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PERCEPTIONS OF BILINGUALISM AND HOME LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND LOSS: A STUDY OF LATINO PARENTS AT A SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA ELEMENTARY CHARTER SCHOOL

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Emily McCormick Enstice
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Dissertation Abstract

Perceptions of Bilingualism and Home Language Maintenance and Loss: A Study of Latino Parents at a San Francisco Bay Area Elementary Charter School

There is limited research that investigates parent perceptions with respect to their early elementary school children’s home language use. To fill the gap in research, this study explores the relationship between first generation Latino parent perspectives of bilingualism, home language maintenance and loss, and the intersection of culture and identity in an elementary school community. It also investigates how parents create an additive bilingual environment in the home.

This participatory action research (PAR) study involved group dialogue sessions and individual interviews in order to engage co-researchers and participants. PAR provided this study with the structure and tools to change and improve upon the current problems that some of the participants were experiencing, while capitalizing on ways in which other participants were successfully maintaining the home language.

The findings included dialogue transcriptions and summaries organized within generative themes. The participants perceived home language maintenance as an important goal regarding family communication and relationship building, cultural preservation, and a better future in the professional world. Their perceptions of bilingualism and attitudes did influence their children’s Spanish maintenance or loss. In addition, the participants’ ethnic and social identities had an impact on their own language choice, but not necessarily on that of their children. Finally, the group shared home language maintenance strategies that contributed to an additive bilingual
environment in the home, highlighting the “Spanish Only” rule within the home space, which was perceived to be the most effective method.

This study illustrated the complexity of language maintenance and its relationship to the following components: perceptions and attitudes; personal histories, or counterstories; personal paradigms; and social, cultural, and economic factors. The research concluded with an action plan to share findings with school staff and other Latino parents interested in home language maintenance.
This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate’s dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

Emily McCormick Enstice
Candidate

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Emma Fuentes
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Sarah Capitelli
Third Reader

May 9, 2012
This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved grandmother, Isabel McCormick. I have always remembered your words of wisdom, your quiet strength, and your appreciation and love of humanity. Your light guided me through this process, Grandma. Thank you and I love you for all that you are, and all that you have taught me.
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I would also like to thank each of my committee members. Dr. Emma Fuentes, thank you for your guidance and for challenging me to analyze the findings from multiple angles. Your everlasting support gave me the courage and the confidence to face the challenges with which I was presented. Dr. Shabnam Koirala-Azad, I wholeheartedly appreciate your encouragement and support, not only during the dissertation process, but also during your Participatory Action Research class. It was there that I first discovered my personal connection to this methodology, and I never would have come to this point without that experience. Finally, Dr. Sarah Capitelli, I sincerely appreciate your valuable feedback as an expert in bilingualism in young children, and as a teacher educator.

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CHAPTER I
THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Introduction

Despite the fact that many Latino families in the United States speak Spanish at home, first generation immigrant parents are noticing that their children are losing fluency and interest in their home language (Brodie, Levin, Steffenson & Valdez, 2002). I use the term “Latino” to refer to people of Latin American origin living in the United States, but Brodie et al. use Latino and Hispanic interchangeably. This study, in which 3,000 Latino adults living in the United States participated, found the following: Almost three fourths (72%) of first generation Latinos speak Spanish as their primary language, but only one in four (24%) are bilingual, and 4% speak primarily English. “In contrast, second generation Latinos are mostly divided between those who are English dominant (46%) and those who are bilingual (47%). Third generation or higher Hispanics are largely English dominant (78%)” (p. 16). Research suggests that Latino families struggle to preserve intergenerational communication by incorporating the use of Spanish in the home (Schecter & Bayley, 2002). One Mexican born grandmother living near her children and grandchildren in San Antonio, Texas lamented:

It would be beautiful for … my granddaughters to truly understand what I wanted to say because it was a way of, getting closer to them and knowing them, or for them to know me … Because I could express my feelings, my dreams, with them, to advise them, and they could understand me … And it seems that it’s SWEETER in Spanish, more emotional: the conversation of a grandmother with her granddaughter. And in English, well, I couldn’t … speak to them from the heart … in Spanish I could speak to them … tell them the dreams that I have for them. But, well, they don’t understand me in, in Spanish, well, how am I going to tell them these things? (Schecter & Bayley, 2002, p.74)
The yearning for a lifelong, meaningful relationship with her granddaughter heard from this grandmother’s voice resonates with Latino immigrant families in the United States. Latino immigrant parents have historically understood the necessity to learn English in order to have social, economic, and even personal success in the United States (Cummins, 2000; Portes & Hao, 1998; Valdés, 2001). According to Brodie et al. (2002), “Hispanics, particularly those who are Spanish speakers, feel very strongly that Hispanics must learn English in order to be successful in the United States” (p.8). Research also shows that Latino parents want their children to maintain the home language (Fishman, 1991; Lutz, 2006; Wong-Fillmore, 1991), yet they often receive the message that English is preferable and more valued than speaking Spanish.

According to Brodie et al. (2002), foreign born Latino parents have attributed language alone as the basis for discrimination; experiences of discrimination, particularly in schools and in the workplace, contribute to the belief that speaking English is preferred over speaking Spanish and it will lead to greater success in the United States. More specifically, the study found, that “among those reporting being discriminated against or treated unfairly, almost half (46%) of foreign-born Latinos report that language alone is the basis for the discrimination they experienced” (p.80). This discrimination has deep-seated roots that have affected the way that parents think about language and language use in the U.S. Foreign-born Latino parents in particular do not want their own children to experience this type of discrimination, so they emphasize the importance of learning English (even more so than U.S. born Latinos, according to Brodie et al.). Consequently, as second generation Latino children speak less Spanish and show a preference for speaking English, the ability and desire to use the home language begins to recede.
Unfortunately, California has communicated to Spanish speaking Latinos that their language, and ultimately their cultures, are not valued in schools. In 1998, California voters passed Proposition 227, which eliminated bilingual education and required that academic learning occur in English only. Two thirds of Latino voters opposed 227, while two thirds of white voters supported the proposition (Valenzuela, 1999).

Proposition 227 was enacted 30 years after the Bilingual Education Act (BEA), Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, passed in 1968. The distinct political climates of the late 1960’s and the late 1990’s help to elucidate the disparate goals of the two mandates. The energy surrounding civil rights and equal opportunity during the former period contributed to the belief that students whose second language was English should receive instruction in the native language whenever possible. The BEA provided federal funding for Limited English Speaking Ability (LESA) students through instruction in Spanish as the native language and English as a second language.

By 1998, controversial political issues involving race, ethnicity, language, nationality, and poverty were at the forefront of political debates as Ron Unz, a Republican businessman who ran for governorship of California in 1994, sponsored Proposition 227. To many U.S. citizens, immigrants speaking “good” English demonstrated that they were “good” Americans, and Prop 227 generally favored assimilation into United States’ culture and society. Yet many advocates and scholars, including Purcell (2002), suggest that “Proposition 227 is not healthy for education in California and it would be wise to dismantle it entirely … bilingual education has helped
children develop ‘academic English’ as well as developing the child’s native language” (p.21).

Many families would agree with advocates of bilingualism and with opponents of Proposition 227. In fact, many families whose native language is Spanish wish to preserve the home language and culture in addition to gaining competent academic English skills (Fishman, 1991; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Suárez, 2002; Wang, 2009; Wiley, 2000; Wong Fillmore, 1991; Worthy, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006). Fishman (1991), a linguist and supporter of heritage language maintenance, developed a process for reversing language shift (RLS) with this view:

Language is a resource at the level of societal integration and social identification … every human aggregate defines its history and works toward a desired model of its future in accord with that definition … A preferred, historically associated mother tongue has a role in this process of individual and aggregative self-definition and self-realization, not merely as a myth … but also as a genuine identificational and motivational desideratum in the ethnocultural realm. (p. 7)

Moreover, it is unnecessary and even harmful to expect immigrants and their families to assimilate into the dominant culture and to discontinue speaking the home language.

Culture and nationality play important roles in language maintenance. Brodie et al. (2002) found that first generation Latinos tend to cite country of origin as the first term of identification, but approximately equal shares of second generation Latinos identify themselves either by their parents’ countries of origin or as American. Yet over half of Latinos with U.S. born parents first identify themselves as American. Not surprisingly, “About half (51%) of English-dominant Hispanics describe themselves first as an American. By contrast, country of origin is the first preference for about half (52%) of bilingual Latinos and two-thirds of Spanish-dominant Hispanics (68%)” (p.28). These findings highlight the direct relationship between country of birth, individual and group
identities, bilingualism and language maintenance. Research in language maintenance and bilingualism necessitates an understanding and appreciation for this relationship.

Even though schools across the country have become more ethnically diverse, they have not evolved to provide authentic, culturally relevant curricula that value and encourage bilingualism, biliteracy, or biculturalism (Valenzuela, 1999). Schools that proudly proclaim their color-blind mission while touting freedom for all “not only fail to validate their students’ culture, they also subtract resources from them, first by impeding the development of authentic caring; and secondly, by obliging youth to participate in a non-neutral, power-draining type of aesthetic caring” (Valenzuela, p. 109). In order to understand the deep seated roots of home language loss, educators and school leaders must develop an awareness of how English only requirements and ethnocentric curricula have a negative impact on Latino family relationships. This study will explore the myriad pressures that are put upon children to speak English only, which in most cases leads to partial or complete abandonment of the home language (Fishman, 1996). More specifically, this study will examine foreign-born Latino parents’ perceptions and thoughts regarding bilingualism as well as the pressures toward monolingualism.

Much of the research on bilingual children in the U.S. has focused on strategies for educators to recognize bilingualism as a resource rather than a deficiency (Carreira, 2000; Cummins et al., 2005; Garza & Crawford, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). Other researchers draw upon the resources and skills of bilingual families, thereby exploring the funds of knowledge that prevail in the students’ homes (Moll & González, 1994). Yet the reality is that individuals and groups from many sectors of society have not yet adopted the viewpoint that bilingual children have much to add in the classroom.
Researchers address the problems associated with subtractive schooling, but do not focus primarily on perceptions of bilingualism and home language loss. Others chronicle home language revitalization and reversing language shift among youth (Fishman, 1991; McCarty, Romero & Zepeda, 2006; Tse, 2001). Moreover, these studies explore how schools and families – eager to revive the use and appreciation of the native language in the household - collaborate to teach children how to speak, read and write in the home language. Even though there are studies that give voice to Latino immigrant parents who are able and willing to give their children the necessary tools to maintain Spanish, youth continue to lose their Spanish speaking and writing skills. Some educators believe that parent involvement and engagement are key components to reversing this loss (Wang, 2009; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006), while others focus on deficiencies in school programs and alternatives to subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Many of these alternatives involve better relationship building between educators and their students’ families.

Statement of Research Problem

Home language loss weakens family communication patterns and cultural maintenance. First generation immigrant parents share stories of their own parents who do not speak fluent English, yet their American born children are resisting Spanish, the home language. School policies, teacher attitudes, peer relationships, and perceptions of English as higher status all contribute to resistance to speak Spanish (Cuero, Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2009; Lee, 2005; Valenzuela, 1999). Consequently, Latino children have difficulties becoming fully bicultural when they cannot communicate with their Spanish speaking grandparents and other family members. Language shapes our
thoughts and embodies different ways of knowing the world. Therefore, having access to the home language can provide a window into the home culture as well. Immigrant parents understand the importance of integrating their children into American society as quickly as possible (Cummins, 2000; Zelasko & Atunez, 2000), but as the need and pressure to speak English persists, children continue to lose home language skills.

Background and Need

According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, over half of the students in California schools identified themselves as Hispanic or Latino during the 2009-2010 school year (Kane, 2010). In San Francisco Unified School District, 48% of all students identified themselves as Latino. Dr. Fuller, a UC Berkeley professor of education and public policy, suggested “state educators look at language education in an entirely new way. ‘If the majority of the population is becoming bilingual,’ he said, referring to the growing Latino population learning English, ‘why shouldn't the white minority also become bilingual?’” (Kane, 2010, p.2). Fuller’s remarks on language education point to a breakthrough to which education researchers can lead the way. English has never been declared the official language of the United States, but it has been the *de facto* national language for decades. California is home to native speakers of many languages, including Spanish or Spanish Creole (26%), Chinese (2.5%), Tagalog (2%), Vietnamese (1%), and Korean (1%) (Modern Language Association, 2012). Yet, empirical studies (Urzúa & Gómez, 2008; Worthy, 2006) have revealed that children of various ethnic backgrounds are losing their heritage languages, which I refer to as the home language. Brecht and Ingold (2002) briefly explain the pattern of language shift:

Among immigrant families, language use shifts toward English in predictable patterns: Children arriving in the United States are generally English dominant by
the time they reach adulthood; children born in the United States to first-
generation immigrant families move quickly to English dominance with the onset
of schooling if not sooner; and third generation children are not only native
speakers of English but usually have lost much of their expressive ability in their
heritage language. (p. 1)

In addition, researchers have observed and studied different forms of additive
(maintaining and developing the home language and culture) and subtractive
(transitioning away from the home language and culture as quickly as possible) schooling
methods that contribute to home language maintenance and loss, respectively (García,
2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Language loss, however, does not
simply occur because Spanish speaking children enter schools where most students and
teachers speak English only. Researchers have also looked at how family and school
perceptions of bilingualism contribute to a child’s home language loss (Cuero et al, 2009;
Urzúa & Gómez, 2008), and how language is tied to individual, family and group
identities (Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Cummins et al., 2005; Hornberger & Wang, 2008).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore parent attitudes and perceptions about
home language maintenance and loss in Latino elementary school children in immigrant
families. This study also seeks to understand to what extent this phenomenon is
happening at a San Francisco Bay Area elementary charter school, and the extent to
which the intersection of culture and identity plays a role in Spanish maintenance or loss.
Finally, it is my hope that this study will inform Latino families struggling with home
language maintenance, monolingual English speaking teachers, and policy makers about
the relationship between bilingualism and cultural appreciation in Latino families. The
following research questions will guide this study:
1. a) To what extent do parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism influence home language maintenance?
    b) To what extent do parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism influence home language loss?

2. Does identifying with an ethnic or social group have an impact on language choice?

3. What are parent perceptions of how to promote and implement additive bilingualism?

Theoretical Rationale

Fishman’s model of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) provides a theoretical framework that underlines the basis of this study (1991). Fishman presents a methodical approach “to what has hitherto been a primarily emotion-laden ‘let’s try everything we possibly can and perhaps something will work’ type of dedication” (p.1). In Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages, Fishman (1991) explains, “The study and practice of RLS proceeds from the theoretically informed study of cases to the fostering of intergenerational mother tongue transmission viewed as a cultural right and a societal resource” (p.7). Moreover, Fishman views language in an additive manner, and I will further explore the relevance of additive bilingualism as a framework for language maintenance.

Wallace Lambert (1981) first made the distinction between additive and subtractive bilingualism. Subtractive bilingualism refers to the learning of the dominant language, which replaces the home language (Lambert, 1981; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Additive bilingualism, on the other hand, would indicate a process in which the home
language is maintained as the dominant language is learned. I argue that language maintenance can be achieved in an additive bilingual environment, whereas the loss of the home language is more likely in a subtractive bilingual environment.

There is a strong relationship between language, thought, and culture, and this relationship contributes to the loss or maintenance of one’s home language. Vygotsky (1962, 1978) posits that as children learn a language, it provides a structure for thinking. As a child learns the symbols that represent objects and concepts in her language, she communicates and interacts in social environments in which individuals share their patterns of thinking. Moreover, language shapes identity, and one way to express a sense of identity and to learn about culture is through speech. Vygotsky’s constructivist language theory provides a framework that elucidates the implications of home language loss, and its connection to the loss of culture and identity. In a subtractive bilingual environment, access to tools of culture, one being language, is limited. Vygotsky’s theory, therefore, complements Fishman’s RLS framework, as discussed in the literature review.
Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations

This study consists of foreign-born Latino parents whose children attend an elementary charter school in the Sausalito/Marin City school district in Northern California. All of the participants’ first grade children were enrolled in the researcher’s class while the study took place. Due to the diversity of the Latino population at the research setting, I did not specify country of birth when selecting Latino parent participants. The study took place during a 10 week period from January, 2012 until March, 2012, meeting weekly or biweekly for approximately two hours at the co-researchers’ home. In some cases, the researcher met with participants individually at the school site. Parents who did not indicate Spanish as the home or primary language were not included, with one exception (see Chapters III and IV). Finally, two co-researchers/participants translated between English and Spanish so that participants could choose which language to use to discuss various topics.

Limitations

It was difficult to anticipate all of the limitations of the study before beginning, but there were certain identifiable and potential weaknesses. This study limited its scope to a small Latino community – including individuals born in Chile, Guatemala, El Salvador, Mexico and Nicaragua - in the San Francisco Bay Area. This study does not aim to generalize findings to Latino groups in other communities because its findings may not apply to Latino communities outside of the areas in which my participants work and reside. Furthermore, I have a small sample size, due to the nature of participatory action research. One of my goals was to address a problem that many parents and their
children are experiencing, however I could not control the size of the school in which they were enrolled. Moreover, I had previously developed relationships with several of the participants and all of their children, thereby making my observations and reflections perhaps less objective than those of a researcher who is not an active member of the community.

Although I have worked in this community for five and a half years, I am a white female whose home language growing up was English, and whose knowledge of the Spanish language and cultures of those who speak it is limited. My university studies in Spanish focused on the Castilian language spoken in Spain, as did my study abroad in Salamanca, Spain. Therefore, I am always learning about the culture and language nuances of my Spanish speaking families with whom I work and socialize, but I am not an expert in all Latin American cultures and languages. That said, my own Spanish language proficiency may have allowed me to more smoothly communicate with participants who intentionally use Spanish to express a thought that is less clear or elaborate when translated to English. It was important for participants to speak openly and freely, and my ability to comprehend Spanish enhanced the quality of dialogue and mutual understanding.

Significance of the Study

A study of Latino children’s home language maintenance and loss is important for several reasons. First, understanding the relationship between external pressures and language choice may help to reveal the reasons that Latino children are resisting the use of Spanish. On the other hand, exploring home language maintenance strategies may generate valuable insights which can be shared with other Latino families in the
community, and perhaps with other Latino groups as well. Secondly, teachers and school officials who recommend or require the use of English only may have limited experience with English language learners. Educators can benefit from this study, which will provide insight into the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, as well as the link between language, culture, and family ties. Perhaps more importantly, family members who aim to maintain the home language, and thereby uphold cultural values and teachings, will also gain insight from this study. Finally, policies such as 227 not only mandate that instruction be taught only in English, but they also discourage bilingualism. This study will inform policymakers about the importance of considering socio-cultural issues and family communication patterns before enacting laws affecting millions of Latino immigrant families in California and throughout the United States.

Definition of Terms

Additive Bilingualism: Knowing a second language while maintaining fluency in the first language (Lambert, 1981).

Assimilation: A linear process of integration into the dominant society (in this paper, this refers to U.S. society) and culture that results in the erosion of the home language and other cultural traits (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Assimilative Forces: Forces in the dominant society that work against the retention of one’s ethnic culture and traditions, leading to assimilation (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

Bilingualism: “Native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, 1933, p.55).

Biliteracy: The ability to communicate in two or more languages (Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000).
Early-exit Bilingual Education: Limited home language instruction is provided for two to four years, at which point, instruction is in English only (Collier, 1992).

Foreign-born Latinos: Latinos born outside of the U.S. or the U.S. commonwealth of Puerto Rico (Brodie et al., 2002).

Funds of Knowledge: Skill sets that households have developed over time in order to maintain the welfare of the family (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Moll and González (1994) refer to this as a knowledge base of various domestic, financial, and social activities that is developed and shared among households.

Heritage Language Learner: Someone who is exposed to a language other than English in the home (Carreira, 2000).

Hidden Curriculum: Unstated academic and social norms and objectives are transmitted at the primary and secondary levels of education. Hidden curriculum may be purposely or unwittingly “hidden” (Vallance, 1973).

Home Language: The language – often referred to as the native or heritage language - spoken at home among family members whose native language is different from the dominant language (Schecter & Bayley, 1997).

Identity: The social positioning of self and other (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005).

Immigrant: A person who permanently moved from his or her country of birth to another country. An immigrant may be documented or undocumented (see Undocumented Immigrant).

Language Shift: The process of shifting from primarily speaking the home language to speaking the dominant language (Fishman, 1991).
Late-exit bilingual education: Bilingual programs that provide support for home language in elementary school (Collier, 1992).

Mainstreamers: Majority group members (Lambert, 1981).

Selective Acculturation: Conforming and selectively adapting to selected norms of the dominant society and culture in addition to maintaining individual and group cultural identity (Gibson, 1988).

Speech Community: A group of people who share the same language and the language’s set of norms and expectations (Fishman, 1991).

Structured Immersion: A bilingual education program that provides all instruction in English (Collier, 1992)

Subtractive Bilingualism: The home language “stops developing as English is learned” (Tse, 2001, p.31).

Two-way Bilingual Education: A school program which utilizes the minority (Spanish) and majority (English) language for instruction to all students (Collier, 1992).

Undocumented Immigrant: An immigrant who is not a documented citizen of the country to which he or she permanently moved.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this study is to explore parent perceptions and attitudes regarding home language loss and maintenance among Latino elementary school students. This review will examine the multi-faceted subject of home language loss and its connection to several important themes. The first section will address the intersection between cultural practices, identity, ethnicity and race, and home language loss (Cummins et al., 2005; Frankenberg, 1993; Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Lee, 2005; Lutz, 2006; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Suárez, 2002). Vygotsky’s (1962, 1978) social constructivist language theory is also considered in this section. In the second section of the review, the theory of Reversing Language Shift (Fishman, 1991) provides a framework to support the efforts of Latino parents who want their children to maintain the home language. I will also review research that supports additive bilingualism approaches (Fishman, 1991; Lambert, 1981; Moll & González, 1994; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991) and how legislators, educators, immigrants and their American born peers perceive bilingualism and assimilation (Crawford, 2000; Gándara & Rumberger, 2008, 2009; Kouritzen, 2000). The third section will examine research that includes parent perceptions of home language loss. This section also explores the benefits of parent-school communication and relationship building (Farruggio, 2009; Guardado, 2006, Worthy, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006).
Cultural Practices, Identity, Ethnicity and Race, and Home Language Loss

The intersection between cultural practices, identity, ethnicity and race has a profound impact on language loss, but the ways in which these factors contribute to home language loss vary. Individuals who identify with an ethnic group and its variety of cultural traditions and norms do not automatically support the acceptance of home language use in all domains. Spanish speaking families differ from one another in this respect, and the literature will further investigate how and why communities, families and individuals perceive language use in different domains, and how this affects home language maintenance. In this paper I use the term “Latino” when referring to people born in a Latin American country. Ideally, I would refer to individuals based on their nationality, as each country has its own culture and way of life. Therefore, my use of the term “Latino” should in no way indicate cultural sameness or lack of diversity among different groups of Latinos. I did not want to limit the literature review or the study to one country, given the diversity of Latinos who are experiencing varying degrees of home language loss. Much of the research, however, is based on the experiences of Mexican families living in the United States.

Language Practices and Identity

Children, adults, families, and communities make conscious decisions to construct ethnic and cultural identities. Yet, the identity of immigrants and their children is often ascribed or imposed by others (Foladare, 1969). Individuals can control achieved identities, which are more dynamic and connected to one’s life experiences, reflections, and values. So as identity construction takes place at both personal and group levels, an achieved sense of ethnic and cultural identity is juxtaposed with that of the ascribed.
identities – an accident of birth - of which individuals and groups have less control.

Bilingual immigrants, for example, can mistakenly be labeled as monolingual when they are heard speaking Spanish in public spaces. Such a label may carry with it a variety of ascribed identities, depending on the perception of the person or group that has labeled an individual as a Spanish speaker.

Schecter and Bayley (1997) suggest that minority groups define ethnic identity based on the interaction of three aspects: “The way individuals locate themselves within a particular social and cultural framework, the orientation of representatives of dominant groups to individuals and groups who display expected lifestyle differences, and official characterizations, such as those contained in census documents” (p. 514). In the case of my study, the dominant group is considered to be American-born, native English speakers of European descent. Schecter and Bayley further specify how linguistic minority groups, such as Latinos in the U.S., must also consider language choice and “use as a form of social action … with social consequences” (p. 514). Moreover, the practice of using one language or another – or choosing to mix languages or varieties of one language - depends upon social context, time and space. Children of immigrants have the added challenge of negotiating their identities at home, at school, and in other spaces in which peers practice other cultures. Based on Vygotsky’s (1962, 1978) social constructivist language framework, parents and teachers of immigrant children should provide opportunities for different means of expression via the tool of language in order to meaningfully construct individual and group identities.

Phinney, Romero, Nava, and Huang (2001) studied influences on the ethnic identities of three immigrant groups of adolescents; they found that ethnic language
proficiency, cultural maintenance by parents, and interactions with ethnic peers contributed to their identity formation. In this paper, ethnic language proficiency will be synonymous with home language proficiency. After studying Armenian, Vietnamese and Mexican adolescents, Phinney et al. found that “ethnic language proficiency had a positive impact on ethnic identity,” but the “peer effect was in fact stronger than the effect of ethnic language” (p. 149). Parents’ cultural maintenance also had a significant positive effect. This is not to say that all immigrant groups progressed through identical channels, but rather, that all three factors in one way or another had a positive relationship to ethnic identity construction.

The research of Phinney et al. (2001), Schecter and Bayley (1997, 2002), and Suárez (2002) has concluded, however, that language is not always an obligatory element of group identity. To the contrary, language patterns and language choice are based on fluid, dynamic, and unfixed conceptions of identity. Schecter and Bayley (2002) articulate the complexity of the relationship between culture and identity and the role of alternate languages and language varieties:

In their [linguistic minority individuals and groups] daily negotiations between dominant and minority groups, and empowered and disenfranchised individuals, they confront the questions of discreteness and synthesis of linguistic code at many junctures and levels of self- and other-defining decision making. In modern, diverse societies, one may expect to see considerable variation in the manner in which individuals who may align to the same census categories engage these linguistic choices. (p.51)

Schecter and Bayley (2002) utilized a cultural practice approach to study and compare Mexican-background families in California and Texas, and found that in both locations, language patterns were based on a multifaceted amalgamation of self-defining categories.
It is common, within any given cultural group, to associate language with the patterns of that culture (Fishman, 1991). Certainly, there are other components of one’s culture, aside from language, that are equally significant, and those aspects contribute to an individual’s ability to retain an identity. A community of peoples who plays the marimba (music), practices Catholicism (religion) and takes part in activist protests (politics) could certainly “prove” that these components are important signifiers of their identity. Nonetheless, taking language away from that community could in fact reduce the influence of other cultural identifiers or components. Fishman (1991) acknowledged, “Most cultures reveal the ‘domino principle’ in operation and when any of their main props, such as language, are lost, most other props are seriously weakened and are far more likely to be altered and lost as well” (p.17). Fishman adds that maintaining a language is actually about supporting “a particular language-in-culture content and pattern” (p.17). Unfortunately, many cultural groups who try to avoid this ‘domino effect’ - by using the home language when useful and appropriate in their judgment - encounter the deep seated force of linguistic hegemony.

Suárez’s (2002) sociolinguistic study of language use of Hispanic – as identified by Suárez – families in a mostly white neighborhood in upstate New York exposes another layer of complexity to language choice. She discovers practices that demonstrate linguistic hegemony, wherein the dominant linguistic group protects its position of power and control. In this scenario, the dominant group – English speakers – asserts its supremacy in a seemingly unintimidating manner. Linguistic hegemony can lead to language shift or loss, despite the efforts of individuals or families. Wiley (2000) explains that “Linguistic hegemony is achieved when dominant groups create a
consensus by convincing others to accept their language norms and usage as standard or pragmatic” (p. 113). This can be achieved through media, schools, advertisements, personal conversations, and other institutions or everyday channels of communication. Linguistic hegemony creates a dilemma for the heritage language speaker who wants to maintain his or her language, which becomes perceived as abnormal, impractical, and nonstandard.

Despite the linguistic pluralism that exists in the United States, assimilative forces, which I will discuss in the second section of this literature review, are strong enough to urge heritage language speakers to speak more English. Suárez (2002) found that all four families in her study (in which at least one parent claimed Spanish to be the first language learned) understood the importance of English proficiency, but they also recognized a generally negative attitude toward the use of Spanish in their mostly white neighborhood. Yet, some of the families acknowledged the paradox of linguistic hegemony. These families utilized a sophisticated strategy to address the problem of linguistic hegemony by attaining fluency in the dominant language while simultaneously maintaining their heritage language. Several researchers (Crawford, 2000; Fishman, 1991; McCarty et al., 2006; Schecter & Bayley, 1997, 2002; Shannon, 1995; Tse, 2001) suggest that parents and their children who actively resist such hegemony can successfully maintain their heritage languages, but such an effort requires social capital, persistence, patience, and a strong sense of identity.

Generally speaking, as Shannon (1995) noted, “Linguistic hegemony extends from how languages are seen to how their speakers are seen … Being perceived and treated as inferior can cause an internalization of those perceptions, a belief that they are
true and natural” (p.181). These perceptions play a large role in determining what language to speak and in what context, but the power struggles between English speakers and those who speak other languages are not equally contested. Spanish speaking groups in the U.S., of course, also have varying national, ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, religious and cultural backgrounds, and the intersection of these categories has an impact on language choice, and ultimately maintenance or loss. Mexican-Americans, for example, constitute the largest Spanish speaking community in the U.S., and there are many significant differences within this group. Moreover, speakers whose first language is something other than English demonstrate language practices that ostensibly contribute to identity construction. Each language group, however, is comprised of individuals with significant, yet unique experiences to which some can relate, and others cannot.

Race and Bilingualism

Race plays a considerable role in the perceptions that people have of bilingual children. Why do we as a society hold those in high esteem who were born in the U.S. and learn to speak a foreign language, but not those who have moved here already speaking Spanish and are trying to learn English? I argue that race consciousness has its merits over color blindness, and that policy members who still consider Eurocentric traits to be the norm are operating under the guise of the latter. A white American who speaks a language other than English is often perceived as highly intellectual, sophisticated and worldly. Immigrants of color, however, are considered deficient when not fully fluent in English, even though they are to some degree bilingual, and often highly literate in the home language. Lee (2005), who studied Hmong American children in a mid-west high school, wrote, “The dominant image of assimilation is based on assumptions of color-
blindness. It fails to consider the way racism structures and limits the life opportunities of people of color” (p.42). Moreover, most Latino immigrants do not bring with them the culture of whiteness that is expected to be absorbed once they reside in the U.S.

Second generation Latino children develop their identities and cultural practices in a variety of domains, but they spend a great amount of time in school and with their peers. The connection between language choice and school policies, as well as teacher and administrative attitudes must be considered further. Schools and districts, of course, are managed by people of different races and ethnicities. How do individual backgrounds and experiences affect educational leaders’ perceptions of Spanish speakers of various nationalities, and what role does white privilege play? Schools have historically portrayed whiteness as “normal,” thereby discounting others as lacking valuable traits and norms.

Race plays a critical role in schooling, as is evident in the 2006 Supreme Court case considering the role of affirmative action in admissions at elementary and secondary schools (Greenhouse, 2006). In Kentucky and Washington, Louisville and Seattle school districts decided to intentionally diversify schools in order to desegregate those that currently do not reflect the racial makeup of the school districts. According to a CNN news article (2006, December 4), The Bush Administration felt that only “‘race-neutral’ means to achieve classroom identity should be used.” Chief Justice John Roberts added:

> The purpose of the [Constitution's] equal protection clause is to ensure that people are treated as individuals, rather than based on the color of their skin. So saying that this doesn't involve individualized determinations simply highlights the fact that the decision to distribute... is based on skin color and not any other factor. (CNN, 2006, December 4)
In this same article, Justice Kennedy also stated that “characterizing each student by the reason of the color of his or her skin” is problematic.

I would argue that the problem here is that these interpretations of race rely on essentialist, fixed, and phenotypical concepts of race, ignoring the complexity of racial formation as a social construct, which classifies groups of people based on human differences (Omi & Winant, 1994). Omi and Winant suggest that definitions of race are constantly changing, depending largely on political motivations of dominant groups. They refer to racial formation as a sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhibited, transformed, and destroyed (p. 55). In other words, it is a colossal oversimplification to define race in biological and/or essentialist terms that take into account “skin color and not any other factor,” especially when considering the fluidity and dynamic nature of race and racism. It is equally troubling when the concept of race is reduced to an objective and isolated concept. Such a misinterpretation ignores other issues, such as class, ethnicity, language choice, and gender, which are inextricably tied to race.

Omi and Winant (1994) define the neoconservative perspective, which deliberately restrict[s] its attention to injury done to the individual as opposed to the group, and to advocacy of a color-blind racial policy. Such an approach reduce[s] race to ethnicity, and almost entirely neglect[s] the continuing organization of social inequality and oppression along racial lines. (p.70)

Theories of ethnicity, as well as class, gender, and nationality are generally conceptualized as central to social, cultural and political issues that have arisen throughout the history of the United States. Race, however, still gets pushed aside.

Concerning race, Omi and Winant (1994) explain how “Mainstream approaches consider race as a problem of policy, of social engineering, of state management . . .
radicals too often submerge race in other social relations - more frequently class or
nation-based conflicts-thought to operate as the ‘motor force of history’” (p. 3). In other
words, race tends to be regarded as a peripheral issue (and people are accused of “playing
the race card”), secondary to one of these more “central” categories, when analyzing
social, political, and economic conflicts. Ironically, dominant groups have been naming
differences of race since biblical times. Examples include Christian European resentment
of Muslims and Jews in the late fourth and fifth centuries and European explorers
(whites) who “discovered” America (land of the nonwhite natives).

Racial formation also takes place in schools, as students of color are classified as
“Other.” Ferguson (2001) states:

In the contemporary period, the production of a racial Other and the
constitution and regulation of racial difference has worked increasingly
through mass-produced images that are omni-present in our lives. At
this moment in time, it is through culture - or culturalism¹ - that difference
is primarily asserted. (p. 80)

Whiteness and American-ness become the invisible, unmarked school “norms,”
and students of color are perceived through a dominant, deficit-thinking lens in which
they are labeled by schools and teachers as one or more of the following: culturally and
academically disadvantaged, at-risk, lazy, “endangered” (see Ferguson, 2001), and
disruptive. I borrow from Bordieu and Passeron (1977), Foucault (1979), Ferguson
(2001), and Lee (2005) to argue that schools and teachers perpetuate institutional racism
by implementing a “hidden curriculum” (Vallance, 1973) that positions students of color
as either victims or “endangered species” needing to be saved, as “culturally different,”

¹Gilroy, Small Acts, 24, argues that “the culturalism of the new racism has gone hand in hand
with a definition of race as a matter of difference rather than a question of hierarchy.”
or as children who speak other languages, as opposed to white students who are perceived as models of “good behavior.”

Bilingual Latino students, therefore, appear closest to the model student when they speak English. The Latino student’s home language is another marker of cultural difference and is seen as a “problem”, rather than a “resource” (Ruiz, 1984). Lee (2005) even suggests that the majority of mainstream teachers would rather not work with students whose home language is something other than English. This type of reaction toward students who speak another language has been going on for centuries.

MacDonald and Monkman (2005) explain the significance of the Treaty of Hidalgo in 1848, the ceding of the last state in 1912 to the U.S., and the resurfacing of racialization with the denial of suffrage to people of color. While publicly-funded Catholic schools continued to educate Mexican Americans during the 19th century, Protestant missionary schools began to be touted as “networking” havens for Hispanos, or “Hispanic Americans descended from 17th century settlers of Northern Mexico and southern Colorado” (p.62). Many of these privileged, young men were hoping to learn English and to obtain a career.

After the Spanish-American War of 1898, in response to social, economic, racist and political interests, Southwestern Anglos began to segregate the growing number of Mexican Americans from their fairer-skinned peers (MacDonald & Monkman, 2005). These Anglos supported their actions with the argument that the children were lacking in sufficient English language skills and had low intelligence levels, and poor sanitation. Still, many Mexican Americans resisted segregation by starting their own schools, and
forming grassroots associations that legally challenged the discrimination practiced against them.

On the other side of the country, Cubans mostly migrated to Miami, and Puerto Ricans to New York and Chicago after World War II. Their experiences in the U.S., however, were quite distinct as they received starkly different treatment regarding English-only policies. MacDonald and Monkman (2005) provide a political explanation. “Situated in the context of Cold War politics, school policies toward the Cuban refugees departed from the strict Americanization measures characteristic of earlier eras, and permitted more flexibility and openness toward bilingual education” (p.65). This example indicates that as bilingualism served mainstream interests - in this case, those of the U.S. government – the use of Spanish was acceptable for a period of time. Later events and legislation will continue to demonstrate the fluctuations that occur regarding dominant perceptions of bilingualism, again depending on the political, economic, or social goals of those in positions of power. More recently, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) claimed to hold schools accountable for the annual progress of Latinos, yet Proposition 227 took the right to bilingual education in public schools away from Latinos and other non-native speakers of English.

Educators, business leaders, government officials, and other individuals and groups tend to see bilingualism as an impediment to success in school or at work, even though there is a vast amount of literature that suggests the opposite. The blame is placed on students for their own deficiencies, as deemed by teachers and school leaders, yet they learn within a system that makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get good grades. Most importantly, many historical events, far beyond what is covered in this
paper, clearly demonstrate the blatant racism and discrimination that Latinos experienced in the past, and continue to experience today. The phenomenon of home language loss, therefore, has its roots in a history of monolingualism and whiteness in the United States, which has been perceived as normal and American.

_Vygotsky’s Constructivist Language Theory_

Vygotsky posits that as children learn a language, it provides a structure for thinking, and as a child learns the symbols that represent objects and concepts in her language, she communicates and interacts in social environments in which individuals share their patterns of thinking. What becomes of children whose parents grew up speaking Spanish, and whom can only explain or prefer to teach a concept in the home language of Spanish? Or, how does a child grasp the complexities of a tradition or concept rooted in another culture, and in another language? According to Vygotsky (1962), speech – inner speech and external speech, or oral language – and cognitive awareness and development are interrelated. Furthermore, language serves as a tool accessible to the child and used for social interaction. When both the home language and the dominant language are accessible to a child, she has the capability to imagine or ponder a thought to herself in one of two languages, or through a combination of both languages. She can also communicate and interact with others who can access one or both of the languages.

A child whose thoughts and actions are mediated by the language – the dominant language – that differs from the home language has less of a connection to the deeper meanings of cultural concepts. Miller (2002) defines culture as “shared beliefs, values, knowledge, skills, structured relationships, ways of doing things (customs), socialization
practices, and symbol systems (such as spoken and written language)” (p. 374). In the case of home language loss, culture, and therefore family relationships and traditions, cannot be as easily maintained. Language maintenance, on the other hand, provides a forum for socio-cultural interaction and the teaching of shared values and other cultural components within a family system. Parents whose children are losing the home language can engage in an additive bilingual approach known as Reversing Language Shift (RLS).

Reversing Language Shift Through Additive Bilingualism

The purpose of this study is to explore parent attitudes and perceptions that contribute to home language maintenance and loss in Latino children in immigrant families. RLS is one framework that takes an additive approach to bilingualism. To know two languages is to know two cultures, but the reverse is true as well; to lose a language is to lose a part of one’s culture. An additive approach to bilingualism suggests that the home and dominant languages are both valued as resources, and are therefore worth preserving.

Reversing Language Shift

Fishman’s theory of Reversing Language Shift (RLS) provides an adequate framework that focuses on a forward thinking, future-oriented approach to the problem of language shift and language loss. Fishman (1991) and other researchers in the field of socio-linguistics (Lutz, 2006; Portes & Hao, 1998; Schecter & Bayley, 1997, 2002; Shannon, 1995; Tse, 2001; Wong Fillmore, 1991) have studied speech communities that are in danger of dying, as well as those whose language is widely used. Although the language is widely used throughout the United States, Portes and Hao (1998) argue that
second-generation children of Latino immigrants are speaking less Spanish, and prefer to speak English. Therefore, RLS is an approach that speech communities have successfully utilized.

Fishman (1991) maintains that language shift or language loss occurs during the assimilation process in which speech communities slowly shift to using the dominant language. In some cases, there are so few speakers of the native language – such as Native American languages or Gaelic in Ireland – that language death may be imminent without RLS efforts. Fishman recognizes that language shift within immigrant speech communities is equally problematic, even if the native language is not in danger of dying out. The Spanish language has the second highest number of native speakers in the world, after Mandarin Chinese (www.ethnologue.org), but this does not diminish the severity of the problem that immigrant families in the U.S. face. Fishman admits that “Language use is somewhat easier to evaluate than language attitude and language competence; after all, much of it is overt and available for others to see and hear” (p. 49). The implementation of RLS, however, is not a simple, prescribed plan. It too is complex, multifaceted, yet structured and organized at the same time.

RLS efforts are social movements, as Fishman (1991) describes them, and they are comprised of “minorities, frequently powerless, unpopular with outsiders and querulous amongst themselves” (p. 382). He explains the challenges that minorities aspiring for RLS face:

It is an activity that is very often unsuccessful and that strikes many intelligent laymen and otherwise intelligent social scientists as ‘unnatural’, i.e. as counter to some supposedly ‘natural’ drift of historical events or the ‘obvious’ direction of social change. It is hard for self-serving mainstream intellectual spokesmen or institutions to be sympathetic to the lingering, cantankerous, neither fully alive nor fully dead quality of many (perhaps most) efforts on behalf of ceding minority
languages (and the majority of sidestream scholars too are ultimately dependent on the mainstream for their perspectives, if not for their livelihoods). (p. 382)

This is a struggle for survival and preservation of culture and identity that perhaps those who have not had the experience themselves cannot completely comprehend.

According to Fishman (1991), there are those who have argued that RLS efforts should not be taken seriously because they are unrealistic, outdated, and unproductive for modern society. This view fails to recognize the deeper, perhaps less apparent motives behind attempts to reverse language shift. When languages are destroyed or speakers begin to use the dominant language in place of their home language, rooted identities are destroyed, cultural rights to foster intergenerational mother tongue transmission are violated, and minority languages are perceived as problems, rather than resources. Given the lack of understanding among “mainstreamers,” or those who support assimilation and monolingualism in the dominant language, bilingual speakers who are eager to maintain the home language may feel as if they’re swimming upstream in their efforts.

Understanding the motivations behind those who are “anti-RLS,” as Fishman (1991) describes them, is an important first step for individuals who are committed, or may think they are committed to RLS. Anti-immigrant sentiments and political stances supporting an English only society are fervent and pervasive in parts of the United States, and it is crucial that RLS supporters understand the views and attitudes of individuals opposed to additive bilingualism.

*Additive Versus Subtractive Bilingualism*

Bilingualism in broadest terms refers to the ability to speak and understand two languages. Distinctions are made based on degree of proficiency, skills acquired in
understanding, reading, writing, speaking and listening. Emphasis is also placed on the perceived value of additive and subtractive bilingualism. Therefore, how do communities, institutions and individuals develop perceptions of additive and subtractive bilingualism and how do these perceptions coincide with language use in private and public domains? Bilingualism inevitably becomes intertwined with assimilative forces, which discount the merits of acculturation and biculturalism.

Wallace Lambert (1981) first made the distinction between subtractive and additive bilingualism, noting that learning a second language can either lead to bilingualism or monolingualism as the home language erodes. Therefore, subtractive bilingualism refers to the learning of the dominant language, which replaces the home language (Lambert, 1981; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Additive bilingualism, on the other hand, would indicate a process in which the home language is maintained as the dominant language is learned.

The process of straight line assimilation is equally subtractive in nature, in that integration into the new society inevitably leads to the abandonment of an immigrant’s native culture. Lee (2005) studied Hmong American high school students and discovered, “assumptions seemed to be that Hmong American students will inevitably assimilate into the dominant culture and that once they do, they will no longer have problems” (p.42). She also learned that the educators of these students assumed that American culture was “normal,” while other cultures were not, and hence, created problems and difficulties. Assuming children of immigrants assimilate into a new culture, the expectation is that the primary culture and linguistic traits will disappear and be replaced by the new culture. The dilemma, of course, is that children’s individual and group identities are tied to the
culture and language that is ostensibly pushed aside or subtracted during the assimilation process. Valenzuela (1999) noted that second-generation immigrant students “are themselves symptomatic of the ways that schooling is organized to subtract resources from them” (p.5). In other words, the home culture, language and identity, are not wanted or valued in the typical school setting.

Crawford (2000) discusses a variety of assimilative forces that influence language choice, and noted that he continues to be “amazed by the enormous gap between popular attitudes about language and scientific realities about language … especially ironic is the claim that the dominance of English is threatened in the United States today by the encroachment of other tongues” (p.51). Moreover, the subtractive nature of popular attitudes toward bilingualism is distinct and well-defined, as the shift toward English is indeed progressing quickly. Crawford (2000) and Fishman (1991) point to demographic and economic factors, mass media, and social identifiers as strong forces. Specific examples among Native Americans who speak Navajo and lived on reservations, as noted in Crawford (2000), include the following: a) intermarriage with other language communities, b) employment opportunities that require English proficiency, c) internet usage, television watching, listening to popular music and video game playing, and d) the desire to speak like individuals who appear to attain professional success. In Latino communities as well, researchers are finding that some or all of these forces, as noted by Crawford, influence cultural shifts and language loss. Immigrant communities experience home language loss or maintenance in unique ways, and those whose language shifts toward English monolingualism must negotiate all assimilative forces.
An additive bilingual approach and attitude allows children, not only to learn and develop proficiency in the home language, but to appreciate their parents and their roles in society (Cummins, 1994; Lambert, 1981). Lambert (1981) stressed that “mainstremers” must first recognize the two faces of bilingualism – subtractive and additive. There are many effective and researched additive strategies, but perhaps mainstreamers must also embrace the attitude that accompanies the essence of these strategies for which Wilder Penfield once argued, “the bilingual brain is the better brain” (Penfield, 1965).

American institutions have exhibited selective understandings of additive bilingualism. Speakers of high-status languages and with high levels of education, and social/economic capital are accepted and even embraced, whereas “newcomers who speak a non-standard linguistic variety emanate from rural backgrounds, or are nonliterate,” and not welcomed in the same way (Valenzuela, 1999, p.26). Yet, children perform better academically and have healthier social experiences with friends and family when they settle into an additive bilingual environment (Cummins, 1994).

Therefore, is bilingualism good for some children, but not for others? Theoretically, no, but in practice, this question has depended on factors such as nationality, socio-economic status, politics, ethnicity, and race.

Additive and Subtractive Bilingualism in Practice

Worthy et al. (2003) presented an ethnographic study of fifth-grade students (some, immigrants, and others were children of immigrants) of Latin American background who have grown up in an additive bilingual environment in a low-income community outside of a large city in Texas. At the time of the study, they were anticipating their entrance into middle school, where they would no longer have content
and language support in Spanish as they did in elementary school. Yet the number of people who were bilingual in Spanish and English, both in the school and in the surrounding neighborhood was high. Almost all teachers and staff were bilingual as were local storekeepers and business owners. All students and their families in this particular fifth grade class considered Spanish to be the dominant language, and all students at the school had access to a bilingual class in every grade from pre-school to sixth grade.

I highlight Worthy et al.’s (2003) study because it demonstrates the challenges that immigrant Latino families face, even when everyone around them speaks Spanish, embraces and fosters bilingualism, and celebrates their cultures (most students were of Mexican background) in public spaces in and out of school. The fifth grade teacher in this study was a child of Mexican immigrant parents, and she was a certified bilingual teacher. Moreover, her teaching style, curriculum, position as a cultural insider, good rapport with families, and supportive attitude toward bilingualism and bilculturalism may not have sufficed to prevent these students’ language shift. As others (Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991) have found, the social, family, peer, and school pressures can be just as strong in an environment in which an additive approach is taken toward bilingualism. There are pressures from the school district and state to transition to English quickly because students have to pass state exams, which are only in English. Understandably, many parents know what the future entails for their children academically, and therefore want their children to learn English as quickly as possible, so as to lose sight of a genuine additive approach. The parents’ intention, however, is to provide their children with the best opportunity to achieve academic success and social acceptance, even if this means using less Spanish.
I also underscore the findings of this research because it is one of the few qualitative studies that focuses on the perspectives of elementary Latino students, immigrant parents and bilingual teachers about bilingualism. Crucial to Worthy et al.’s (2003) argument is that the challenges and pressures to assimilate escalate as children grow older. This potentially disastrous scenario can lead, not only to fragmented family relations, but also to an increasing achievement gap and risk of school dropout (Valdés, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Worthy et al., 2003). Worthy et al. explained how “Interviews and observations reflected the contradictory messages received throughout their lives in the United States. They have been told that most middle school and high school teachers will not speak much if any Spanish” (p. 288).

These fifth grade students anticipated what they knew was to come, and that is an expectation to “do all work and pass high-stakes tests in English … left on their own to continue learning Spanish” (p.288). This type of anxiety and fear is not unfounded. Major theorists in bilingual education (Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1985) have long argued that sink-or-swim classrooms are ineffective and that background knowledge in a subject (i.e. Science, Math, Art) is most easily comprehended when taught first in the native language. Nonetheless, California outlawed bilingual education in 1998 and there is a strong push to assimilate all students as quickly as possible; the myth that immigrants must learn English immediately (at the expense of losing the home language) in order to be successful continues to permeate discussions about education and immigration. Schools and teachers who understand the benefits of bilingualism certainly provide an additive environment for their Spanish speaking students, but middle schools and high schools can only provide limited support.
Finally, I emphasize the benefits of additive bilingualism because Latino parents and students understand the value of fluency in both Spanish and English. The baseless argument that immigrants don’t want to learn English still enters the minds of both monolingual and bilingual supporters in the U.S. It is no surprise that immigrant families deem it necessary to, at the very least, appear monolingual, even if they aim to maintain the home language. Tse (2001) has studied English language learning among immigrant children in the U.S. and she exposes the ubiquitous myths about immigrants. She explains how Americans often confuse bilinguals with non-English speakers:

[There is a] lack of acceptance of the additive nature of language learning. Monolingualism in the United States is so common and true bilingualism so rare that it is difficult for the public to grasp the concept of “additive bilingualism” … We can see this in numerous instances of media outcry when a language other than English is used for public discourse, which to many is an indication of resistance to English … It is much more likely that non-English speakers are bilingual. (p.43)

Tse further clarifies that as of 1990, over 90% of speakers of a language other than English also spoke at least some English, with 75% speaking “well” or “very well.” In order for teachers, schools, districts and states to support children in immigrant families, they and the media must endorse the value of additive bilingualism. Otherwise, many families – especially low-income families - will continue to feel ostracized and ashamed of their home language.

Parent Perceptions of Home Language Loss and Maintenance

**Parent-School Cooperation**

Parents may struggle to have a voice in the school setting, but many choose to take the necessary steps to preserve the home language in their families. Given the challenges that they face and the many entities – media, schools, society at large,
individuals – that may not see the value in additive bilingualism, home language maintenance requires effort, education, and persistence. Strategies that have proven to be successful outside of the school setting will be further explored in empirical studies (Farruggio, 2009; Guardado, 2006; Worthy, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006).

First, I look to the funds of knowledge approach, which is one that requires the cooperation of teachers and parents.

Moll et al. (1992) studied household and classroom practices of Mexican communities in Tuscon, Arizona in order to bridge the gap between knowledge and skill sets in the home and at school. In this qualitative study, the researchers give voice to families who are often considered “‘Poor,’ not only economically but in terms of the quality of experiences for the child” (p. 132). Communities, however, have ‘funds of knowledge,’ or skill sets that households have developed over time in order to maintain the welfare of the family. How individuals use their funds of knowledge, with whom in the community they are shared, and when families use them in order to cope with various situations involving finances, schools, jobs, and more are of particular interest. Like additive bilingualism, funds of knowledge represent a wealth of cultural and intellectual resources that can only add to a child’s learning in the classroom. This positive conception of family resources, however, diverges from mainstream perceptions of low-income families that are in some way lacking or underprovided.

Not only did the families in Moll et al.’s (1992) study display a great deal of knowledge about economics, law, and history (based on factors such as parent occupations and family trips to visit relatives in Mexico), they also demonstrated passion and commitment toward education for their children; gaining fluency in English was one
essential component of the families’ commitment to education. By building a relationship with parents, the teachers learned more about what the parents knew, and more importantly, how they became knowledgeable about various subjects. Though, what happens when parents perceive research projects, or even school curriculum developed in response to funds of knowledge research, as temporary or special?

Marshall and Toohey (2010) asked this in their study of educators’ incorporation of the funds of knowledge approach with Punjabi Sikh students in a Canadian elementary school. It is heartening to learn of individual studies in which researchers and teachers are using this approach in schools, but it is not a widespread practice. Marshall and Toohey acknowledge, “Although this project successfully invited children to bring their first language and their grandparents’ knowledge to school, teachers, children, and parents saw it as ‘something special’, as not really school” (p. 237). What does this say about how children and their parents may feel about speaking their home language in the school setting, and what are the implications?

Sadly, parents have accepted the fact that schools generally do not view bilingualism/biculturalism additively. If schools made an authentic effort to habitually include family cultures into the curriculum, projects like the one observed in Marshall and Toohey’s (2010) study would not be perceived as exceptional events. Schools and teachers who attempt to normalize funds of knowledge approaches are constricted by, what Van Dijk (2001) describes as, “members of more powerful social groups and institutions, and especially their leaders (the elites) [who] have more or less exclusive access to, and control over one or more types of public discourse” (p. 356). Recognizing that their home language may not be perceived as “official discourse,” parents are taking
matters into their own hands by finding ways to teach their children the home language.

*Family Efforts and Spanish Maintenance*

Several researchers have explored effective strategies or approaches that Latino parents use in order to maintain the home language, while still supporting proficiency in English for their children (Farruggio, 2009; Guardado, 2006; Orellena, Ek, & Hernández 2000; Phinney et al., 2001; Schecter, Sharken-Taboada & Bayley, 1996; Schecter & Bayley, 1997, 2002; Stritikus & García, 2005; Urzúa & Gómez, 2008; Valenzuela, 1999; Wang, 2009; Worthy, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). Schecter & Bayley (2002), who studied the language socialization practices of Mexican-background families living in Texas and California, learned that families in both locales “essentially concur in the view that school is a place to acquire academic competence in the dominant societal language … the responsibility for Spanish maintenance rests primarily with the family” (p. 188). In this study, the extent to which the school should facilitate cultural and language maintenance (in the parents’ opinions) varied, as was the case with several empirical studies involving first and second generation children from different ethnic backgrounds. Ultimately, bilingual immigrant families may differ from one another regarding how outside factors (i.e., school, media, law) affect their children’s home language maintenance, but the role of family as vital and central to language maintenance is generally universal.

Language socialization research (Ochs, 2000) clarifies “how language practices organize the life span process of becoming an active, competent participant in one or more communities … children and other novices come to understand the linguistic repertoire as a palette of subtle, expressive variations and possibilities” (pp. 230-232). In
order to understand such a repertoire-as-palette, parents who engage in conversation with their children via the home language act as a resource within that specific language community.

The symbolic meanings to which families attach the use of Spanish and English are largely dependent on time, space, and socialization practices. Qualitative studies that include participant observations and open-ended interviews allow the researcher to interact with the participants in a more natural setting in which conversation and interaction take place. Rather than focusing on larger quantitative studies – chiefly based on questionnaires and surveys - I examined mostly ethnographic case studies that give voice to the participants (immigrant parents) who may elaborate on a given topic using their own words. Finally, in order to best understand how parents choose strategies to maintain the home language, I explored a variety of studies that include Latinos from different regions of North and Central America, and Puerto Rico. Moreover, the studies incorporated Latino families that now reside in various parts of the United States, as well as in Canada.

According to the research, first and second-generation Latino parents understand the need for proficiency in English, but in many cases they also have a connection to the Spanish language. In Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo’s (2006) study, 16 parents (all, except one, were from Mexico) who were involved in their children’s education and language use employed a variety of strategies to help their children maintain Spanish. None of the parents, however, were comfortable speaking English, yet they could understand some. Most parents felt that Spanish fluency was vital for family communication, and preservation of culture, customs, and traditions. Through their own
experiences, or through those of other Latino immigrants in their community, parents believed that bilinguals benefitted financially in their jobs. Even though all parents understood the advantages to bilingualism and spoke only Spanish to their children, the children still experienced Spanish erosion.

According to the study by Worthy and Rodríguez-Galindo (2006), parents determined to sustain Spanish used the following strategies: attended community and religious events held in Spanish; prohibited the use of English in the home; frequently visited monolingual Spanish relatives; provided opportunities for reading and writing in Spanish at home. The purposeful strategies in this study, and in others, would unfortunately not suffice in every family. Some parents were forced to remain resolute in the face of relatives who criticized the “Spanish Only” approach in the home, while others cut back significantly on visits to relatives in Mexico due to financial hardship. The low socioeconomic status and lack of English proficiency of all parents forced many to accept any available job opportunity, even if it meant losing time to actively enforce the maintenance of Spanish speaking and culture at home.

Summary

Parent perceptions and attitudes regarding home language loss and maintenance among Latino elementary school students intersect with cultural practices, identity, ethnicity and race, and home language loss (Cummins et al., 2005; Frankenberg, 1993; Hornberger & Wang, 2008; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Lutz, 2006; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Suárez, 2002). Reversing Language Shift (Fishman, 1991), or RLS, which incorporates additive bilingual approaches, provides a framework to support the efforts of Latino parents who want their children to maintain the home language. Unfortunately,
bilingualism is not always viewed through an additive lens. Those who support assimilation, for example, have argued that fluency in the dominant language should be the priority, even if it means losing the home language (Crawford, 2000; Gándara & Rumberger, 2008, 2009; Kouritzen, 2000). First generation Latino parents have various opinions about home language maintenance, depending on life experiences and perceptions of bilingualism. Research has shown that many parents see the value in parent-school communication and relationship building (Farruggio, 2009; Guardado, 2006, Worthy, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006), as teachers and families develop a mutual understanding of what it means to be bilingual. As much as school and teacher support for bilingualism helps, many parents feel that it is ultimately their own responsibility to actively and strategically maintain the home language.
CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

I incorporated participatory action research (PAR) so that participants and I could actively examine together both the problem of home language loss, and approaches used to maintain the home language. According to Williams and Brydon-Miller (2004), this research approach is appropriate for community-based research:

[It] combines aspects of popular education, community-based research, and action for social change. Emphasizing collaboration within marginalized or oppressed communities, participatory action research works to address the underlying causes of inequality while at the same time focusing on finding solutions to specific community concerns. (p. 245)

PAR gave our community the structure and tools to change and improve upon the current problems that some of the participants were experiencing, while capitalizing on ways in which some participants were already maintaining the home language. Ultimately, this genuinely democratic approach gave participants and co-researchers the opportunity to research and reflect through their own inquiry.

Participatory Action Research Approaches

In order to lay the groundwork for this study’s participatory research methodology, I will review three approaches: collective praxis, critical inquiry, and counterstorytelling. I incorporate Paulo Freire’s methodology of praxis and more specifically, Cahill’s (2007) and Cahill, Rios-Moore and Threatts’ (2007) collective praxis approach. Moreover, while Freire (1970) refers to praxis as “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (p.36), Cahill and Cahill et al. emphasize the collaborative component of their PAR approach. The research study will also include
Maguire’s (1987) methodology of critical inquiry and Delgado’s method of counter-storytelling (Tate, 1997).

Collective Praxis

Cahill et al. (2007) describe key principles of PAR, and I ascribed to these principles in the study:

PAR is based upon a belief in the power of ‘knowledge produced in collaboration and action’ (Fine et al., 2003). Placing emphasis upon the democratization and redistribution of power within the research process, PAR builds participants’ capacity to analyze and transform their own lives and is committed to ‘giving back’ to community collaborators (Breitbart, 2003; Cahill, 2007b; Fine et al., 2003; Hart, 1997; Pain, 2004; Torre, 2005). (p.98)

This research utilized the collective praxis approach as a way to maximize power sharing, collaboration, and action amongst research participants and community members. Such a model highlights the cycle of reflection and action as it requires group dialogue and problem-solving.

Cahill’s (2007) position is that PAR breaks away from traditional research in the sense that the ‘researched’ become researchers while simultaneously taking on the role of participants. The ‘typical researcher,’ however, also takes on both of these roles (researcher and participant). In particular, Cahill finds that writing and reflecting give all participants the freedom to express their thoughts, which they can then share with the group. This method of inquiry lends itself to reflection and action, or praxis. For example, the participants in this study may agree that home language loss is a concern of theirs, but some may have been more inclined to speak their minds, or feel more comfortable speaking English in a group. Though some participants shared thoughts as to how to problem-solve, others who may have disagreed with these methods of addressing the issue did not always express themselves. I provided various opportunities
to engage in critical dialogue that included all participants’ beliefs in order to conduct a truly inclusive project.

It is my responsibility to state that I, as a white female whose native language is English, had always placed traditional forms of research in high regard before studying participatory action methodologies. Having had the opportunity to study at four year universities at the undergraduate and graduate level, the majority of my professors were researchers engaged in quantitative studies or mixed methodologies. Once I began my doctoral research, however, I felt a strong connection between the content of a participatory action research design and my own personal paradigm. The cyclical process of reflecting on practice, taking action, reflecting, and taking further action resonates with my belief that both the university researcher and the participants are “experts” in their own rights. Therefore, as I embarked on a journey of utilizing a non-traditional approach, I learned from the knowledge and experiences of the participants.

Cahill et al. (2007) also suggest that PAR provides an opportunity for collective responsibility and social change. The participants and I critically reflected upon the state of their own lives. Freire (1970) defines this as a problem-posing approach whereby we recognize the fact that we may have different backgrounds, yet we are part of the same community. Furthermore, as we examined and questioned our own personal beliefs and values, and through which lenses we viewed the world, we came to a better understanding of how our individual experiences contributed to our ability to do research. Collaborative methods also required that we collectively analyze our differences in order to shape questions upon which we wanted to focus.
Conscientization (Freire, 1970) also played a significant role in this approach. Cahill et al. (2007) explain that this process “involves the critical reflection upon the contradictions in one’s own everyday life and the transformation of oneself as a part of this process” (p. 111). In order for each of us to get to the heart of these contradictions that exist in each of our lives, we would agree to partake in meaningful dialogue in a safe setting. The participants and I felt comfortable in both sharing our personal experiences and identities, and asking questions of one another. For example, what led the participants and me to conclude that we should preserve home languages, even though our life experiences have been different in many ways? More importantly, how are these experiences related to our world views? We as researchers learned how to keep our project undefined yet structured, as questions like these inevitably surfaced and our “planned” processes at times changed.

Critical Inquiry

In this study, I questioned societal “norms” and how they relate to one’s personal views of the world. Maguire (1987) describes how this process leads to an individual’s paradigm, or “place to stand” (p.10). Critical inquiry goes beyond questioning where we see ourselves from the place in which we stand, as it leads to not only self-reflection, but also analyses of social systems. It is this process of questioning “social facts” that would ultimately inform our actions. More specifically, I chose to adopt an alternative research paradigm, which “is a choice to recognize a range of knowledge forms and inquiry systems which produce knowledge for the explicit purpose of human emancipation” (Maguire, p.28).
There is a significant relationship between the approaches of Cahill (2007), Cahill et al. (2007) and Maguire (1987). In order to collaboratively reflect and take action that improves the lives of an oppressed group, one must partake in critical inquiry as described above. As we came together as researchers and participants, some assumed that I the “researcher” was operating within a dominant research paradigm. However, objectivity, researcher distance, universality, quantitative data, social control, and impartial advice (Maguire, 1987) were not necessarily components of this research process. Admittedly, participants were unfamiliar specifically with the collaborative piece of PAR. With this group of participants, I explored the benefits of subjectivity, closeness to a subject, uniqueness, qualitative data, local self, determination, solidarity and action.

Though I was eager to begin this participatory project, I had reservations about presenting this methodology to the participants. In the beginning, some were hesitant to embrace the fact that alternative research projects are conducted in a less defined manner than positivist research methods, which embody the characteristics of a dominant paradigm. There were also varying levels of experience with research amongst the participants, so we often revisited the essential components of PAR. As an academic, I encouraged dialogue around this topic so that participants could speak truthfully and openly about their perceptions of “research.” Providing a platform for participant expression was imperative as they reflected on the possible questions of “How do we start our research and where do we begin?”

Throughout my adult life, I have had a keen interest in bilingualism, cross-cultural communication, second language acquisition, and elementary education. So certainly,
this lack of distance between the participants and me is at odds with the positivist approach, as I could obviously not remain objective as we proceeded with our research. Furthermore, I was the teacher of all participants’ first grade children as the study was being conducted, so I had further insight into the lives of the participant families and their commitment to education. Because I chose to utilize a participatory approach, I was entirely aware that I could not separate myself from my “subjects” (a positivist term) and that obtaining support from school staff would be necessary before initiating the project. Finally, I reiterated that those of us who were privileged to have had more formal academic experiences than others were not necessarily more knowledgeable about finding a solution to our problem. Furthermore, those of us that that finished four years of college and graduate school as well did not face the specific challenges that the mothers and fathers have faced ever since raising their Spanish speaking children. This simply reinforces the significance of making an effort to avoid making assumptions based on our labels coming into the study.

As I mentioned earlier, critical inquiry is not simply a self-reflection process, but one that recognizes that “the personal is political.” As participants began to accept the participatory methodology after our first dialogue meeting, they started sharing this process with others in the BSA community. In order to learn more about their political views, which are intertwined with their experiences and personal paradigm, we established a safe and comfortable meeting place. Once participants started making connections between raising bilingual, bicultural children and social norms in schools, workplaces, and other places in society, participants became motivated to share their thoughts with other teachers and parents. During the study, we presented initial findings
at an English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) meeting, led by the Assistant Head of School. In order to avoid reifying any stereotypes or hierarchies, we decided as a group what we wanted to say to the public, and how we wanted to say it. We also planned to present findings and analysis at a staff meeting after the conclusion of our study. In participatory research, we never stop giving voice to anyone, and this includes the presentation of the results! “Naming one’s own reality” (Tate, 1997), or counterstory, can play a pivotal role in the revelation of our study’s results.

**Counterstorytelling**

People of color in the United States have historically been exposed to racist acts and attitudes, xenophobia, cultural ignorance, and various forms of discrimination. Richard Delgado, a critical race theorist (CRT) and scholar, has studied the role of counterstorytelling in CRT (Tate, 1997). Tate posits, “The discussion between the teller and the listener can help overcome ethnocentrism and the dysconscious way many scholars view and construct the world” (p.220). Delgado (1989) explains:

> Stories and counterstories can serve an equally important destructive function. They can show that what we believe is ridiculous, self-serving, or cruel. They can show us the way out of the trap of unjustified exclusion. They can help understand when it is time to reallocate power . . . Stories and counterstories, to be effective, must be or must appear to be non-coercive. They invite the reader to suspend judgment, listen for their point or message, and then decide what measure of truth they contain. (p.2415)

Tate further explains that the listener does not always expect the counterstoryteller to tell the whole truth, mainly because it initiates discomfort and unease. Yet, it is the listener’s task to process and reflect upon these stories with an open mind and open ears.

For the most part, BSA community members have the best intentions of listening to others’ stories and learning about people’s experiences. However, I am unsure as to
how the more well-to-do, white families would interpret the stories of low or middle-income Latino families. Many Spanish speaking families in different parts of the country feel shunned and unwanted in their school communities because they and/or their kids either don’t speak fluent English, have an accent, or take pride in their native cultures (sometimes misinterpreted as disrespecting American culture). Fortunately at BSA, this has not been the experience of the participants. However, not every wealthy white family, of which there are many in Sausalito, has developed a close relationship with a Latino family, and therefore it is inevitable that there may be some surprises and reactions of disbelief regarding expressions of any negative experiences involving discrimination or poor treatment against them. Finally, I distinguish between the white families with extensive financial means, and those of lower and middle classes, of which there are many in the Sausalito/Marin City school district.

This study embraced the opportunity to include counterstorytelling throughout the research process. The counterstories told by participant parents in particular presented their views of bilingualism and reasons for supporting the prevention of home language loss. Their views and opinions may or may not be unexpected, but it was crucial that all participants had an opportunity to express themselves freely and honestly to any audience. Most importantly, I greatly appreciate the contributions of personal counterstories to this research study.

Research Design

A participatory action research design, with an emphasis on dialogue and narrative, allows for relationship building, questioning, reflecting on personal experiences, and most importantly, planning for action in order to address concerns of home language
loss. This study took place during the months of January through March, 2012 as my research team and I investigated home language maintenance and language loss among first generation Latino elementary school children in the Bay Springs Academy (BSA) community. The participants of this study were Spanish speaking parents who were born in a Latin American country.

The study included four participants and two participant/co-researchers whose children were enrolled in the researcher’s first grade class at Bay Springs Academy (BSA), and I will distinguish between participant and co-researcher roles later in this chapter. We explored possible reasons for home language loss amongst BSA’s second generation Latino children, the benefits of bilingualism, and contrasting views of language preference amongst parents, students and teachers. Additionally, we discussed effective home language maintenance strategies. Information gleaned from discussions guided by focused questions became a data set that was coded and analyzed. More specifically, group dialogues, individual interviews, field notes, and informal conversations in the researcher’s classroom and via email communication contributed to data sets analyzed by the researcher and co-researchers.

Research Setting

This study was conducted on the campus and in the neighborhood of Bay Springs Academy (BSA) in Marin County, approximately 20 minutes outside of San Francisco. The elementary charter school is in a suburban setting, serving approximately 250 students in grades kindergarten through eighth grade. BSA is comprised of an ethnically and socioeconomically diverse group of families (Education Data, 2012), including the following: 38% Latino, 31% white, 18% African American, 8% Asian, and 5% two or
more races. 26% of students are English Language Learners (ELs), the majority of whom speak Spanish as a native language. As for economic makeup, 53% of students receive free and reduced priced lunch, which is determined by family income.

The school received the California Distinguished School Award from the Marin County Superintendent of Schools in 2010 and 2011. Notably, the award recognizes the school as “a place committed to the needs of a diverse population” and “a place where students, parents, and staff have a strong voice in the direction the school will follow and, working with the Board, are able to shape the school in the image the community desires” (California Department of Education, 2010, www.cde.ca.gov/ta/sr/cs/disting2010.asp).

As a teacher-researcher and insider of the community, it is worth mentioning that the participants in this study chose to define their city of residence as Sausalito, rather than Marin City. The area in which the participants live is generally referred to as Marin City, however, there is no definitive distinction as they share a zip code and are within walking distance from each other.

Sausalito’s median household income of $109,019 as of 2009 (City-data.com, 2011) was more than double that of the nation’s $50,599 median in the same year (De-Navas-Walt, Proctor & Smith, 2011). Marin City, which shares a zip code with Sausalito, had a median household income of $54,165 (City-data.com) and four times as many residents below the poverty level as Sausalito. Therefore, there is a noticeable disparity in economic resources within the Sausalito/Marin City school district. Other components of the demographic makeup of the two areas vary as well. For example, Sausalito is mostly white (91%), whereas Marin City has roughly an equal number of white residents.
(39%) as African American residents (38%) and 14% identified as Hispanic or Latino (City-data.com).

I highlight the racial and economic differences within the school district’s zip code in order to preclude any misinterpretations of the research setting, as well as the participants’ self-reported city of residence. Given the scope of this study, I will not provide a complete analysis of the Sausalito/Marin City demographic makeup. Rather, I provide this information to illustrate a more complete picture of the research setting, and to contextualize the research findings.

Participants and Co-researchers

The participants and co-researchers were selected from the school’s pool of parents of English Language Learners (ELs) and Latino parents of children who are fully English proficient (FEP). We met weekly at the co-researchers’ home where we socialized, enjoyed home-cooked meals, and built rapport in addition to conducting research. Most of the families were familiar with surrounding areas outside of the school campus and other neighborhoods in which the families reside.

Initially, I distributed a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A) to all parents of EL students enrolled at BSA. Additionally, I informally contacted parents who signed up for the school’s Family English Language Development (FELD) classes. BSA was providing FELD classes for the first time, and I provided childcare for all participating families during these bimonthly classes. In addition to the FELD classes, some parents joined the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC), which is another group I approached about my study when I attended one of their meetings in the fall of 2011. Finally, in the fall of 2011, I had many one-on-one conversations with Latino parents of
students in my class, and several individuals expressed interest in participating. In order to determine whether or not parents were eligible to participate they had to fulfill the following requirements:

1. Born in a Latin American country

2. Speak Spanish at home with at least one other family member

3. Available and willing to participate in this study

4. Want their children to learn how to speak, read and write Spanish

Prior to the beginning of data collection, I had envisioned most, if not all participants becoming co-researchers. My original vision, however, did not coincide with the comfort level of each participant. Moreover, two of the six participants emerged as co-researchers after the first dialogue as they became enthusiastic, not only about the original questions posed, but about the interests of their own family and of the school’s Latino parent community. Engaging the co-researchers in the entire research process, however, proved to be more challenging than I had expected prior to data collection.

The co-researchers and participants had distinct roles in this study. The participants attended each meeting and were engaged in dialogue, but they did not make suggestions regarding further research and dialogue topics or focus areas. The co-researchers often served as discussion leaders, hosts of each dialogue meeting, and they encouraged participants to speak in whichever language was most comfortable. After our first dialogue meeting, the co-researchers and I made significant modifications in the guiding questions to be further explored in future meetings. After reviewing previous dialogue summaries and transcripts, co-researchers continued to modify and generate
guiding questions for future dialogues. They also served as translators for me, as I understand a limited amount of Spanish. Finally, co-researchers reviewed the transcripts to check for accuracy and emerging themes, and translated a document (Appendix D) that the school will share with all EL families, per the suggestion of the Assistant Head of School, and the collaborative decision amongst co-researchers and participants.

Ideally, the co-researchers would have had sufficient time to conduct individual interviews with other participants, collect data from other potential participants in the community, and analyze more data. Due to extremely hectic schedules, they were not able to become as active in the data collection and analysis process. They were, however, vigorously involved in defining dialogue questions, reviewing dialogue transcripts, and making a future plan of action within the community, as discussed in chapter V. These actions set them apart from the participants, but given more time and flexibility, co-researchers would have had adequate time to participate in more of the data collection and analysis process. So the extent to which the co-researchers were able to participate was not ideal, but “the most important distinctions centre on how and by whom is the research question formulated and by and for whom are research findings used” (Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995, p.1668). Co-researchers did not formulate the main research questions, however they fully supported them and advised as to how to answer the questions, and how to involve community members who were experiencing home language loss or maintenance.

Four of the participants, while actively engaged in dialogues and in some cases, one-on-one interviews and a school ELAC meeting, did not take on the same role as the co-researchers. They participated in dialogues, spoke to the researcher and co-
researchers informally before and after school, and informed other Latino parents in the community about our study. As a group, the participants and I decided to invite special guests to one of the meetings, including the school’s Spanish teacher and the parents of a one of the researcher’s students. The participants and co-researchers shared a home-cooked meal at the co-researchers’ house each time we met. The meals prior to the formal dialogues served as a time to develop relationships at a more personal level, and to share cultural dishes, stories, music, and laughter with one another.

Table 1 below presents brief descriptions of each participant at the time the study was conducted, including their gender, age, primary language(s) spoken at home, country of birth, and number of years living in the United States. Each of these descriptors is based on the participant’s self-reporting. Two participants acted as co-researchers, as noted below.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Languages Spoken in the Home</th>
<th>Country of Birth</th>
</tr>
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<td>English and Portuguese</td>
<td>Chile</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Henriette*</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Perla</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rubén*</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Nicaragua</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*participant/co-researcher
Background of the Participants

*Gabriel*

Gabriel was born in Valaparaiso, Chile and he arrived in the United States in 1980 when he was 18 years old. He lived in Chicago for two years and then traveled to Europe. Ultimately he moved there and lived in France, Portugal, and Germany for a period of eight years. Gabriel had family in these countries, attended chef school in Paris, and eventually met his wife in Portugal. They decided to move back to California in 1990, where Gabriel was a chef in the San Francisco Bay area for 15 years.

Gabriel now works in the field of sustainable energy for residential homes and lives in Sausalito, California. Gabriel has one young adult son who was born in France and raised in Portugal, and a six-year-old daughter who was born in California. His daughter mainly speaks English at home, but also speaks some Portuguese with her mother and some Spanish with her grandmother, who lives with his family in Sausalito. Moreover, their home languages are currently English and Portuguese. He stated that he wanted to be a part of this study because he would like his children to be bilingual or trilingual in order to have many options for their lives in the future. Gabriel, his wife and daughter will permanently move to Portugal in a few months after the conclusion of this study; he anticipates that after moving to his home, which is minutes from Spain’s border, his daughter will naturally and quickly learn Spanish.

*Gloria*

Gloria was born in Joya del Pilar in El Salvador and moved to the United States in 1990. She was 19 years old and decided to obtain a job cleaning houses in San Francisco. She was later hired as a house cleaner and full-time babysitter for families in Marin
County, a suburb of San Francisco and the county in which the research setting was located. Gloria has two young adult children who live in El Salvador and speak Spanish, and one seven-year-old daughter who speaks Spanish and English. She wants her youngest daughter to maintain the home language because it is important for her future in the United States. Furthermore, she hopes that her daughter will learn to appreciate her native roots and cultural background. In her opinion, speaking the mother tongue is equally important as speaking the dominant language.

Henriette

Henriette came to the United States from her birthplace of Managua, Nicaragua when she was 12 years old in 1989. She has been married to fellow participant/co-researcher Rubén for 12 years, and they have an infant son as well as a six-year-old son. She moved back to Nicaragua in 1995 before marrying Rubén, at which point she considered herself bilingual. After getting married and spending five years in Nicaragua, Henriette returned to the Bay area and resided in Sausalito, where her parents and brother’s family live as well. Her husband made the permanent move to Sausalito soon after their first son was born.

Henriette stated that she works very hard to keep the family’s cultural background and home language. She works as a Community Relations Specialist in the San Francisco Unified School District and she was hired in part for her fluency in Spanish. She translates and interprets in Spanish everyday and she loves doing it. She asks her six-year-old son to speak Spanish to her all the time in the home, but realizes he may prefer English. That said, she believes that maintaining the home language is a tough job, but very important.
Nicolás

Nicolás was born in the town of San Antonio Enchisi, less than 100 miles northwest of Mexico City. He attended school until sixth grade and then worked full time on his family’s farm. He arrived in the United States when he was 20 years old, and later married fellow participant, Gloria. Nicolás has a seven-year-old daughter who understands Spanish, but rarely responds to him in Spanish. He works in construction in and around San Francisco and almost always speaks with his co-workers in Spanish. Nicolás speaks some English and says that he is still learning and practicing everyday with American-born co-workers and bosses.

Nicolás is happy that his daughter asks him to speak to her in Spanish because she wants to learn his native language. As the study was being conducted, his wife and his daughter visited his extended family in his home town in Mexico. Nicolás hopes that his daughter will one day be able to communicate fluently in Spanish with his mother.

Perla

Perla was born in Guatemala City, the capital of Guatemala. She moved to San Rafael, California with her mother, American-born stepfather, and her older brother when she was 13 years old, and attended San Rafael High School. Perla, a single mom who works at a retirement home, has a 15-year-old son, a six-year-old daughter, and a six-month-old daughter. She is very proud of the fact that her son, who attended a highly specialized school for children with autism in Guatemala City for three years, is nearly fluent in Spanish and can read and write in the language as well. She feels guilty that her six-year-old daughter, however, speaks little Spanish. Perla would like her children to be bilingual so that they have a better future and many career options, but also so that they
Rubén
can communicate with her family when they go to Guatemala. Recently she has started reading to her daughter in Spanish and playing her songs from her childhood, which is something that they both enjoy.

Rubén

Rubén came to California in May of 2006 when he was 28 years old, a few months after his now six-year-old son was born. His parents and siblings live in Nicaragua, and his wife’s parents and brother’s family live in their Sausalito neighborhood. Rubén has a law degree from Nicaragua and was a practicing attorney before moving here. He will be graduating from the University of San Francisco’s nursing program in May and will soon be a Registered Nurse. After moving to California, his brother-in-law got him a job at a hospital where free English classes were offered. Rubén was determined to learn English quickly and he is now fluent.

Rubén feels very strongly about maintaining the home language, and he says his number one strategy is to be firm about the language with his older son. It is very important that his children maintain Spanish because it is the way they communicate at home, with family who live in their neighborhood, and with family who are back in Nicaragua. He also feels that speaking a second language is an advantage in school, for work, and for living in the U.S. Rubén was a natural leader during many of the group dialogues, and he enjoyed sharing strategies for maintaining the home language that worked for his family.

Validity

Participatory research presents plural and subjugated expertise. In other words, unlike positivist research, which is often measured by the extent to which “experts”
consider the design as valid, participatory research relies on the dedication and commitment to the research process of the participants and researcher, all of whom are experts in their own right (Tolman & Brydon-Miller, 2001). Participatory research recognizes that knowledge which is not objective in the positivist sense can still be considered valid. This is because researchers and participants who work diligently with a self-awareness, purpose and dedication to the problem will most likely be more engaged and intent on gathering evidence to support their cause. In participatory research, three forms of knowledge are considered: instrumental (practically useful), interactive (derived from dialogue), and critical (derived from reflection and action) (Park et al., 1993). These are the forms of knowledge to be considered in order to establish validity.

Furthermore, each dialogue was guided by a series of thematic questions initiated by the researcher and co-researchers. Subsequent questions were developed after transcribing data from previous dialogues, and participants then had opportunities to voice questions, concerns, or comments of the co-researchers’ processes. In order to provide as many modes of communication, co-researchers were available via email and phone as well. Participants were invited to share written reflections, respond to dialogue in Spanish, and participate in individual interviews. These tools and observations served as data collection instruments, in addition to group dialogues. As mentioned in Chapter I, co-researchers served as translators who addressed comments and questions in both English and Spanish when necessary. As a precautionary measure, co-researchers reviewed notes and selected transcribed text from previous dialogues so as to reflect accuracy.
Data Collection and Interpretation

The researcher reviewed questionnaire (Appendix A) answers sent to potential participants and contacted interested parents for an initial group dialogue. Data were collected within a prescribed process that included group dialogues, journal writing and sharing, field notes, one-on-one interviews, and informal observations. The initial data collection involved an analysis of responses to group dialogue questions asked at the first meeting. These open-ended questions allowed participants to speak freely and comfortably:

1. a. What problems do you and/or your family face in your daily lives regarding your child(ren)’s home language loss?
   b. What problems have you and your family members avoided due to the fact that your child(ren) is (are) bilingual English-Spanish?

2. What problems do you think other first generation Latino parents face when attempting to maintain the home language?

3. How do you perceive bilingualism? What comes to mind? How do you think others view bilingualism in general, and bilingualism among Latinos?

4. Why do you think the problems mentioned in 1.a. and 1.b. exist? What causes these problems, in your opinion?

5. What are some things that can be done about these problems? What is currently being done about these problems?

6. What do you want or need from the other participants who are either concerned about home language loss, or are maintaining Spanish in the family?

Discussions were audio recorded and written notes were taken at this meeting, other
group dialogues, and individual interviews and observations.

Specific steps in data collection are listed in Table 2 on the next page, while data collected focused on the issue of parent perceptions of bilingualism and home language maintenance and loss. Group dialogues took place weekly or biweekly from January through March, 2012. During these meetings, I followed up on previously asked questions, making time for written responses and oral sharing. Given the co-researchers’ desire to rely more on dialogue and less on written responses, the latter form of sharing was used sparingly. Park et al. (1993) emphasize the importance of collaborative organization:

To begin with, the community decides how to formulate the problem to be investigated, what information should be sought, what methods should be used, what concrete procedures should be taken, how the data should be analyzed, what to do with the findings, and what action should be taken. In this process, the researcher essentially acts as a discussion organizer and facilitator and as a technical resource person. (p.19)

There are many important points that Park et al. address. First, as we began to collect data, the participants looked to me as a teacher to their children, and not as a co-researcher. I took great efforts to establish myself, not as the lead teacher, but rather, as a “discussion organizer and facilitator,” as Park et al. suggest. Fortunately, the co-researchers straightforwardly suggested we modify one of the guiding questions, effectively deciding upon pertinent information needing to be sought. They also made suggestions as to how to analyze the data (i.e. creating a bilingual information sheet regarding effective home language maintenance strategies, Appendix D) and with whom to share our findings. We genuinely took part in collaborative organization.
Table 2

*Dates of Dialogue/Interview*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dialogue/Interview</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial group dialogue</td>
<td>January 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second group dialogue</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Third group dialogue</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>ELAC Meeting</td>
<td>February 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fourth group dialogue</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
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<tr>
<td>First individual Interview</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second individual interview</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third individual interview</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fifth group dialogue</td>
<td>March 2012</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Protection of Human Participants

Official IRB permission was obtained before the start of the study, and all co-
researchers and participants signed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B). All co-
researchers and participants were given a "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" (Appendix C) and a copy of the consent form to keep. I explained the consent process and the parents indicated their consent in order to proceed. The consent form described the process, confidentiality, risks and benefits and provided contact information.

Data Analysis Procedures

This research study included data analysis that involved both co-researchers and the researcher. Park et al. (1993) stated that “data are analyzed with the intention of discovering the dimensions of the problem under investigation and of coming up with a guide to collective action” (p.13). The co-researchers employed qualitative approaches and assisted me with transcribing selected text in order to identify emergent themes, analyze data sets once themes were identified, and organize analysis to align with research questions.
Background of Researcher and the Question of White Privilege

I have worked at Bay Springs Academy (BSA) for five and a half years, and I have developed relationships with many parents of EL students. When the Head of School announced the initiation of the English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) in the fall of 2009, I eagerly volunteered to be on the committee. Aside from my experience as a teacher at BSA, I have personal interests in Latin American culture, the Spanish language and bilingualism, and also political issues related to immigrants from Mexico, Central and South America. More specifically, I have written several research papers on immigrant-related issues focusing on legal status and human rights, including language rights and language practices. Fortunately, my professional life at BSA has been very fulfilling. I teach first grade and I have developed meaningful relationships with several other teachers and parents. I originally applied for my current position at BSA because I was attracted to the diversity of the school, and particularly, the presence of Spanish speaking Latino families.

During one of my semesters as a doctoral student here at the University of San Francisco, I decided to enroll in a qualitative research class. After the first meeting, I dropped the class because I was uncomfortable with the stipulation that we as researchers must go outside of our communities to research a group removed from our local spaces. In my view, this was counterintuitive and went against my personal paradigm. Why, I wondered, would I seek out an unknown group who may or may not have a problem, ask them to be my “subjects,” and then explain to them “my” research agenda? I found this to be in direct conflict with my personal and political belief that everyone deserves and has a right to a voice, especially those who have historically been oppressed and
discouraged to speak out. Now in the spring of 2012, I am doing participatory research because it allows me to address a problem in my community about which many people share concern.

I viewed this research study as an opportunity to personally and collaboratively reflect on our local concerns and how they relate to larger political and social issues in the United States. As a white female, I understand that there are only so many experiences to which I can relate when I am in dialogue with Latina mothers and Latino fathers. Nonetheless, my goal was to explore shared experiences and reflect upon how those have contributed to our individual interests and worldviews. During the research process, I hoped to provide a safe and productive environment in which we could openly discuss how to better serve the needs of BSA families whose first language is Spanish.

A candid discussion of my background must certainly acknowledge the presence of and my experiences with white privilege. McIntosh (1988) articulates the problem best, as I have had similar experiences throughout my years as a white girl, woman, student, athlete, teacher, and as many other white identities to which I subscribe, or have subscribed in the past. McIntosh explains:

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed [this] pattern … whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow “them“ to be more like “us. (p.1)

As a white woman in a position of power – namely that which came from unearned privilege - and as a member of the dominant group and main culture, I came to this project with advantages and disadvantages of which I must at the very least acknowledge
and be mindful. I am both an insider of the community, and an outsider. As much as I support the efforts of first generation Latino parents to maintain the home language, I have not had an organic experience myself of speaking to my children in a home language that is something other than English, and I have not had the experience of going through my daily life without white privilege. In this regard, I was an outsider who was dedicated to learning more about the research topic, but who may have been perceived by the participants as the educator and the sole expert. I am an educator, but I am also a learner, and I am an expert in my own right, yet so are my participants. Collectively, we aimed to navigate and reconstruct power systems, but I acknowledge my positionality and my dedication to the project.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to explore parent attitudes and perceptions about home language maintenance and loss among Latino children in immigrant families. This study also investigated the relationship between ethnic and/or social identities and language choice. In order to understand parent perceptions of how to promote and implement additive bilingualism, the study explored home language maintenance strategies as well. The researcher collected and analyzed six first generation Latino parents’ critical reflections on perceptions of home language maintenance and loss. All participants, with the exception of one, considered Spanish to be the home language, and all of their children were born in the United States. The researcher utilized a participatory action research method with group dialogues and individual interviews as primary data collection methods to explore home language loss and maintenance at an elementary K-8 public charter school – Bay Springs Academy (BSA) - in the Sausalito/Marin City school district of Northern California. The findings are presented below, following the research questions addressed in the study.

This chapter presents critical reflections that were obtained from three female Latino parents and three male Latino parents whose children attended BSA during the 2011-2012 school year. All of the participants’ children were enrolled in the researcher’s first grade class at the time of the study, and all families lived in Sausalito. All participants chose pseudonyms for the study, as they wanted to feel safe and comfortable in sharing their experiences, which would knowingly be shared in this dissertation’s
findings chapter. In addition, I chose a pseudonym for the name of the school at which the children were enrolled.

Overview of Findings

As discussed in chapter III, the researcher engaged in dialogues, interviews, and informal conversations during the months of January through March of 2012. She also attended a meeting with the school’s English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) and two of her participants. Finally, the researcher took field notes throughout the data collection period. The following research questions were addressed:

1. a) To what extent do parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism influence home language maintenance?
   b) To what extent do parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism influence home language loss?

2. Does identifying with an ethnic or social group have an impact on language choice?

3. What are parent perceptions of how to promote and implement additive bilingualism?

    I posed a set of guiding questions for the first dialogue, and the co-researchers and I determined questions for the following dialogues. I interviewed three participants to clarify my own remaining questions from group dialogues, and to probe further about any topics on which they did not elaborate during group dialogues. Each participant was also encouraged and free to suggest questions or topics for the following meetings. Therefore, we addressed each research question, but we spent more time discussing those most important and salient in the lives of participants.
As the meetings progressed, the co-researchers became more comfortable with taking on leadership roles during the dialogues, and I began to step away from the teacher role that I have played for my entire career. The participatory research model gave us the opportunity to move freely from one topic to the next, and to address the research questions in a relevant, yet structured manner. There were moments of high emotion, discomfort, gratitude, hopefulness, inspiration, and pride. The topic of bilingualism and home language maintenance and loss brought about mixed emotions and passion in all of us, and the participatory model is one that gave such emotions a place to be voiced and to be heard. Moreover, this model empowered its participants to act on their findings for the current study, but also for their future.

Generative Themes

The generative themes that emerged from the entire data set are organized within each research question, and in some cases subthemes follow the generative themes. Dialogue transcriptions are included so that each participant’s unique perception and voice can be shared accurately and openly. The participants felt that home language maintenance was important for family communication and relationship building, cultural preservation, and a better future in the professional world. They also felt that their first grade children were at an ideal age to either continue maintaining the home language, which is generally Spanish, or to reverse the loss of Spanish.

Research Question 1 a)

To What Extent Do Parent Attitudes and Perceptions of Bilingualism Influence Home Language Maintenance?
Recognizing the Advantages of Bilingualism

Speaking from the Heart

The participants perceived Spanish to be the language in which they can best express themselves without losing any meaning in translation. They also found that shared experiences with relatives in the home country were enriched when their children could not only understand them, but speak to them in Spanish. Perla explained:

Already [my daughter] is refusing she doesn’t want to speak Spanish, but today I think we had a breakthrough when I offered – she wants to go to Guatemala and visit my mom. I said, ‘Oh, your cousins there speak Spanish so they’re not going to be able to communicate with you and she said, ‘Well, do they speak English?’ and I said, ‘Why can’t you speak to them in English and they’ll teach you Spanish?’ (Second Dialogue, February, 2012)

The desire to have their children speak to their relatives in their home countries was at the core of long-term family relationships. Perla and others felt as though their children would never get to know their relatives without maintaining Spanish. For Henriette and Rubén, speaking to and sharing experiences with relatives who spoke mostly Spanish was not as logistically challenging, and they concurred with Perla’s desire. Rubén noted:

And it’s very helpful that we have Henriette’s parents right there. They take care of [my son] and everyday they speak Spanish with him. So here we speak Spanish, but also he goes to Grandpa’s house. (Third Dialogue, February, 2012)

In Rubén’s case, his son has daily conversation with his grandfather, but also learns life lessons from him because he can understand and speak the home language.

When one of the dialogues took place, Gloria and her daughter were visiting her husband, Nicolás’ family in Mexico. After speaking with Gloria on the phone that day, Nicolás was elated and proud that his daughter was sharing experiences with his mother while conversing in Spanish. He described a specific incident:

She’s in Mexico, so I noticed something. There nobody speaks English so she has
to speak Spanish. She’s traveling a little bit. She’ll say sometimes, ‘I don’t know how to ask for this.’ But I just tell her to ask them and she says, ‘But always I do my best to speak in Spanish. I went with my grandma. She wanted me to help make the tortillas… I said, ‘did you speak with her?’ She said, ‘Yes, I speak with her, ask me how to do this, tell me how to do it. So I think I did good! I made a few tortillas already.’ That’s what she said to me. So I think she’s happy with this. Um, she’s interested in Spanish. I think it’s really good. I do my best to teach her and speak with her. (Third Dialogue, February, 2012)

Nicolás’ daughter was responsive to his perception that speaking in the home language with his family gives her the opportunity to share meaningful moments with them.

When the school’s Spanish teacher joined the group for the fourth dialogue, she mentioned how proud she was of Nicolás and Gloria for sending their daughter to Gloria’s family’s home in El Salvador earlier in the year, and then to Mexico. Her positive reinforcement was welcomed by the group that day, as her opinion meant a lot to the participants. Gloria told the Spanish teacher, “Thank you for teaching our kids. [Our daughter] is always talking about you. ‘Guess what, Mom, I learned today with [the Spanish teacher]! Te lo canto?’” (Fourth dialogue, March, 2012). Moreover, the parents’ perception that knowing Spanish was necessary for communicating with family had a positive influence on their children’s home language maintenance.

_A Better Future_

Participants believed that being bilingual would lead to a better future for their children, especially because in their experiences, their bilingualism has been an advantage in their own careers. All of the participants noted that their bilingualism was a factor in becoming a professional, or it allowed for better, more efficient communication with co-workers or bosses. They tried to explain this to their children, as well. Perla explained, “I’m trying to instill in [her 6-year-old daughter] I want her to be bilingual because it is fabulous and you are – like in my job – you’re worth more if you’re
bilingual, so that’s my opinion in my household” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). The participants’ experiences at work were generally positive, with the exception of a few isolated incidents. Their positive experiences were in part attributed to their bilingualism. Nicolás explained his point of view:

Being bilingual to me, I think is important. Very important because you can be more successful at your work. Now if my daughter can speak both languages because as you say some people don’t like you to speak Spanish, but there are other people who like you to speak Spanish to them. Even they speak Spanish with you, it’s just like me. I don’t speak good English, so they don’t speak Spanish either, but they try. (Second Dialogue, February, 2012)

Nicolás further explained that, not only has bilingualism helped him advance in his career, but he feels that both his monolingual white and African American co-workers and his bilingual Latino co-workers value bilingualism at the workplace. He noted that he knows enough English so that he can understand what his boss is communicating to him, even though his speaking ability is not fluent. In other words, knowing English has been a great advantage for Nicolás because his boss and others can communicate with him, and he can translate in Spanish to those co-workers who understand little, or not enough English.

When discussing the perceptions of bilingualism from the participants’ points of view compared to a monolingual American parent’s view, I asked the group the following question (Second Dialogue, February, 2012):

Why do you think many American parents are impressed by children who go to a Chinese or Spanish immersion school? These children don’t have any cultural ties to these languages, but their parents have the resources and the money to send them to a school that teaches them another language … we already have so many people here doing that same thing [immigrants learning a second or third language through conversation, ESL classes, or through self-teaching, for example], yet they’re often told to just speak English.
During this discussion, I was referring to private immersion schools. For example, tuition at the Chinese American International School in San Francisco, a kindergarten through eighth grade Mandarin immersion school, is $22,560. Rubén spoke about the culture of commercialism, the socio-economic statuses of “educated” people, and why bilingual individuals are more highly valued in the United States:

Well because they have this decision to plan for the future … the United States is very commercial, it’s diverse and multicultural. So the more you know the more valued you are in society and one day if you get educated, this position in society … if you’re going to be the boss of the manager … you have diversity culturally, maybe in class for you, it’s very important to know that the smart person is the person who can communicate. That’s the best kind of boss you can have … The more you know the more valuable you are.

Perla added that being bilingual is an option for parents who can afford to send their children to an immersion school, and many people are impressed by that. In her case and for others, however, learning another language is a necessity and perhaps not perceived as impressive. All parents agreed that maintaining the home language would benefit their children because it would further enhance their career options in the future.

*Having Pride in the Native Culture and Language*

Beginning with the first dialogue, the participants began speaking about being proud of their bilingualism and their culture. They also wanted to develop this sense of pride in their children because they felt a strong connection between culture and language. Moreover, they hoped that their children could feel more connected to their native countries’ cultures and traditions by learning Spanish and communicating with relatives. Everyone, with the exception of Gabriel, wanted to strategically maintain the native language by speaking it in the home, so as to preserve the connection and pride in their
culture as well. Gabriel felt proud whenever his daughter would say something to him in Spanish. He said:

*Cada vez que [mi hija] dice algo en Español me pongo orgulloso. Por ejemplo, dijo, ‘Papá, ésto es chicharrón!’ Lo he aprendido de la convivencia de las compañeras.* Every time my daughter says something in Spanish, I feel proud. For example, she said, Dad, this is a chicharrón! She learned that from these meetings with her classmates” (Fourth Dialogue, March, 2012).

Though he had no plans to enforce the use of Spanish in his home, Gabriel explained that he sometimes wished his daughter knew more of the language so he could share stories with her. He felt that stories can “get lost in translation” (Fourth Dialogue, March, 2012).

Gabriel planned to move to Portugal with his family in the near future. The others planned to stay in the U.S. and felt that in order to feel proud of their Mexican, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, or Guatemalan heritages, they must understand and communicate to family members in Spanish. Gabriel clarified that once they moved to Portugal, his daughter would become fluent in Spanish because most people speak the language there. Therefore, she could develop a closer relationship with his mother, who speaks Spanish, but not English. As is the case with the other participants, building a relationship with his mother served as an essential means for his daughter to connect to his family’s roots.

Gloria was the first to broach the subject and mentioned a time when two monolingual “Caucasian American kids,” as she described them, told her son, who was speaking Spanish with a Latino friend, that “Spanish is a dumb language” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Her husband, Nicolás added to the conversation:

E.E.: I’m glad he [her son] shared that with you … so you could respond. What did you say?
N: Yeah, we can help him with that … don’t feel bad about what they say about you. Don’t take it personal.

G: Just be proud.

N: Yeah.

G: That you have two languages.

Others were nodding their heads and I asked what everyone else though about Gloria’s Comment, and the implication that parental support was important. Rubén responded:

I think that’s the key. I think the hardest part of being parents is to just let the kids learn, or help them be proud of the language or where you come from or your origin. So if parents are not being proud of being Latino, because [one could say] I don’t speak English and I only speak Spanish. You were saying you [Nicolás] only got to sixth grade, but if you are proud of whatever point you get to, you’re going to transmit that feeling, that idea to your child … your child will receive that perception from you so he won’t stand out from everybody else. I don’t care what you say. I’m proud of being Latino and I’m proud of speaking Spanish and English. How many languages do you speak? So if you teach your child, you need to be proud of your language. That’s what I do, no matter what. You should be proud of being Nicaraguan and you speak Spanish. I don’t care where we are. We speak Spanish and we’re going to be proud.

Perla and Henriette were nodding their heads, and Perla said that she was so proud of being bilingual that to her, speaking Spanish is a privilege. She explained how her brother, who married a white woman who was born in the United States, wants to reverse their daughter’s home language loss. She told him, “After what I gathered here at this meeting, I’m going to tell him, you know, instill Spanish in my niece because it’s, ahh, it’s an advantage in a way, but a privilege also” (First Dialogue, January, 2012).

Rubén concurred and said, “That’s a word I like, it’s a privilege. *Privilegio.*”

Henriette felt that her accent was a cultural marker and at work people ask her:

‘Oh, where is your accent? Where are you from?’ And I’m proud of it. It doesn’t bug me, it doesn’t bother me at all. I just say Latino. They read my last name and they say, ‘Oh Italian, but your accent?’ And I am Latino, it’s just the last name. I
am since changing it to [my husband’s last name]. I think that’s very Latina. I like that (Second Dialogue, February, 2012).

When Henriette and Rubén got married she kept her maiden name, which is of Italian origin, although none of her recent ancestors are from Italy. She has decided that she wants people to identify her as a Latina, and her husband’s last name is a more accurate reflection of her Nicaraguan identity. Both her accent and her husband’s last name serve as ethnic and cultural markers that highlight her Latino-ness.

At a later meeting we were reviewing some of the strategies for maintaining the home language, and parents concurred that travelling to their native countries helps. Again, the conversation turned to the importance of preserving the culture. Nicolás and Henriette talked about the experiences that their children can have with their family in their native countries. Henriette and Rubén, however, did not currently have the financial resources to go back to Nicaragua. She explained (Third Dialogue, February, 2012):

H: *Pero esperando que en el futuro se pueda llevar a [mi hijo] realmente a Nicaragua porque esas experiencias que estan haciendo Gloria y [su hija] son muy importante por la cultura, la idioma.* But we’re hoping that in the future we can actually take Ronny to Nicaragua because those experiences that Gloria and [her daughter] are having are very important for the culture, the language.

N: *Por todo. Por todo.* For everything. For everything.

H: *Por todo.* It’s great that she’s making the tortillas with Great Grandmother and his mother like Nicolás says. [His daughter’s] not being shy, you know, she’s enjoying it. It’s great, yeah! So good for her.

N: I feel like she’s a lucky girl ‘cause she goes to Mexico, to El Salvador, so she knows a little bit more where we came. I mean, I watch those movies on El Salvador, it’s amazing ‘cause … they don’t have a house like here. They don’t sleep in a bed like here. They’re, how do you say, poor? Not poor, but … middle-class. It’s really different so she has to appreciate … what she has.

Nicolás expressed his desire for his daughter to see beyond her life in the United States and viewed language as a prerequisite to such a perspective. Rubén expanded on
what his wife was saying, and added that these experiences in their native countries
would leave a lasting impression on their children. Not only should they take their
children there, but he believed they should also explain to them, “You’re going to be my
legacy. You’re going to be my herencia.”

P: Heritage.

R: yeah, legacy too. You will see that it will be healthy and beneficial for
you in the future.

Henriette added that parents should explain to their children what it means to honor their
roots.

H: Yes, definitely explain to him, to them, the kids why. I think you have to
praise yourself and we all have to praise ourselves meaning darnos mucho crédito
porque somos papás y es bien que somos bilingües, pero eres ocupado [a
Nicolás]. Give ourselves a lot of credit because we are parents and it’s good that
we are bilingual, but you [Nicolás] are busy.


H: Yeah, it’s not easy, umm, entonces tenemos que darnos mucho crédito por
estar en este reunión. So we need to give ourselves a lot of credit for being in this
meeting. Just the fact of being here … meeting and trying to figure things out.
And learning from each other! Like I really admire that you guys [Gloria and
Nicolás] are taking [your daughter] to Mexico so that she can learn, not only her
language, but her roots, her herencia.

Rubén’s, Henriette’s, and Nicolás’ commitment to learning and understanding their
decision to speak two languages, as well as to raise their children as bilinguals illustrated
their pride in the native language and culture

Summary

Having pride in the native culture and language was important to the participants,
and they wanted their children to feel connected to their family’s roots. In some cases,
maintaining cultural markers and viewing home language maintenance as a privilege
reflected such pride. They also believed that it was important to engage in critical
dialogue with their children at an early age about why they should honor their roots.
Finally, the participants began to recognize the fact that their participation in this study
was also a reflection of their commitment to staying connected to their heritage, culture,
and language.

**Reflecting on Counterstories**

Participants were asked to share their personal stories, and what their experiences
were with speaking Spanish and English as a child, or when they first moved to the U.S.
They came to the conclusion that their personal histories, which can be considered
counterstories (Delgado, 1989), influence how they perceive bilingualism and home
language maintenance and loss. Counterstorytelling can allow people of Color to “name
their own reality” (Hermes, 1999; Ladson-Billings, 1999) and to confront the rationale of
American masternarratives (Ladson-Billings, 2000). The story of assimilation and the
Americanization of immigrants has been described as a cultural melting pot, resulting in a
common culture and a more homogeneous, monolingual society. The participants’
counterstories challenge the normativity of subtractive bilingualism and assimilation, and
they illustrate a more complex and multi-faceted reality.

The participants who moved here as children – Henriette and Perla - shared
similar experiences in school as they were treated like outcasts. They were teased and
made fun of for their accents and for speaking Spanish. Their parents’ perceptions of
bilingualism and home language maintenance, however, differed from one another.
Perla’s white American stepfather, for example, adhered to the melting pot theory and
expected his children to speak English only, in order to “respect the culture” of the
United States (Perla, Individual Interview, March, 2012). Her mother supported her husband, even though she would have chosen to maintain Spanish in the household had the decision been up to her only. Perla’s stepfather showed little curiosity in her mother’s Guatemalan heritage, and his outlook on assimilation had a lasting impact on Perla. Moreover, her ethnic roots and her native language were invisible to her stepfather, and this led her to feel ashamed and embarrassed of her background as a child.

Henriette’s parents, on the other hand, raised her to be bilingual and to be proud of her Nicaraguan heritage. Furthermore, she believed that it was unfair to judge a parent or a child who has not maintained the home language without knowing his or her background. She explained further (First Dialogue, February, 2012):

I think it’s very important to look back, like our kids are in this young generation, but it’s very important to understand the background, like the parents’ generation. Why is the kid not fluent in his or her home language? It’s not ok, like some people say, like my parents have a strong opinion and other older generations. But it’s not ok to blame the kid, it’s not ok to blame the parents, and not feel ashamed or bad at all. You know, like he [Rubén] made that comment on that day.

R: It was easy to me to say, ‘Oh, does she [Perla’s daughter] speak Spanish?’ I apologize.

Rubén was referring to a comment that Perla had made earlier:

P: I was telling Gloria that [my daughter’s] father, we both grew up here, but we both spoke only English. And when I first came, I think the second time I came here [to Rubén’s house], Rubén kinda made me feel bad about myself because he said [your daughter] doesn’t speak Spanish? And he just kind of gave me that look and I felt bad, but it’s like he said, don’t be afraid! Like in my household, it was in a way my stepdad made me feel like I had to be ashamed of my heritage. Because he said only speak English when you’re around me. And even with my own mom I have to speak only English, so obviously, he wanted me to learn it, he wanted to know what we were talking about [Laughter].

R: And that is selfish! Selfishness.

P: Yes
E.E.: And that had a huge effect on you, what you think about speaking Spanish, right?

Perla nodded and explained how she became even more frustrated when she sent her oldest son to Guatemala, and her mom (who had moved back to Guatemala with her husband) spoke to him only in English. In Perla’s view, she was making an effort to preserve the family language and culture by sending her son to a school for Autistic children in Guatemala, rather than in the U.S. Her mother’s language practices did not necessarily help her reach her goals. Henriette sympathized with Perla, as she understood that Perla was attempting to maintain Spanish with her son. She also understood the family tensions described by Perla, which were based on varied perspectives on language maintenance. Perla’s stepfather’s influence, however, was impeding her efforts.

Henriette reiterated:

So I say there’s a history, there’s something behind every kid who is either bilingual or not, or bilingual as a Latino, or anything. It doesn’t necessarily have to be a Latino. You know people who say, ‘Yes I don’t speak Chinese because my parents never spoke Chinese to me.’ It’s not their fault. It comes from the family and maybe it’s not the parents’ fault because that’s how they were raised, you know … but your option is to teach bilingualism as much as we can.

Rubén admitted that his family is lucky because his wife’s parents, her brother and his kids live in the neighborhood and speak Spanish with his children. He agreed that every family is different and said, “Pero claro que cada familia tiene una situación diferente. Pero se necesita la voluntad, el tiempo. But of course each family has a different situation. But determination and time are necessary.”

I asked if having pride in your background and your heritage was enough, given that Perla had put so much effort into taking her son to Guatemala to experience life there, yet her mother spoke English to him. I wondered if her parents’ enforcement of speaking
English at a young age in the U.S., and her stepdad’s refusal to allow her to speak Spanish made Perla’s efforts more difficult. She thought that her experiences did have a lasting effect on her perception of bilingualism, even though she did have the desire to maintain the home language. Gloria cautioned that if a parent shows in any way that he or she is ashamed of where s/he comes from, the child will notice. Rubén said, “And if you are ashamed, you transmit that, 100% sure” (First Dialogue, January, 2012).

At the beginning of the second dialogue, I checked in with the participants and summarized what we discussed and what my takeaways were from the prior meeting. My intention was to check for clarification and accuracy, and to see if anyone had reflected on our first dialogue, which took place two weeks prior in the same setting. My co-researchers, Henriette and Rubén, and I, agreed that this would be the best way to begin the second meeting, given that we had covered a lot during the first meeting, and some participants had become emotional. Perla explained:

Rubén pointed out that we all have backgrounds and struggles that in some way have impacted in a big way how our kids aren’t bilingual – I mean some are and some are not. Yeah, it was very emotional for me. I’ve been thinking about it ever since, ahh, it’s going to be very tough for me.

Then she explained how her daughter was refusing, but that she was excited to go to Guatemala and at least try to learn Spanish so she could communicate with her grandmother and cousins.

Others were less forthcoming at the beginning of this meeting, so I asked another question that we had not yet covered. After we talked about other peoples’ perceptions of their bilingualism, the discussion shifted to negative experiences that stuck with Henriette and Rubén. Henriette recalled her years as a teenager in the Bay area as she was trying to learn English:
I didn’t feel comfortable speaking English for a long time. It wasn’t until I was maybe a grown 25 years old. Before that I did not feel comfortable. I would only speak if necessary. Only at work, at school, totally needed. When I came home I remember in my teenage years I felt very comfortable. Relief – that was home. I wasn’t forced to speak English, and that was me back then, believe it or not, that was me. I was very shy with English. (Second Dialogue, February, 2012)

Since Gloria and Nicolás were less vocal at the second dialogue meeting, I met with them individually several weeks later. Gloria was much less shy about speaking English when she first started learning, and she described the church at which she took ESL classes as comfortable and safe. When she thought about any past experiences that may have influenced how she perceives bilingualism, she recalled a time when she was a babysitter in Sausalito, which she described as “famous for snobbies.” She expressed her frustration and disappointment (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

I worked with a family who wanted me to speak to their kids in Spanish because he thought my English was bad. First I want them to learn Spanish. I’m going to school to learn English so I am not going to speak Spanish! If you speak Spanish to the kids you can’t practice English. It was sad, I worked with those girls. I was firm in my answer. The little girl came and said she could understand me. The way he asked was racist if I could only speak Spanish. It was kind of racist.

Having had many informal conversations with Gloria prior to the study, I had developed the sense that she was strong in her beliefs and values, and this discussion confirmed my pre-conceived notion. She would not compromise her sense of self and her goals for herself in life, like trying to learn English.

When Nicolás thought about his experiences in Mexico, he explained that he wanted his daughter to give back to his family and the community in which they lived. They were supportive of his decision to move to the U.S., although he admitted that he did not expect to stay for good. “When I came here to work, I’m going to the USA and I’ll be there for 10 years and then, I came here 10 years ago and … and I mean I make a
family” (Fourth Dialogue, March, 2012). Once he married Gloria and had a child, it became clear to him that he would ultimately stay in the U.S. and get his citizenship as soon as possible.

All of the participants, except for Gabriel, had only lived in their home country and in the U.S. Gabriel, however, had moved from Chile to the U.S, to Europe, and back to the U.S. His experience with Spanish, and therefore his perspectives, were in some ways different from the other participants. He explained in Spanish (Fourth Dialogue, March, 2012):

Ésto, las lenguas en familias siempre así ... no un problema pero ha sido como que el punto alto de la comunicación ... Mi hermano tiene una mujer francesa y tiene dos niños y ellos hablan francés, y con mi mamá, español, y con mi esposa portugues. Entonces, a veces el español, no el español. Tratar de siempre enseñarle español o enseñarle portugues, enseñarle inglés. Es una cosa muy grande y parece que siempre estamos conversando acerca de las idiomas. En vez de llevar, en comparación con un niño que solamente habla y usa una idioma. Es mucho más fácil. No se habla de idiomas, se habla de otras cosas. Entonces, un poco contradictorio a veces me gusta simplificar las cosas y hablarle a [my hija] en inglés solamente para que ya tenga una conversación fluida. Siempre que este sujeto de la idioma o de corregirle fuera el tema principal de toda conversación. Entonces le hablo a ella en inglés y un poco de todas idiomas.

This topic, languages in families in this way … it’s not a problem, but it has been the high point of communication … My brother has a French wife and he has two children and they speak French, and with my mother, Spanish, and with my wife, Portuguese. So, sometimes Spanish, no Spanish. To try to always teach Spanish, or to teach Portuguese, or to teach English. It is a very big thing, and it seems like we’re always talking about the languages. Instead, take in comparison a child who only speaks and uses one language. It’s much easier. They don’t speak about languages, they speak about other things. So, a little contradictory, sometimes I like to simplify things and speak to [my daughter] in English only so that she has a fluid conversation. Every time this subject of language or of correcting her was the main topic of every conversation. So I speak to her in English and a little of all the languages.

Gabriel, therefore, did not consider Spanish to be the home language, but he was part of the study because he wanted his daughter to maintain Spanish and assumed she would quickly learn the language once he moved to Portugal. Having learned several
languages in order to communicate with his family, and to adapt to the places in which he lived, Gabriel spoke the language that would communicate the message most effectively. Moreover, language became a matter of practicality. He agreed that language and culture were tied, but he was not concerned about language loss because his family would be exposed to his native language on a regular basis very soon.

Summary

The participants had many common interests and perceptions of bilingualism, but each person’s unique upbringing, country of birth, and personal experience had an impact on home language maintenance or loss. More specifically, their histories, or what can be considered counterstories, challenge the problematic and inaccurate portrayal of the immigrant as one who assimilates and drops the home language in order to adopt the dominant language. The age at which the participants emigrated varied, as did their experiences with learning English. The parents of those who emigrated as children, for example, had varying backgrounds and perceptions of language use. The participants who moved here as adults generally learned English quickly as a necessity, but continued to speak more Spanish than they did English, with the exception of Gabriel.

Showing Confidence, Resilience and a Strong Sense of Self as a Parent

The participants found that their positive and negative experiences as first generation Latino immigrants generally made them stronger individuals and stronger parents. They felt that being firm and determined parents, regardless of the maintenance strategy, was the most important factor in maintaining the home language. The participants reflected on experiences as children and as young adults who were struggling to adapt to a new culture and to be accepted by their peers. As immigrants, they had to
learn English quickly and adapt to cultural norms, many of which were unfamiliar. Regardless of the age at which they emigrated, each participant felt that their ability to acculturate into American society in a relatively short period of time gave them a sense of accomplishment.

Despite the assimilative forces surrounding them, they were committed to maintaining their culture and their language, and they strived to show the same determination as parents. In most cases, participants encountered individuals who treated them disrespectfully based on their ethnicity or race, for speaking Spanish, or for speaking English with an accent. Therefore, preserving a healthy self-esteem was at times difficult, given the existing xenophobia. Moreover, their experiences challenged their sense of identity and self-worth, which in their view, empowered them to be more assertive and confident. As Latino parents trying to maintain the home language, they found these traits to be most beneficial and invaluable.

**Being Firm and Determined**

Rubén was the first participant to articulate the need to be firm about expectations, rules, and values in the family. After responding to Gloria about explaining to their children why they speak Spanish, he said (First Dialogue, January, 2012):

R: They will have the kind of question [“Why do I speak Spanish?”]. But if you don’t act strong about what you really want, they’re going to lose confidence. You want to give confidence, parents. Especially the first couple of years … The thing is, it’s a tough job being parents and teaching two languages because it takes time, it takes determination. You need to be focusing on this thing and just keep doing it. And that’s why it’s a hard job. Unfortunately, not every family succeeds at this topic because it’s so difficult, every single day. Especially when kids reach this age – school age – where peers are just speaking English and everything else they are learning is in English.
Rubén elaborated on the difficult job of teaching two languages in the home. His child, for example, was extremely fond of school, but he associated that setting with speaking English. Therefore, his son would share stories about what he learned during story time at school, for example, but he automatically spoke in English. Maintaining the home language, according to Perla, required a great amount of discipline. She explained (First Dialogue, January, 2012):

I did try to only speak in Spanish with [my daughter] and she’s refusing. She’s saying no, but her grandmother still wants her to speak Spanish, but she [her grandmother] doesn’t speak English that much. So [my daughter] did tell me she was frustrated, she said I don’t want to go to my grandmother’s because she doesn’t speak English.

At the third dialogue (February, 2012), Rubén listened to the other participants and wanted to address this topic again. He explained that not all maintenance strategies would work for every parent:

We are very firm from the beginning so you have right there my strategy … there has to be some kind of coercion and pressure you need to put on her, both of you [Nicolás and Gloria] because you are the authority. If they don’t recognize you as the authority, everything else is going to be difficult…It’s not just about the language. It’s about authority … I enforce and it works. The tone that you use when you talk is different. You say, ‘Hey [Son], go ahead , study in Spanish.’ [Laughter]. ‘You need to study Spanish, whether you like it or not, ok?! It’s not an option.’ It’s like every kid has responsibility.

Perla later said to Henriette, “I agree with your husband that I have to be a bit more strict ... I let [my daughter] walk all over me.” (Third Dialogue, March, 2012). In other words, rather than enforcing the “Spanish Only” rule in the house, Perla explained that she sometimes allowed her daughter to respond in English because she preferred not to argue with her. Perla admired Rubén for his consistency and firmness with his son and she expressed her desire to start enforcing the “Spanish Only” rule, despite the fact that her daughter may prefer English.
Rubén was eager to help Perla achieve her goal of home language maintenance, and recognized that other parents experienced the same struggles. Gloria had shared a newspaper article, published in Spanish, which described the experience of raising bilingual children. Rubén reminded the participants about that article because it reinforced the fact that raising bilingual children is not easy. He recounted some of the specific challenges they face as parents, given that their children are in a mostly English speaking environment during the day. (Third Dialogue, February, 2012):

We don’t have an immersion school at Bay Springs Academy and parents have to do that hard work. We are the only ones, we own that responsibility, and we’re the only ones interested in doing that … even if the school did provide [immersion], that’s half. The other half has to be the parents…we work hard … we travel, we commute, we have two kids and on and on. That’s why this article [that Gloria brought up at the meeting] is all about how difficult it is … the rule is again, you’re going to speak Spanish no matter what, period.

He explained that parents had an additional struggle when having more children. Participants had reflected on the dilemma they had when their children were first beginning to speak. More specifically, participants chose to speak to their children in Spanish at home, anticipating the pervasiveness of English at school. In their view, the first year or two of school were most challenging because their children did not yet know English. In some cases, participants questioned their decision to speak Spanish only in the house before their children entered school. They worried that their children would be unprepared for school, or possibly fall behind. Rubén explained that he and his wife read books and newspaper articles that gave conflicting pieces of advice for raising bilingual children, causing them to ultimately choose the strategies with which they felt most comfortable. After experiencing the uncertainty of setting up a system to maintain the
home language with the first child, Rubén explained how, “when you get to the second one, you’re already tired …” (Third Dialogue, February, 2012).

We revisited the fact that their six and seven year old children preferred speaking English, and therefore may forget to speak Spanish with their younger siblings. Once again, being firm about the “Spanish Only” rule in the house was a requirement for raising bilingual children in their view, and with multiple children, parents also had to monitor conversations between siblings.

Most of the participants, with the exception of Gabriel, expressed their desire to require speaking Spanish in the home. They struggled with the “Spanish Only” rule, however, because it required a great amount of discipline and firmness on their part as parents. In their view, raising bilingual children is an everyday “battle” – a word used by Rubén and Perla - that requires consistency, determination, and time. The next section explores some of the experiences the participants had as immigrants, and how those experiences both challenged their senses of self-worth and shaped their identity as Latino parents.

*Reflecting on Put-Downs and Maintaining a Healthy Self-Esteem*

Every participant at some point was either ridiculed, told to speak English only, or put down in some way because of his or her accent or limited English. In Perla’s case, one of her daughter’s previous teachers ridiculed her when they were in high school together. She explained, “She ridiculed me because I had an accent. She would make fun of me because I had broken English” (First Dialogue, January, 2012).

In Perla’s case, the teacher who ridiculed her was a second generation Mexican American. Gloria explained that for her, “It bothers me more when people from my
country act that way,” (Individual Interview, March, 2012). Other forms of put-downs that participants experienced were: store clerks speaking quickly because they recognized a Latino who, from their perception, would likely have limited English; people making assumptions that they were uneducated or untrustworthy based on their ethnicity and/or appearance. Gloria shared a story in which she was treated as an untrustworthy employee (Individual Interview):

I worked for a guy who was a veteran and his medicine disappeared. His wife asked me if I took some pills. I said I would never do that! It’s hurtful when you ask me that way. I was with her for 12 years or so. I didn’t want to have the key anymore, to get blamed for things. This couple changed because I was firm.

Gloria expressed that because she was firm, her employers changed their behavior. Rubén explained that he too has had to assert himself when seemingly impatient people in customer service addressed him as though he would have limited English. He described going to the grocery store and the clerk seemed to expect that Rubén was not going to fully understand him. “Like, for example … you ask for information or you go to pay and this person behind the desk … starts talking to you as fast as they can … and I can tell you, you can stop them … I have done that many times” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012). Others agreed that at times, individuals would either speak very slowly or very quickly to them, based on the assumption that they would most likely be less than proficient in English. Perla, for example, noted that during her middle school and high school years, teachers and other students assumed those with “Hispanic features” were unable to speak English (Individual Interview. March, 2012).

Gloria explained that in her experience, Latino women who recently emigrated to the U.S., for example, may be perceived as “dumb” (Fifth Dialogue, March, 2012). She
had been cleaning houses and babysitting for 20 years, and through conversations with acquaintances whom she met on public buses going to and from work, she realized others shared this sentiment. She said, “Some people, when you first come here will take advantage of you because you are ‘dumb,’ you know, that’s what they think” (Fifth Dialogue). One of her bosses, for example, tried to use her as a Spanish tutor for her children, even though Gloria was hired as a babysitter. She found this insulting and disrespectful of her needs, one of which was to learn and speak English.

Summary

The participants shared that they did not want these experiences to have a negative impact on their children’s sense of self, or sense of identity. In their view, put-downs can lower a person’s self-esteem, which can have adverse effects on their role as parents. Having a strong sense of self was very important, and according to the participants, their children needed to see a determined, confident role model if they expected to maintain the home language. As noted earlier, they found that their children will prefer speaking English and will ask parents why they have to speak Spanish. Therefore, the participants viewed firmness and conviction as vital traits of parents who wish to maintain the home language. Sharing their negative experiences with their children could hinder their goal of constructing a healthy self image and self-esteem, from some of the participants’ perspectives. Moreover, the participants hoped to act as positive, confident role models for their children.

Perceptions of Bilingual Latinos as Other

The participants shared stories of people’s behavior towards them based on language use, and how this made them feel about their own sense of identity as a
bilingual person. They felt strongly about teaching their children to stand up for themselves if they were ever criticized or judged by anyone, or to simply ignore such criticism. Henriette recounted a time in her life when Latino Spanish speaking girls made fun of her for being different, while others were nice to her (Second Dialogue, February, 2012):

And I remember at school a couple of girls just making fun of me not wanting to be my friend. And I want to say that now I understand that I didn’t understand why they did it. I thought that I just didn’t fit in, I’m not popular, I’m not cool, I don’t speak very well in English, I am shy, I have an accent back then. Now I understand that they did it … maybe because they didn’t understand back then bilingualism. And these people spoke Spanish too, they were bilingual Latino, and now I understand … what I think now is that maybe they didn’t feel comfortable with my accent … and I want to say others were friendly to me. They thought, ‘oh, ok, she’s the shy one, you know, she’s learning,’ and they were nice to me.

Henriette and Perla had seen their monolingual bosses treat some of their co-workers – some Latino, others Chinese or Filipino – poorly for having a heavy accent. Henriette found it “a little mean, very rude, discriminatory,” while Perla said their bosses may not “have the level of tolerance” for immigrants who spoke with an accent, or were not fluent in English (Second Dialogue, February, 2012).

Rubén, unlike his wife, said, “I don’t try to understand, really. I just react and defend myself, whatever because I will fix their worth [Laughter]” (Second Dialogue). He did not appreciate the fact that some people treat all Latinos equally, without getting to know them. He commented on the reputation that he believes Latinos may have in the United States, based on the behavior of a relative few:

We need to understand that not everybody is the same, so you treat me this way. Okay, you’re white, so now I say they are all the same so I’m just going to be rude to everybody. I think that’s the difference to us. We understand that there are different kinds of people out there and like a different kind of Latino. There’s a lot of delinquent people like, ahh, bad people, and that’s why at some point we
got this bad reputation. A lot of people came here to commit crimes, and that’s why they are discriminated. And if they see us, anybody, that we are hard workers, good people, family people, we get the same treatment. So we need to stand up for ourselves … I think the most difficult thing is trying to identify what person is in front of you. So that’s why I say treat me this way, I’ll treat you the same … whatever color or whatever education, you’re not going to be rude to that person.

Gloria agreed that the best way to respond to someone who criticizes or stereotypes is to assert yourself because, in her opinion, “You know, it’s the way that person thinks … I have a friend who will take all this personally and say, ‘Oh what a racist!’ And I say yeah, whatever, you know? I don’t care” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012).

Although the participants shared many negative stories, they believed that they had more positive experiences as a bilingual adult. Perla, Henriette and Nicolás explained further (Second Dialogue):

P: You have to withstand the humiliation of your peers that they’re going to make fun of your accent.

H: And then there’s the other, the good side, that there’s most people like you [me] who want to learn Spanish or already speak Spanish. Or like you [Nicolás], like your boss, they say ‘Buenos días’ and they want to learn. I do hear that too.

N: Yeah, I feel good. My English is not that good, but sometimes they call me to translate to other people.

Finally, I asked if they tell their children about the positive perceptions that others have of them, and they said yes. They prefer to highlight these positive experiences with their children so that they have the desire to be bilingual and maintain the home language. Nicolás shared with his daughter how he was valued at his job for his ability to translate his bosses’ instructions to employees who only understood Spanish, or very little English. Similarly, Rubén explained to his son the admiration that his colleagues at his university had for his bilingual abilities. As discussed in the section addressing advantages of
bilingualism, parents made an effort to have conversations with their children about the positive perceptions that people have of bilinguals, especially in the workplace.

**Summary**

Participants needed to respond to individuals with negative perceptions of bilingual Latinos at some point in the past, and for some, they continue to encounter those who treat them as Others. Seeing themselves through the lens of a monolingual person born in the United States, for some, helped the participants understand why others’ reactions to bilingual Latinos varied. Some participants felt strongly about standing up to individuals who treated them in a discriminatory manner. They felt that certain individuals stereotype Latinos, regardless of their education, language abilities, or socio-economic background, whereas others admire their bilingualism.

**Summary, Research Question 1 a): To What Extent Do Parent Attitudes and Perceptions of Bilingualism Influence Home Language Maintenance?**

Parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism did influence home language maintenance. The participants recognized the advantages of bilingualism and shared them with their children. They also found that as parents, it was important to share their beliefs and positive attitudes toward bilingualism and biculturalism with their children. Nonetheless, their personal experiences with learning English as immigrants also had some effect on their children’s maintenance of Spanish. Moreover, they strived to construct their own identities as confident, bilingual parents who honored their roots. In doing so, they hoped to be strong role models for their children, who would appreciate being bilingual and bicultural. This section addressed the relationship between parent
attitudes and home language maintenance, but the following section investigates parent attitudes’ influence on home language loss.

Research Question 1 b)

To What Extent Do Parent Attitudes and Perceptions of Bilingualism Influence Home Language Loss?

When we began the study, we discovered that most of the participants were already practicing home language maintenance in multiple ways. Therefore, most of the findings centered around the topic of home language maintenance. Nonetheless, all participants had experiences that either led to the onset of home language loss, or the fear of home language loss. Home language maintenance and home language loss amongst the participants will be analyzed further in Chapter V.

Misinformation About Home Language Maintenance

Participants received inconsistent or inaccurate information about effective methods of home language maintenance. Newspaper articles and books on how to raise bilingual children gave varying advice, and in some cases immigrant parents and teachers advised against speaking Spanish in the home. Moreover, in their quest to prepare their children for school, some of the participants grappled with mixed messages about raising bilingual children. In some cases participants feared that their children would become confused by speaking two different languages. In other cases, participants felt even more uncertain after comparing their own methods of home language maintenance to those of other parents, or to strategies discussed in books and news articles. Ultimately, they concluded that their insecurities concerning home language maintenance did hinder their efforts.
A Misperception: Children May Become Confused

Some of the participants were told to only speak English with their children. Henriette shared her own experience with the notion of getting confused (First Dialogue, January, 2012):

When we do homework, it’s English. I try to do the Spanish homework only on the weekends. Me being afraid of him not getting confused, during the week it’s English only while doing homework and reading. But daily conversation is in Spanish when we’re just talking…If I am doing homework with him in English, I should not be teaching him Spanish. That’s what I heard from a coworker … and from a book that I never finished reading [Laughter].

Henriette and her husband were thankful that they followed the advice of their own parents to speak to their son only in Spanish, at least prior to entering school. Some participants were told to start speaking more English at home when the child entered school, so as to avoid confusion and provide opportunities for academic success. When Perla first came to the U.S., she was twelve years old and her American born stepdad forbade her to speak Spanish. He preferred that she assimilate and learn English quickly so that she would not become confused in school. Later, Perla was told by her son’s first grade teacher to speak in English only with her son “so he wouldn’t be confused” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Moreover, Perla was told to stop speaking Spanish as a child, and to stop speaking Spanish to her son.

Henriette responded to Perla’s comment about the first grade teacher’s suggestion to speak in English only. First, Henriette explained that her job in administration in the San Francisco Unified School District requires her to talk to parents throughout the day. Part of her job is to assist parents with navigating the system, and if they are seeking special education services, for example, she tries to gather more information in order to
better assist them. She explained that many parents – in her case, mostly Chinese and Latino - have been told by teachers or other parents to speak English only to their children. Moreover, parents whose children are not performing well academically are unsure as to whether their child had a possible learning disability, or if they became confused by speaking the home language with their parents. Henriette added that parents become fearful that their children have fallen behind, perhaps because the parents did not require English only in the home.

Gloria added that children “get frustrated because they speak Spanish so they have a hard time learning English … the first year [kindergarten] … Yo tenía ese temor que no vaya a avanzar en el ingles. I had this fear that she wouldn’t make progress with her English [if she continued to speak Spanish at home] (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Others admitted to feeling uncertain as to how much English they should be speaking and when their children should speak, read and write English. Nicolás brought up another point, wondering if using his daughter as a translator would confuse her even more. He said:

_Tal vez en mi caso es un problema con ella en que no hablé mucho español horita porque yo la uso como traductora. Es que yo la uso para practicar inglés, pero, tal vez eso es un problema ... para que ella aprende español_ (First dialogue, January, 2012). Maybe in my case it’s a problem with her in that she doesn’t speak much Spanish to me right now and I use her as a translator. It’s just that I use her to practice English, but maybe that is a problem ... so that she can learn Spanish.

So Nicolás wondered if he was encouraging his daughter to speak English only, even though he wanted her to speak Spanish as well. The group addressed Nicolas’ concern when they discussed language maintenance strategies. Rubén could relate to Nicolás because he too was initially uncertain if his tactics of raising a child in a Spanish Only
household were appropriate. Regardless, he said, “Me personally, I was never afraid about losing the language … because I was proud of my language” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). In other words, despite the conflicting messages that he and his wife had received from publications and other immigrant parents about children becoming confused when learning two languages, they stuck to a plan that would work for them. Rubén suggested to Nicolás that instead of using his daughter to help him with English whenever they speak to one another, perhaps there should be more of a balance.

Most important, in Rubén’s view, was to remember the fact that children can and do learn several languages at once. The problem is not that children will become confused, but rather, the problem is the fear that parents have. He stated, “Hay una cosa que es un problema. El miedo. El miedo en aprender dos idiomas al mismo tiempo. There’s one thing that’s a problem. Fear - the fear of learning two languages at the same time” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). He shared several maintenance strategies that participants may have wanted to consider. These strategies will be discussed in relation to the third research question.

Gabriel gave his perspective on learning several languages at once, after I asked him if he was ever concerned about getting confused when he learned French and Spanish (Fourth Dialogue, March, 2012):

I probably learned them [several languages] as an obligation. I had to learn French or English because I lived in those countries and Portugal, so I was only learning languages in order to survive. It’s not her [my daughter’s] case, and I know that in her case … no matter how many languages you bring up to them they will absorb that.

Moreover, in Gabriel’s experience, people who learn a second language as an obligation – especially when it is the dominant language - adapt and do not get confused.
Summary

All of the participants had at one point received the message that speaking Spanish while trying to learn English could cause confusion. In some cases, this contributed to the fear that a Spanish Only rule, which some tried to implement on a consistent basis, could have confused their children as they tried to learn English in school. In discussing the dilemma that parents faced when trying to maintain the home language while grappling with their fears of causing confusion, they began to explore the idea that there is not only one way to learn Spanish and English simultaneously. Effective maintenance strategies will be investigated further in reference to the study’s third research question. Fortunately, those who had experienced such fear but were ultimately successful with home language maintenance up to this point guided others about the reality of bilingualism, which will be analyzed further in Chapter Five.

Loss of Identity and Connection to Home Culture

The participants in the study agreed that they would feel guilty if they chose not to enforce a Spanish Only rule in the home because such a decision would signify a rejection of their culture and identity. Perla was the only participant who felt that language loss had already set in, so she described how her children’s sense of identity may suffer (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

P: I do feel somewhat guilty that I wasn’t speaking to my children in Spanish. It’s something my kids are going to struggle with in the future because you know They look Hispanic but they don’t speak Spanish, I mean they speak a little bit. So it’s gonna hurt them in the future, but we’re trying … if you look Hispanic we’re going to talk to you in Spanish. The same goes for a white person.

E.E.: Does that bother you?

P: At first it did. In 89 if you had Hispanic features, you were considered not able to speak English so my dad forbade me to speak Spanish to respect your country
and it makes sense. But now I feel guilty.

Although Perla did not lose her Spanish, she felt that the first years after moving to the U.S. were difficult for her because she was speaking less Spanish. She explained (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

P: I kinda lost touch with my culture after a few years. I was 13 and my brother was six, I was really young still. I kind of feel embarrassed sometimes because I feel like maybe I left my background pride on the back burner.

Perla shared with the group all of the strategies she was already implementing in order to reverse any loss or resistance to Spanish, but she repeatedly became discouraged. Rubén suggested that we turn our focus toward language maintenance strategies, so as to make our dialogues more productive for everyone, especially Perla (Third Dialogue, February, 2012). Perla was eager to put a plan into place to gain back her own sense of identity as a Guatemalan-American, but also to impart this onto her daughter.

The group began to engage in problem-solving as they discussed the onset of home language loss, and the desire to reverse the loss of Spanish. Furthermore, participants generally viewed home language loss as part of a process of identity deconstruction and ebbing ties to the home culture. They began to discuss ways in which the group could share maintenance strategies that worked for parents who were maintaining the home language. These strategies will be revisited in response to the third research question.
Summary, Research Question 1 b): To What Extent Do Parent Attitudes and Perceptions of Bilingualism Influence Home Language Loss?

The participants concluded that parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism did influence home language loss. More specifically, misinformation and misperceptions about learning two languages simultaneously led some participants to question their abilities to maintain the home language with their children. In an effort to prepare their children for school, some participants read guide books and newspaper articles about how to raise bilingual children, and some conversed with other parents. Once children reached school age, some participants were told by teachers that a Spanish Only rule in the house may lead to academic struggles. Feeling uncertain, some of the participants became less stringent about speaking Spanish in the house. Some, however, were beginning to notice that, after a year and a half in elementary school, their children were more actively refusing to speak Spanish. Therefore, they were committed to discussing home language maintenance strategies at future meetings.

Research Question 2: Does Identifying with an Ethnic or Social Group Have an Impact on Language Choice?

As the participants and I discussed when they used which language, they often brought the discussion back to their role as a Latino parent trying to instill in their children an appreciation for their ability to communicate in two languages. Moreover, their language choices as adults did not go unnoticed by their children. The participants spoke English and Spanish in various settings, and sometimes a mix of the two. More specifically, the participants spoke the language[s] that would most effectively communicate a message at work. In some cases their Latino identities did have an
impact on language choice, as did other factors such as the individuals with whom they were speaking and the places in which conversations took place.

*Communicating at Work*

All of the participants in the study spoke both Spanish and English at their jobs and they were proud to share this with their children (as a way to promote bilingualism). Gabriel and Nicolás specifically work with other Spanish speakers who automatically speak Spanish with each other (Fifth Dialogue, March, 2012):

G: But yeah, I have the same situation that Nicolás has where there’s people at work they come from different countries like Spanish people, or people that were born here but they don’t speak Spanish. There are other ones, they don’t speak any English, so they have basically a level with all these people in different languages. Sometimes English, so it makes it hard in that environment. My boss, he doesn’t speak Spanish so he wants to know what we’re talking about. Just because of work purposes, he wants to understand what is happening. Sometimes he feels like he’s being left out because I really do need to communicate with him in Spanish and it’s kind of hard. For me it’s all about work. I mean I’m just trying to adapt to them, so you get the right tools, the right information about the work they’re going to do.

In Gabriel’s case, he only speaks Spanish to Latinos and to Spaniards who do not speak any English, but he feels that at work, he’s most concerned with communicating the message so that everyone understands exactly what needs to be done. He explained that just as the participants learned English as “an obligation,” many of his co-workers are beginning to do the same. He chooses to speak Spanish to his co-workers, not because they are Latino, but because they speak a language he knows and he wants to communicate work information to them.

Nicolás speaks both English and Spanish with his American born white co-workers. He explained (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

N: With Latinos, Spanish is our first option to have a conversation. I have other co-workers who are white and they don’t mind if I don’t speak good English, they
always talk to me. They understand what I say in English. They try to also learn Spanish from ahh, a program

E.E.: Rosetta Stone?

N: Yes, Rosetta Stone. The boss tries to speak Spanish with them. I never feel like they mind if I’m a Latino. They notice right away when they see my skin or hear my name. What is interesting is that they try to learn the language. They try and like to speak Spanish with Latinos.

Perla’s work situation slightly differed from Gabriel’s and Nicolás’. She does speak to other Latinos in Spanish at work, but only for social purposes. With her bosses and in front of residents, she speaks English because she is required to do so. Perla said (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

With my friends [at work] I talk mostly in Spanish when we can in the break room. We are always told not to speak Spanish in front of the residents [at the home for senior citizens] … out of respect. With my friends, if they are bilingual, most of them want to speak in Spanish. When there’s a TV in the room, they always watch the novellas in Spanish. So yes, I do speak Spanish with them, in part because they are Latino, but mostly because I know they speak Spanish.

Henriette commented earlier about how she also speaks Spanish with her Latino friends during her break, but she also helps translate written documents for Spanish speaking co-workers who cannot understand written English.

Summary

Overall, the participants felt that their ethnic and social identities did have an impact on their language choices at work. Knowing how to make a connection with bilingual Spanish and English Latinos at work and communicating effectively and efficiently was perceived as equally beneficial.

Conversations with Friends and Family

All of the participants said that when they spend time with bilingual Latino friends, they almost always speak Spanish. At family gatherings, they also speak Spanish.
Additionally, participants wanted their children to have the ability to choose which language to use with other Latinos. Gloria does not have a lot of family here, like Henriette, Rubén and Perla do, but she has made a group of friends with which she meets for holidays and get-togethers. She told me about one of these groups (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

In the summer we get together and we’re from different countries. El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala. We’ll get together on the weekends and take the kids to the park. When we are in a group we are going to just speak Spanish. When the kids get together, they won’t speak Spanish. We celebrate so many holidays, we play Mexican lottery, eat each other’s food, play games. We share each other’s traditions. We call a gallon of milk a different way, but we mean the same thing … we met through family friends and friends of friends.

Gloria was happy to share the cultural traditions with her friends and each other’s children, but as she noted, the kids still chose to speak in English.

Rubén and Henriette have had different experiences within their social groups, given that their extended family living in their neighborhood acts as their main social network. When they convene, everyone speaks Spanish, including the kids. Outside of the family, they mainly spend time with a group of friends from Nicaragua and El Salvador and they generally speak Spanish. Rubén clarified why he chooses to speak Spanish with this group of friends (Fifth Dialogue, March, 2012):

Let’s say friends are everyone with your home language, I mean Spanish speakers. I think I have a diversity of circles of people, Latinos, or Americans, or white, or any other culture or language. And definitely I feel more comfortable when I speak Spanish. English, it’s my second language, of course. So I can express myself as a person, I have more vocabulary … You’re going to feel better in your own language and communicate in that way, express it because you know your culture. Even though it’s from different countries we are Latinos we know at some point. I mean you need to be smart, you don’t want to be stupid and say something that’s really going to offend any other person … If you say, ‘oh in your culture, you guys are like this.’ I’m just thinking about Costa Rica and Nicaragua. They have very, um, kind of differences, two countries. So I haven’t encountered
any Costa Rican persons so far here. But based on my experience, they don’t get along for some reason I don’t know.

Rubén then explained, “So I want [my son] to have a relationship with somebody or interact with many different cultures. It’s such a great thing to interact with different cultures” (Fifth dialogue, March, 2012).

Nicolás, who speaks Spanish with all of his Latino friends, realized that he used to stereotype people of Asian descent when he lived in Mexico in a similar way in which he stereotyped Latinos in the United States when he first moved to California. He explained how he assumed he would speaking with other Mexicans,, but instead speaks Spanish with Latinos from many different countries. He reflected on his observations (Fifth Dialogue, March, 2012):

I noticed I’d say Chinese when I see Asiatic people, I’d say Chinese. But maybe they were from Japan or somewhere else … when you go on the streets in the city here, you can see black people, Asiatic, Latinos, and when I saw Latinos, I thought maybe as every American people, Mexicans. But I realized that not all of them are from Mexico but they speak Spanish … I realized we have so many Latinos in this country, from different cultures, but we are Latinos. Some of my friends are from different countries, some are Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Honduran, or Costa Rican. I met them at work … I know we speak the same language, that’s how I know them.

Perla had Latino friends who came here when they were very young, and only spoke only English with her. She explained the situation (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

E.E.: Do you have Latino friends who only speak English?

P: That I identify with, yes. And I think it goes back to how long you’ve been here. My friends who only speak English came here at nine years old and she married an African American. She’s from El Salvador. I brought my children in this household, they’re divorced now, but they only spoke English. The grandma speaks Spanish to them. They’ll understand it, but not speak it. My cousin’s friend is that way too. She’s from Guatemala, came here, bought a house in Novato, she’s very well educated. She is here [she puts her hands up high] and
we are here [she puts her hands down low]. I notice this person is very Americanized. So yeah, she doesn’t have many Hispanic friends. My cousin met her through church, which is in English. I mentioned to my cousin about our meetings and for the most part, she came across Hispanic friends who don’t teach their kids Spanish. She said don’t feel bad, and I said well I kind of do.

Again, I could sense the feeling of disappointment that Perla expressed, as she talked about her friends who don’t speak Spanish to their kids, and seem uninterested in home language maintenance.

*Summary, Research Question 2: Does Identifying With an Ethnic or Social Group Have an Impact on Language Choice?*

Participants generally spoke Spanish with close friends and family because they felt most comfortable expressing themselves in their home language. They noted that the amount of time they had lived here and the friends with whom they associated had an impact on which language they used when speaking with friends and family. All participants, with the exception of Gabriel, married another Latino and had close Latino friends and family who also spoke Spanish in social situations. Most participants did not have close Latino friends who spoke mostly English, although some had family or acquaintances who spoke mostly English. They concluded that identifying as Latinos did have an impact on their language choice, but other social factors played a role as well.

Research Question 3

What Are Parent Perceptions of How to Promote and Implement Additive Bilingualism?

*Maintenance Strategies for Parents: Putting a Plan into Place*

The participants agreed that their children generally preferred to speak English with their peers, even when the family and the school promoted bilingualism. They noted the pervasive use of English, and parents would need to have a plan if they aspired to
home language maintenance. Strategies to maintain Spanish in the home included the following; Consistently enforce a Spanish Only rule in the home and be firm, patient and use positive reinforcement; visit the home country if possible; provide written Spanish homework for children and use positive reinforcement; provide access to music, television and print in Spanish; and explain to children the importance of bilingualism and biculturalism upon entering school. Participants with multiple children suggested having the older child or children speak to their younger siblings in Spanish only. Parents who wished to reverse home language loss or resistance may eventually implement these strategies by starting slowly with one or two. The participants, however, discouraged punishing the child for refusing to speak Spanish or using incorrect grammar and speaking with an accent while in the beginning stages of implementing maintenance strategies. Generally speaking, participants agreed that if they wished to maintain Spanish, they must prioritize the implementation of strategies at home.

*Consistent Use of Spanish-Only in the Home*

Most of the participants had attempted to implement a Spanish Only rule in the home, however they had varying degrees of success with the rule. Henriette, whose son spoke Spanish in the home, explained how her parents required the use of Spanish Only when she first moved to the U.S. as a child. Her cousins, however, attempted to persuade her family to introduce more English in the home. Henriette explained how her parents’ Spanish Only rule has helped her family maintain the home language now that she is a parent (First Dialogue, January, 2012):

H: I came to the country when I was 13. And I was told – I was asked by a cousin of mine who was very nice to the family and wanted to help us … to only watch TV in English and you know they do it because they want to help you. But then it was my mom’s choice to have me speak in Spanish to her at home at the time.
Some parents choose not to do it. To me, that’s ok, it’s an option … my rule in
the house is Spanish only even if it doesn’t happen. No sucede siempre con los
niños. It doesn’t always happen with children. Yo entiendo. I understand, it’s a
reality. My son speaks Spanish but he automatically talks to me in English and I
constantly have to remind him, “Hijo en español. Hablamos en español en casa.
Son in Spanish. We speak Spanish at home.” He gets it and he starts talking to
me in Spanish. But then the next day it’s English so then I have to tell him. It’s
all the time. And that’s ok, that’s fine with me, you know. I will continue to ask
him everyday.

P: That’s good that you’re doing that.

H: To talk to me in Spanish. And it got to a point where I was thinking ok, I’m
not going to push him, he already speaks Spanish, we’ve been talking to him in
Spanish all the time. I am just going to understand that he comes home from
school – speaks English at school all the time – but at home I keep reminding him,
you know in a nice way, the rule is you speak Spanish here and outside it’s
English. You know, just to get him to think that he needs to talk to us in Spanish
at home. So, but it’s an everyday thing.

Participants revisited the fear that their children could be unprepared for school if
they spoke only Spanish for the first three or four years before entering school. Rubén
admitted, “So we set the foundation for the language – Spanish only! Then – I’m not
saying this was the best way to go … we rushed. We said, [son], it’s time to go to pre-
school, he’s not speaking English” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). I asked him, “Did
panic set in?” and he responded, “We panicked that he was not going to be … not
ridiculed, but behind! Or be afraid or shy about the language or afraid of the school so
we worried about it.” Ultimately, he and his wife decided to continue to enforce the
Spanish Only rule, except when doing school homework with their son. Henriette
credited her husband for remaining firm and confident about their rule, despite the fears
and questions they expressed when their son started pre-school.

Other participants had been less strict about enforcing the rule, and hence were
seeing different results with their children. Gloria and Nicolás’ daughter used to speak in
English to her father and in Spanish to her mother. After listening to the success that Henriette and Rubén were having, they decided that Nicolás would not practice English with his daughter anymore. Nicolás said, “I’ve lived here for 12 years, and I’ve been practicing English with [my daughter], but it seems like it’s not that good actually … I think many parents do the same thing” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Previously, he hadn’t considered the idea that perhaps he was contributing to home language loss by using his daughter as a translator and as someone with whom he could practice English. Rubén added that Nicolás could still ask her how to translate words from Spanish to English when necessary, but to try to keep normal conversation in Spanish. Perla was not enforcing the Spanish Only rule, but vowed to start. Henriette cautioned Perla, “talk to your child [in Spanish], but try not to be too pushy” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Otherwise, children might continue to resist the use of Spanish out of frustration, or fear of being criticized.

*Visit the Home Country*

Some participants had their children visit the home country as a strategy to connect to their family’s roots, but also with the intention of maintaining the home language. At the time of the study, Gloria had taken her daughter to visit Nicolás’ family in Mexico. He explained that after becoming more strict about the Spanish Only rule in the house since our first meeting, his daughter “understands a little bit more now and she speaks a little bit more Spanish. She’s in Mexico now … there nobody speaks English so she has to speak Spanish” (Third Dialogue, February, 2012). He added that she became more interested in speaking in Spanish after visiting with her extended family in Mexico.
Perla agreed that visiting the home country had helped her now 13-year-old son maintain Spanish. He spent three summers in Guatemala with her mother and attended a specialized school for children with Autism there. Because of his experiences reading, writing, and speaking Spanish in Guatemala, he is bilingual and “welcomes Spanish,” according to Perla (Third Dialogue, February, 2012). She hoped to send her two daughters there more frequently in order to reverse the home language loss that her six-year-old daughter was beginning to experience.

Rubén concurred (Third Dialogue):

Well if you can afford that, do it. But if not, let’s make something else work out … I think it’s a good idea that you guys [Perla, Gloria, Nicolás] send your kid overseas to your country. And they have this interaction with parents, family, relatives. That’s a good strategy, a very god strategy. Of course that has to do with money, another issue right there.

For Rubén and his wife, it would be a financial hardship to travel to Nicaragua, but they felt fortunate that Henriette’s parents, brother and his children lived in the neighborhood. When together, their family spoke only in Spanish, so it was similar to an overseas experience in terms of language use. On the other hand, they hoped to visit Rubén’s family in Nicaragua in order to introduce their son to their native culture, customs, and way of life.

*Provide Written Homework in Spanish*

Although most participants had not provided homework in Spanish to their children, Henriette and Rubén found that this was a very effective strategy. When their son began to read and write, they sought out age appropriate workbooks and reading material in Spanish. Most important, they argued, was to try to make a habit out of doing Spanish homework on a routine basis. Henriette said, “You know, we practice Spanish
over the weekend after breakfast, before watching TV. I don’t do it every weekend because things come up” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Rubén asked, “Can I tell you one strategy we use? We kind of say to [our son], this is your teacher’s homework for the weekend [Laughter].” Because he has so much respect for the teacher … Did the teacher assign it? It’s done” (First Dialogue). In the summer, they continue to give their son Spanish homework, telling him that his teachers want him to complete it.

Henriette and Rubén emphasized that they had to be creative and persistent when using this strategy because children know that most of their peers are not asked to do additional homework. Hence, they tell their son that his school requires him to do the homework so that he will see the value in completing it. Once this strategy became a routine, Henriette and Rubén admitted that, as with all strategies, they had to be firm and consistent. They also found that praising their son often and providing extrinsic rewards when he would complete homework in Spanish worked well. Making learning fun in Spanish, as they have tried to do with school homework in English, was an important piece in implementing this strategy.

Access to Music, Television, Video, and Print Materials in Spanish

After the first meeting, the group generally looked to Henriette and Rubén as leaders and as experts in home language maintenance. Gloria, Nicolás and Perla wanted to maintain the language, and were eager to use some of the strategies that they had once attempted to use in the past, or those that were working for Henriette and Rubén. Playing music, watching TV and movies, and reading books in Spanish appealed to their children.

As the group socialized, ate dinner and transitioned to our meeting space, Henriette praised Perla, saying, “You, Perla, wanted to play a movie in Spanish with the
kids tonight, so I thought that was great” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012). Earlier, Henriette had mentioned her experience with Spanish language programs. “I put the cartoons on – this is how it started! I put the cartoons on Saturdays, Univisión in Spanish, like Dora in Spanish and I tried to avoid … TV in English” (Second Dialogue). Gloria concurred, “It works. With [my daughter] on Sundays, she just knows it’s [TV programs] in Spanish. We’ve got Dora in Spanish and we’ve got Animal Planet” (Second Dialogue). Generally speaking, participants had also read stories to their children in Spanish. As discussed earlier, in some cases teachers had asked participants to start speaking and reading in English only at home. Speaking with other families who used this strategy with varying levels of success was encouraging to the group.

This strategy was somewhat easier to implement because children enjoy watching television, listening to music, and to stories. Rubén added that parents should discover what their kids are most interested in – music, video games, etc., - and start with those materials in Spanish. He recalled a time when he and his wife were seeking materials and said, “I remember when I began to look, I got this CD from the library. It’s called People and it’s in Spanish … he’s playing a game and matching on the computer, so he started having interests … in video games” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Perla had also played music for her daughter that she listened to as a child. Perla’s daughter demonstrated interest in Spanish songs, as she would come home and sing what she learned in Spanish class at school. Moreover, the goal was to motivate the children by providing access to Spanish multimedia to which they could relate.
Explain the Importance of Bilingualism and Biculturalism

Speaking critically about valuing bilingualism and biculturalism with children helps them understand why parents speak to them in Spanish. Participants discovered that their children seemed to embrace the idea of bilingualism the more they had discussions about it. Rubén and Gloria agreed (First Dialogue, January, 2012):

R: Parents have to explain the benefits of the language.

G: Not one time. You have to repeat it!

R: Over and over!

G: Because they ask.

R: For example, at school and at work, Henriette and I talk about the advantages of being bilingual. We’re proud because of this and this.

By constantly sharing stories with their son about how wonderful it is that they can communicate with more people because they are bilingual, Henriette and Rubén hoped that he too would begin to understand the benefits of bilingualism.

Older Children Speak to Younger Siblings in Spanish Only

In many cases, participants had more than one child and they hoped to maintain the home language for all children. We discussed the possibility that older children might forget to speak to their younger siblings in Spanish without being explicitly told to do so. Therefore, participants suggested having a plan in place before the birth of subsequent children. Henriette explained, “I hear from other parents that when you have a second child, the first one will talk to the little one in English only. And then with the second child it’s going to be harder” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). Hence, being proactive and having a plan early would hopefully make home language maintenance with her second child less challenging.
Henriette and Rubén made an effort to enforce the Spanish Only rule when their older son began speaking to his five-month-old brother. Perla too had already told her six-year-old daughter to speak to her six-month-old sister in Spanish only. Perla hoped that she could implement this as a strategy to reverse home language loss with her older daughter while initiating home language maintenance for her younger daughter.

**Summary, Research Question 3: What Are Parent Perceptions of How to Promote and Implement Additive Bilingualism?**

The participants shared home language maintenance strategies that promoted an additive bilingual environment. The most effective and easily accessible strategy, based on participant experiences, was to implement a Spanish Only rule in the house. Unfortunately, even the most persistent and diligent parents find it challenging and extremely time consuming to enforce this rule. Other methods included visiting the home country, providing written homework and multimedia in Spanish, having discussions about bilingualism and biculturalism with children, and requiring older children to speak Spanish with younger siblings. Using positive reinforcement also had a positive influence on children when maintaining home language maintenance, or attempting to reverse home language loss.
CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Having worked at Bay Springs Academy for several years, and having the privilege to conduct my doctoral research here, I felt very fortunate and excited to begin the process of soliciting volunteers for a study on parent perceptions of bilingualism. In the beginning of the 2011-2012 school year, I began having informal conversations with my Latino students’ parents about the study. I soon learned that all of them were born in another country, and many of them wanted their children to be bilingual. Some of them already had a plan in place, some were trying, and there were those who felt like it was a losing battle. In the end, six dedicated and motivated parents eagerly joined my study group, and each participant was an involved parent of one of my first grade students.

Having done a home visit at my co-researchers’ home a few weeks after school began, and having worked with many of the participants as they volunteered in the classroom, or came on field trips as chaperones, I had already established relationships with the mothers. I had met the fathers at parent conferences and at other school-wide or classroom events, but I hadn’t had many informal conversations with them. They too were not only willing, but enthusiastic about participating in our study.

Every dialogue meeting was preceded by a home-cooked meal, or a pot-luck style dinner. I looked forward to these Friday nights, and though I was not taking notes or audio recording the dinner conversations, these informal discussions were just as valuable as the dialogue sessions. The participants’ children were running around, playing games, and communicating with one another in English, with the occasional phrases in Spanish. The parents, however, took turns each week bringing a movie in Spanish for the kids to
watch while the participants and I met. During our fourth meeting, as we were eating, laughing and talking about a recent field trip, Gabriel’s daughter came up to her father and me, pointing to her food and said, “Papá, un chicarrón!” Later in the evening everyone laughed because they actually did call that particular food by the same name, but so many other foods and phrases, of course, varied from country to country. It was the daily and mundane phenomena in which I took notice because in these moments, we connected with one another, we shared stories, and we learned about one another’s perspectives.

I was keenly aware that inviting me, their children’s teacher, into their home space and sharing special foods with me was a privilege and an honor. By opening up their home to me and the other participants for this study, the co-researchers engaged in trust building as they expressed themselves honestly and openly. Over time, my teacher role began to transform into that of a friend, confidante, and co-researcher. Initially, I had asked the group if it would be easier to meet at school, and I could sense the disapproval with that suggestion, as they were not only willing, but enthusiastic about holding the meetings at one of their homes. Given the experiences and stories that everyone shared so comfortably and readily in the home space, I soon developed a better appreciation for their decision to meet there.

The space in which we convened, as opposed to my classroom or some other area on the school’s campus, symbolized comfort, privacy and security. Additionally, the co-researchers’ home was a place where learning, knowledge-building, and problem-solving first began in the kitchen as we spoke to one another informally and shared recipes that had been passed down by family members. Over time, I observed my co-researchers and
participants as, not just parents of my students, but curious, bilingual, educated immigrants from five Latin American countries. The abridged labels assigned to them at school – EL (English Learner) parents, FELD (Family English Language Development) students, FRPL (Free and Reduced Price Lunch) qualifiers – did not apply here.

Similarly, the participants were surprised, but seemingly relieved to see me through another, unexpected lens. Although I remained, “Ms. Enstice, First Grade Teacher,” they were happy and interested to learn that I had personal curiosities about their food, their cooking methods, their language and expressions, their families, their countries, and more. In essence, together we exchanged roles as teachers and learners outside of the school space as we revealed what could be considered our hidden identities. By conducting our research in the co-researchers’ home, we continued to share pieces of ourselves in our private space over the course of the study.

Our research setting could also be referred to as a “safe space” or a “pocket of counter hegemonic possibility, site of critique, engagement and outrage” (Weis & Fine, 2000, p. 57). As we engaged one another in English, Spanish, and a mix of the two, at times the medium became the message. In this space, each of us could choose how to express ourselves without fear of judgment, labeling, or othering. No longer were we speaking Spanish in the home and English at school. Rather, we were engaged in critical dialogue as we concurrently attended to routine and ‘normal’ activities, such as serving dinner, watching over the children, and communicating in a language(s) which would allow us to articulate important messages in the medium of our choice. Revealing ourselves to one another took time, but through dialogue and observation, we made discoveries about one another, but also of ourselves.
The findings in Chapter IV demonstrate that the participants’ perceptions of bilingualism do have a significant impact on their children’s maintenance or loss of Spanish. The participatory method was chosen so that the participants and co-researchers could engage in dialogue, which focused on the topic of bilingualism and home language maintenance and loss, and to then take action to implement change. Rather than following a prescribed set of questions, the co-researchers and participants collaborated to identify themes and address relevant concerns. We engaged in discussions that resulted in authentic expression, and a clearer understanding of how individual perceptions of bilingualism have an impact on elementary school children’s home language loss or maintenance. More specifically, this study illustrates the complexity of language maintenance and its relationship to the following: perceptions and attitudes; personal histories, or “counterstories; personal paradigms; and social, cultural and economic factors.

Group Dynamics and Contributions

An analysis of this study’s findings would not be clear or comprehensive without a discussion of the group dynamics that were observed. Every dialogue took place at the home of Henriette and Rubén, the co-researchers. Henriette was the first participant to reply to my questionnaire (see Appendix A), and she requested that we have the meetings at her house, so long as that would be convenient for everyone. She helped contact the other participants and often planned meals for the following meetings, as well. Though they invited the group to their home, we as a group also collaboratively constructed a distinctive space within their home.
Like every other meeting, we began our first with a potluck style dinner and then moved into a small space in their home where we could meet without being interrupted by the kids. The simple task of planning meals prior to meeting engaged us in an unfamiliar, yet exciting way. Together, we had to make decisions about something unrelated to homework, field trips, or parent-teacher conferences. Now we were exchanging emails and phone calls as friends, family, and coworkers would do.

Starting our formal dialogue created a sense of uncertainty within me. I wondered if we could transition from our informal and friendly, yet informative dinner conversations to ‘the research room.’ Would the participants continue to express themselves freely in this more structured space? As I introduced the study and revisited the topic, goals, and guiding questions, Rubén immediately offered a suggestion. The way in which I phrased the following question was “not direct”: “What problems have you avoided on behalf of your child’s home language maintenance?” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). After making his suggestion, others agreed that Rubén made a good point; simply state the advantages or benefits of maintaining the home language, rather than focusing on potential problems. For each of the following meetings, the participants often looked to Rubén and his wife, Henriette, for guidance. Generally speaking, Rubén felt very passionate about this topic and was not afraid to speak his mind. For the most part, participants looked to him as a leader and as a mentor.

Henriette was the first participant to answer a guiding question, and as she did in subsequent meetings, she repeated the question in Spanish for any participants who may feel more comfortable hearing it again in their home language. She carefully read others’ body language, listened to their stories, and offered guidance accordingly. As we learned
about others’ counterstories, struggles and successes with home language maintenance, everyone began to express empathy for each other.

Perla was a newly single mom and felt guilty that she had not enforced Spanish in the home earlier, but hopefully sending her daughter to Guatemala would motivate her. Nicolás thought he was doing more harm than good by using his daughter as a translator in English, but he asked the group their thoughts on the matter. Rubén had to study all week, leaving only weekends to spend quality time with his son, but he was firm with his Spanish Only rule in the house. Gabriel, though interested in home language maintenance and bilingualism, couldn’t bear the thought of forcing his daughter to speak one language or another. He simply wanted his daughter to express herself freely. His wife suggested he join the group halfway through our study, so the group welcomed him as a newcomer and respected his contrasting views on home language maintenance. Gloria and Henriette had a quiet confidence about them, and they shared their thoughts openly and genuinely on every topic.

Ultimately, Rubén and Henriette emerged as co-researchers because they offered to clarify any questions I had about translation, they helped coordinate meetings, and they altered guiding questions for each meeting. Furthermore, Rubén and Henriette reviewed transcribed data and other documents, and they advised as to what home language maintenance strategies should be shared with the school community. Most importantly, the co-researchers worked with me to devise a plan for future action within the community. All participants had a sincere interest in learning from one another’s perceptions and experiences. We ultimately shared how much we learned from one
another, and how the participatory model, specifically using dialogue groups, served us well.

Though our dialogues took place in a relatively “safe space” as described earlier, the existing gender relations and power dynamics within the group merit a brief analysis. During our discussions, Rubén tended to contribute before anyone else, and he spoke in a confident, self-assured manner. Most participants would wait for him to finish without interjecting, and Henriette would often ask, “I’m sorry, are you done? I don’t mean to interrupt.” This language and other female participants’ willingness to accept Rubén’s advice as ‘truth’ suggest that cultural beliefs regarding appropriate gender-related behavior influenced the group dynamics.

Latino cultures are certainly not homogenous, but Raffaelli and Ontai (2004) suggest, “traditional Latin cultures are marked by strong gender role divisions. The idealized traditional feminine gender role involves being submissive, chaste, and dependent, whereas the masculine gender role involves being dominant, virile, and independent (Comas-Diaz, 1987)” (p. 288). Raffaelli and Ontai acknowledge the criticism that these depictions may stereotype Latina women. Nonetheless, they suggest “scholars have identified a set of cultural values that are relevant to gender-related socialization in Latino/a families” (p. 288). Ruben and Henriette at times exemplified these roles in their tone, their body language, and conversational styles. For example, waiting to speak could be considered more submissive, and interjecting and interrupting as more dominant. Some of the counterstories, such as Perla’s, challenge these “strong gender role divisions.”
The topic of home language maintenance and loss was obviously important to each participant, but it was an emotional and sensitive topic as well. Perla was not entirely comfortable playing the role of the submissive and dependent female, and she viewed Rubén’s dominant manner as offensive when he asked her in disbelief why her daughter was not bilingual. Given her feelings of guilt about her daughter’s home language loss, her poor relationship with her stepfather, her recent separation from the father of her infant, and the increasing stress of her job, she was experiencing a difficult phase in her life and did not hide her emotions. In general, her willingness to be direct and to assert herself revealed her compassion toward the topic of discussion, and also a deliberate negotiation of power and her role as female.

Finally, there were substantial differences amongst the participants in education level, proficiency in English, professional positions, and economic resources. Nicolás, for example, had formal education through sixth grade and spoke English with a heavy accent. Rubén spoke English fluently with a slight accent, had previously earned a law degree, and was now pursuing a nursing degree. Nicolás would carefully listen to Rubén in such a way that a student takes notes when a teacher or professor lectures. Henriette had a similar effect on the participants as Rubén, as many in the group looked to her as an “expert,” given her son’s fluency in both languages. Her friendly, welcoming demeanor encouraged others to share and ask questions.

As all of this unfolded, it became easier for me step away from my teacher role. Initially, the group waited for me to ask the following question, or to lead the discussion. Making an effort to utilize the participatory method to its fullest, I reminded myself that I must share the leadership responsibilities with my co-researchers. Through our collective
efforts and rich dialogue, we gathered meaningful data about parent perceptions of home language maintenance and loss, and bilingualism.

Review of Findings

The findings indicate that the participants’ perceptions of bilingualism and home language maintenance did influence their children’s maintenance of Spanish. Specifically, the participants recognized several advantages of bilingualism and expressed pride in the native culture and language. In their belief, these perceptions had a positive impact on their children’s home language maintenance. Owning their personal histories, or counterstories, and having confidence in their role as parents empowered the participants to take steps to maintain Spanish in the home. As we explored perceptions of Latinos as ‘Other,’ participants agreed that experiencing discrimination influenced language maintenance.

Participants’ perceptions of bilingualism and home language loss also influenced their children’s resistance to Spanish. Misinformation about bilingualism and monolingualism, and loss of identity and connection to native culture contributed to diminished use of Spanish at home. While identifying with an ethnic or social group did have an impact on participants’ language choice, other factors, such as space, time and context played a larger role. In addition, participants spoke both English and Spanish in conversations with friends, family, and co-workers.

Participants agreed that in order to maintain the home language in the United States, they must have a strategic plan that incorporates speaking Spanish in the home. In their experience, without a plan, children would prefer to speak English and ultimately lose their Spanish (even if parents continued to speak Spanish at home). Perceptions of
effective maintenance strategies include: requiring the use of Spanish in the home, visits to the home country, demonstrating strength, confidence and consistency as parents, speaking critically about bilingualism with children, and collaborating with other parents who are trying to maintain the home language. During the discussion of maintenance strategies, participants agreed and demonstrated that it was equally important to be proficient in English.

The data collected from this research study revealed five generative themes:

- Bilingualism has many advantages;
- Children’s preference to speak English poses a challenge to home language maintenance efforts;
- Additive assimilation in the home is part of parenting and leads to home language maintenance;
- Language is tied to ethnic identity;
- Being proud of your roots builds confidence and pride in the home language.

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in relation to the generative themes and relevant research literature, reflect on the PAR process, present action plans, and give recommendations.

Generative Themes

*Bilingualism Has Many Advantages*

There was never any doubt or disagreement when discussing the advantages of bilingualism throughout our dialogues. Yet, the participants expressed their views in ways structured by their social class and the geographic locations of their families. Family communication and relationship building and increased professional opportunities were two of the most frequently addressed advantages of bilingualism. The participants would discuss the advantages of bilingualism at every meeting, noting that they wanted the best for their children, and raising them to be bilingual would serve them well in these
regards. Many studies have found that parents understand the myriad advantages of bilingualism and speaking English proficiently (Farruggio, 2009; Guardado, 2006; Worthy & Rodríguez-Galindo, 2006). In many regards, their reasons for promoting bilingualism varied.

Communicating with family members in the home country would be nearly impossible without knowing Spanish. Participants also explained that, not only do their family members expect that their children understand Spanish, but they also expect fluency when speaking. Otherwise, extended family members may mock the children, demonstrate shame, or withdraw. Most of the participants’ children had been to their parents’ home country and they had experienced for themselves the need to communicate in Spanish.

Many participants felt that their children would be more motivated to stay or become fluent in Spanish if they made regular visits to their home countries. Otherwise, they feared the ridiculing and disappointment that they might face if they were lacking in fluency. While the study was taking place, Gloria and her daughter were visiting with Nicolás’ (Gloria’s husband) family in Mexico. Their daughter used her Spanish, cooked, walked on the streets, played with cousins on the farm, and wrote in her journal about her experiences.

The participants discussed bilingualism from a global perspective as well. Rubén, for example, noted that “The United States is very commercial, it’s diverse and multicultural. So the more you know, the more valued you are in society … you are raising your kid, getting him ready for the world.” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012). Even though the majority of the peers of the participants’ children were monolingual
English, their personal experiences led them to the conclusion that proficiency in two languages was not only beneficial, but necessary. Perhaps based on previous informal conversations with individual participants, I expected the group to focus more on family communication and identity construction as advantages to being bilingual. Even before the study began, I knew that each of the participants valued education, but we hadn’t discussed their views on bilingualism from a global, cross-cultural perspective.

Research on Latino parent perspectives has shown that parents recognize the financial advantages of being bilingual in their jobs (Worthy & Rodríguez-Gallindo, 2006), but fewer studies suggest that Latino parents perceive bilingualism – not just English proficiency - and cross-cultural understanding as a necessity for success in the workplace in the U.S. Much research focuses on the cognitive and cultural advantages of learning English and Spanish (Cummins, 2000; Portes & Hao, 1998; Valdés, 2001). The participants thought that bilingualism would lead to more professional success, but one co-researcher and participant perceived bilingualism as a tool to cross-cultural understanding in the work-place, and not only as a practical tool for communicating. Ideally, he suggested, everyone would be multilingual, but having a bilingual mindset leads to curiosity about the cultures and of those with whom we work. Rubén explained:

So if you’re going to be their boss and I know that they’re going to have Filipino, Latino and Chinese [employees], I must understand their culture and treat them as they deserve. That’s one position. Again, the more you know the more valuable you are. (Second Dialogue, February, 2012)

This particular participant and co-researcher had attained the most formal education of anyone in the group, and was raised in an upper-middle class family. At the time of the study, he claimed to be the only individual in his nursing program cohort at the University of San Francisco who spoke English as a second language. He mentioned
on several occasions how his colleagues in the program thought highly of his bilingualism and asked if he would tutor them. In fact, Rubén did conduct weekly Spanish language tutoring groups with his colleagues. He described the perceptions of these colleagues:

“I’ve been hearing from people – monolinguals – who are really receptive to bilingualism … this person particularly told me, ‘Oh, you know what, Latinos they are growing a lot in this country’ … Spanish, it’s becoming very, at some point we’ll become like the second official language. That’s what I’m hearing.” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012)

I would argue that Rubén’s experiences and socio-cultural capital led him to consider the role of language in the workplace as one that requires bilingualism and a culturally sensitive skill set. Though Rubén had English classes prior to coming to the United States, his fluency in speaking and his ability to study at the graduate level in English was impressive.

Borrowing from Bourdieu (1991), the recognition of linguistic capital, or the prestige, of English also played a role in Rubén’s quick ascendancy in the U.S. The status level of English, however, depends on context. Rubén distinguished between the linguistic capital of Spanish in the U.S. and that of English in other countries. The participants generally referred to the linguistic capital of English in the U.S. as a given. In contrast, just as individuals here in the U.S. will need to speak Spanish, Rubén claimed, “English is an interactional language. Everybody wishes to talk or speak English. The same thing in Nicaragua, if you speak English you are WOW! … Part of their curriculum has to be in English” (Second Dialogue, February, 2012). On the other hand, he said, “So, sounds funny to me, Latino countries, they want to have English and now here in
America they want to have Spanish. I mean not everybody of course, but it’s a mixture” (Second Dialogue).

Other participants viewed the advantages of bilingualism from a different social and geographic lens. The group untangled the workings of social systems that shaped their experiences as they compared their views of bilingualism. As Rubén proposed a theory about the linguistic capital of English and Spanish vis-à-vis the global, educated workforce, Perla, Nicolás and Gloria focused on familial relations and social mobility within the local workforce. Given their geographic locations, these participants were required to travel to their home countries to visit extended family, most of whom only spoke Spanish.

Rubén had the luxury of having easy access to Henriette’s bilingual family members who lived in the neighborhood. Therefore, their son’s bilingualism benefitted his relations with his family in Nicaragua, but fortunately his oldest son was already bilingual and therefore gained from familial relations here in the U.S. These findings give further credence to Fishman’s view of Reversing Language Shift (1991). Participants perceived advantages of bilingualism in terms of effective communication with family and professional success. Fishman views “the fostering of intergenerational mother tongue transmission … as a cultural right and a societal resource” (p. 7), which mirrors the perceptions of this study’s participants.

When they cited bilingualism as an important factor in obtaining work, Gloria, Henriette, and Nicolás spoke specifically of their abilities to translate for their bosses as advantageous. In Henriette’s case, she did not have a college degree, but her ability to communicate well in Spanish and English fluently and articulately set her apart. Norton
Peirce’s (1995) concept of investment in language learning applies to this set of participants differently. Participants generally invested in home language maintenance for their children, “with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will in turn increase the value of their cultural capital. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on that investment” (p.17). The “good return” to which Norton Peirce refers was relative to a complex interaction of the participants’ education levels, bilingual capabilities, and class distinctions.

Their positioning as Spanish speaking immigrants with little formal education beyond middle or high school was in stark contrast to that of Rubén and Gabriel. In Perla’s and Henriette’s case, English proficiency was required in the workplace, whereas Gloria and Nicolás mostly used their English to translate for their bosses or co-workers. For these four participants, opportunities for upward socio-economic mobility would arise through different channels, as their bilingualism looked and sounded different than Rubén’s. Rubén’s “higher status” as a university educated registered nurse (and in healthcare, employees are highly sought after for their highly developed bilingual skills) in the workforce indicated a greater chance of socio-economic ascendency. In similar fashion, Gabriel was raised in Valaparaiso, the “cultural capital” of Chile, and has lived and worked in Europe and the U.S. He also viewed the advantages of bilingualism from a global perspective and through a higher economic class lens.

Summary

The participants recognized many advantages to bilingualism, as they saw the benefits of proficiency in both English and in Spanish. Their children attended a school in which everyone spoke English throughout the day, and few teachers were fluent in
Spanish. Therefore, there was no need to “invest” in English proficiency for their children. They shared an investment in Spanish maintenance in respect to the advantages of bilingualism, however their distinct backgrounds and experiences with English and Spanish influenced their expectations of the outcome of bilingualism. While all participants saw bilingualism as an advantage for familial relations, the geographic space in which they and their families occupied shaped their views uniquely.

**Children’s Preference for English Stymies Home Language Maintenance**

Regardless of how dedicated a parent may be to home language maintenance, participants observed a consistent preference for English from their children. It is well-documented that once children enter school, they tend to lose their home language (Fishman, 1991; Lee & Oxelson, 2006; Shannon, 1995; Tse, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991). Not only is English spoken throughout the day, but it is also the language of power. As Schecter and Bayley (1997) suggest, choosing to use one language or another is a “form of social action … with social consequences” (p.514). I would argue that the participants’ children made a conscious choice to use English because, on some level, they understood the existing power dynamics.

Schecter and Bayley (2002) also noted that throughout such “daily negotiations between dominant and minority groups, and empowered and disenfranchised individuals, they [minority group members] confront the questions of discreteness and synthesis of linguistic code at many junctures and levels of self- and other-defining decision making” (p.51). At ages six and seven, the participants’ children had already had several opportunities to distinguish between the significance and symbolism of speaking English,
versus speaking Spanish. Therefore, their preference to speak English may have reflected their deliberate decision to “negotiate between dominant and minority groups.”

In some cases, teachers show frustration toward English language learners because they need additional assistance as they begin to learn their second language. Gloria’s and Perla’s daughters had this experience in kindergarten. These negative experiences can have a lasting effect on children who may then avoid speaking Spanish. Considering that I am the lead researcher in this study and the teacher to every participant’s child, I can accurately and confidently report that I put a great amount of effort into encouraging Spanish speaking families to speak, read and write in the home language whenever possible.

The children’s peers – both Latino and non-Latino – generally speak English in the classroom, on the playground, and at after-school activities. This accounts for approximately seven to 10 hours per day, which constitutes the majority of their waking hours. Gabriel, Henriette and Rubén repeatedly mentioned that their children come home and automatically speak English. Perla got frustrated when she would ask her daughter questions in Spanish, who would then answer in English. Henriette found that she has to constantly remind her son, “En Español, hijo, en Español. In Spanish, son, in Spanish” (First Dialogue, January, 2012).

Sometimes peers of various ethnicities and language backgrounds make fun of others who speak Spanish or who speak English with an accent, according to participants. They’ve found that in some cases, Latino children’s parents, including some of the participants, were told to speak English only so that they wouldn’t fall behind in school. Myths and misinformation about learning a second language (Crawford, 2000; Cummins,
1994) perpetuate concerns of falling behind in school if a child maintains his or her home language. Perla felt that her stepfather’s insistence that she speak English only as a child has affected her daughter’s home language loss, even though she is now making great efforts to maintain Spanish in the house.

There are many researchers in linguistics and language learning (Crawford, 2000; Cummins, 1981; Krashen, 1985; Lambert, 1975; Penfield, 1965; Tse, 2001) who have highlighted the cognitive and social benefits of knowing two languages. Moreover, teachers and parents who implement a subtractive bilingual environment are doing more harm than good for the children. Even children who are raised in an additive bilingual environment at home generally prefer to speak English (Cuero et al., 2006; Schecter et al., 1996; Worthy et al., 2003), but based on research (Guardado, 2006; Tse, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 2001) and my experience as a teacher of Latino children, those who have negative experiences with the home language show even more resistance.

The pervasiveness of English need not have a causal relationship with language loss, although it typically does. Brodie et al. (2002) found that “second generation Latinos are mostly divided between those who are English dominant (46%) and those who are bilingual (47%). Third generation or higher Hispanics are largely English dominant (78%)” (p. 16). Parents who understand the necessity to gain fluency in both the home and dominant languages reveal the paradox of linguistic hegemony (Suárez, 2002; Wiley, 2000).

Rubén, for example, came to the United States and became fluent English in six years and is now graduating with an advanced degree in Nursing. He did not, however,
stop speaking Spanish. Rather, he and his wife successfully maintain the home language by emphasizing to their son the importance of knowing both languages and speaking Spanish only at home. Consequently, their son is less affected by the pervasiveness of English and linguistic hegemony because both of his languages are normalized and used when appropriate. Though he does prefer to speak English, his parents use a variety of strategies to convince him to speak Spanish and to be proud of his bilingualism.

In Rubén’s view, parents who were told not to speak Spanish, were bullied or laughed at during their first years in the United States can discourage home language maintenance if they share their negative experiences with their children. Rubén cautioned Perla:

Think about if you say [to your daughter], ‘listen to you complaining about your accent.’ That’s when you were a child when you were bullied, and your peers and stepfather. So that’s a negative reinforcement right there. And you are giving the the idea to her that that’s not good, I don’t want that for you. (Third Dialogue, February, 2012)

Moreover, though parents’ backgrounds do influence their perceptions, Rubén asserted that parents need not verbalize their negative experiences with the language as a young child to their own children. In his experience, making positive associations with Spanish is much more effective for maintaining the home language.

Rubén’s perceptions of Spanish maintenance within the context of language use with family, or in a space defined by Uriciuoli (1996) as the inner sphere, are rooted in his affluent, ethnically and racially homogenous background. His suggestion to Perla, however, is not based in her reality. Uriciuoli defines the inner sphere (i.e language use with family and friends) in juxtaposition with the outer sphere:

One’s inner sphere is made of relations with people most equal to one; one’s outer sphere is made of relations with people who have structural advantages over one
… For people whose lives and options are not greatly constrained by race and class difference, the polarity is minimal. (p. 77)

The outer sphere, to borrow from Uricuioli (1996), of language is “defined by relations with bosses, landlords, teachers, doctors, social workers, and others with the advantage of authority, class, and stereotypically (though not always) race” (p. 77). Perla’s inner sphere of language use was shaped by the intersection of class, geographic space, race, linguicism and gender, whereas Rubén’s inner sphere was less multifaceted and more supportive of his language choices. Perla’s overall negative experience with her white, upper middle class stepfather who required the use of English in her home (inner sphere) had an impact on her perception of how to engage her daughter in regards to Spanish maintenance. It is interesting and relevant to note that she is also bothered by the fact that her stepfather refuses to learn Spanish, and requires English in his home that he now shares with Perla’s mom in Guatemala.

Rubén, who was well intentioned in giving advice to Perla and others, has had few complications or negative experiences within his inner and outer spheres of language use. His family had the economic and socio-cultural resources to promote bilingualism, and having moved here as an adult, he has few, if any, negative associations with his home language. By the time he came to the U.S., he had an equally positive perception of Spanish and English, and his bilingualism and socio-economic background have been valued within his outer sphere. Again, his gender played a role in his assertive tone as well. Perla saw the value of her bilingualism in her outer sphere, but it is perceived in an ethnicized way.

To once more borrow from Uriciuoli (1996), seeing language in an ethnicized way “allows some voice to ethnics to speak for themselves in ways that fit the interests of
the nation-state – hence the emphasis on the achievement and ethnic community” (p. 16). However, “People may safely retain their language, so long as it does not show in their English, which must display no more than a slight accent and occasional quaint expression” (p. 18). In Perla’s work space (outer sphere), for example, proficiency in English is required, but use of Spanish and heavy accents are frowned upon. Her accent was heavier than Rubén’s, but not too heavy from her boss’ perspective. As noted in the findings, her boss had a No Spanish rule at work, whereas Henriette and Rubén were admired, rewarded and valued for their Spanish proficiency.

Summary

All of the participants’ children have shown a preference for English, and in some of their households, this presents a challenge for language maintenance. Depending on their backgrounds, the pervasiveness of English outside of the home has had varying impacts on their children’s home language maintenance. Participants with lower ascribed statuses (Foladare, 1969), the social statuses assumed involuntarily, and those with fewer socio-economic resources generally had more difficulty overcoming the effect that English dominance has had on their children. They also had more struggles with home language maintenance, and in some cases, the participants’ internalization of negative attitudes toward Spanish use may have exacerbated their struggles.

Additive Bilingualism and the Parents’ Role

Participants agreed that they must be proactive in maintaining the home language, and research on language practices in the home and community echoes this finding (Ochs, 2000; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Wang, 2009). The participants found that maintaining an additive bilingual environment is essential for maintaining Spanish, but it requires
time, patience, consistency, and in some cases, financial resources. They also found that sharing ideas and strategies with other families was helpful, and that teachers should be made aware of what parents can be doing at home to maintain the language. Rubén guided the parents:

We as parents once again need to take on a role. We need to take roles, and as long as you define which are your roles, what is your role? You’ll need to perform that role, period. Don’t say, oh it’s my kid, he doesn’t want to. Of course they don’t! (February, 2012)

He emphasized this point because many participants had conversations with other parents who assumed their kids would maintain Spanish as long as they heard family members speaking it most of the time. As research illustrates, even children who do live in homes and communities where the heritage language is spoken tend to lose it (Worthy et al., 2003). When it came time to discuss effective maintenance strategies that participants use in the home, my co-researchers, Henriette and Rubén, generally led the conversations. They made a conscious effort to maintain the home language even before their oldest son was speaking. In our introductory meeting, one of my guiding questions asked the participants if their children’s home language loss had caused any problems, and another asked what problems they had avoided because of home language maintenance. Rubén felt uncomfortable with the latter question and thought it would be more productive to discuss maintenance strategies. That way, parents who were experiencing home language loss would spend more time learning from tactics that work for parents who were maintaining the language.

After several meetings, we came up with a list of strategies that participants perceived as effective in their households. Henriette and Rubén, the co-researchers, were very explicit about what worked for them, but reiterated that not all strategies work for
everyone. In other words, there would be no “one-size-fits-all” approach to maintaining the language because each parent had their own daily routines, parenting styles, formal education levels, and varying levels of home language maintenance or loss in the household.

Ultimately the group decided upon the following strategies: require children to speak Spanish at home and be firm; have one parent do school homework with children in English, and another parent or family member does age appropriate homework in Spanish (chosen by the parent); provide entertainment (movies, music, cartoons) and books in Spanish; visit the home countries if possible; explain to children why bilingualism is important for them and their families; provide a print-rich environment at home for children in Spanish; think of home language maintenance as part of parenting; don’t give up on home language maintenance if your child resists; refrain from criticizing children – positive reinforcement works better; have your elementary school aged child read to a younger sibling, cousin or friend when possible.

After coming up with this list, I suggested that we attend the next school English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) meeting to share with the Assistant Head of School and other parents. The group agreed that this was an appropriate forum to share initial findings, and Perla and Gloria decided to attend. Perla, though nervous, would present the list to the group. Though it was a small group at the meeting, we were excited to implement part of the action phase of our participatory study. Before presenting, Perla overcame her nerves and admitted that this topic makes her very emotional. The Assistant Head of School, who thanked Perla for her courage and willingness to share the emotional side of home language maintenance, asked if the school could include our list
in the school’s ELAC master plan. We were elated to learn about the potential of reaching every parent of an English Language Learner in our school community! We emphasized that these strategies were based on parent perceptions. I noted, however, that the effectiveness of many of these strategies of home language maintenance had been documented in research as well (García, 2003; Phinney et al., 2001; Schecter & Bayley, 2002).

The difference between the participants and the families such as those in Worthy et al.’s (2003) study, for example, is that the participants were planning for the future of their children’s bilingualism in the beginning of elementary school or earlier because they had already come to terms with the pervasiveness of English. In some communities, bilingualism is widely supported and implemented in both formal (i.e. school and professional settings) and informal (i.e. home, neighborhoods, social groups) venues. The participants in this study, however, sent their kids to a school where monolingualism in the classroom was the norm.

There were options for Spanish English bilingual education in the San Francisco Bay area, but most were located relatively far from their homes, and not a logistically feasible possibility. Moreover, the participants recognized that they must implement strategies at home now because their kids will always be exposed to mostly English when they’re at school or with their friends. Again, Gabriel did not feel compelled to implement strategies at home, given his impending move to Europe.

Scholars (Marshall & Tooey, 2010; Moll et al., 1992; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000) suggest that partnerships between families, schools and communities can support parent efforts such as home language maintenance. Moll et al. were specifically looking at ways
to incorporate ‘funds of knowledge,’ or skill sets that households have developed over
time in order to maintain the welfare of the family, into teachers’ curriculum. Though the
scope of this study does not explore teaching curricula in relation to home language
maintenance, Moll et al.’s research provides a framework for knowledge building and
sharing between parents, teachers, and other school community members. The
participants in this study expressed a desire to partake in outreach efforts and community
collaboration. Their goal was twofold; to inform others about the benefits of proactive
home language maintenance (i.e. implementing strategies, like a Spanish Only rule in the
house), and also to learn best practices from other families.

In Moll et al.’s (1992) qualitative study of households, they found “accumulate
bodies of knowledge” (p. 133) within family homes, as discussed in the literature review.
The participants in this study had accumulated an extensive body of knowledge about
home language maintenance during our study and previously through their own practices
at home. They wanted to share this knowledge with other families who were struggling
to maintain the home language. Furthermore, they wanted to build awareness around the
fact that home language loss is common amongst children of immigrants. Moll et al.
describe their approach:

Our approach also involves studying how household members use their funds of
knowledge in dealing with changing, and often difficult, social, and economic
circumstances. We are particularly interested in how families develop social
networks that interconnect them with their social environments (most importantly
with other households), and how these social relationships facilitate the
development and exchange of resources … that enhance the household’s ability to
survive or thrive (see, e.g. Moll & Greenberg, 1990; Vélez-Ibanez & Greenberg,
1989; see also Keefe & Padilla, 1987). (p.133)

The participants had already developed social networks within the community, and they
were now equipped to capitalize on those networks by engaging in knowledge-building
dialogue about creating an additive bilingual environment in the home using effective maintenance strategies.

In addition to collaboration amongst families, Moll et al.’s (1992) funds of knowledge approach involves the school community. In their research, the school-family connection is actually the primary focus. The participants acknowledged that most teachers do not know Spanish, but given their experience with me, they felt that having a teacher who actively supported home language maintenance was very advantageous. In other words, while learning subject matter at school in Spanish was obviously not an option (outside of weekly Spanish classes), collaborating with teachers who understood the implications of home language loss would support their efforts in maintaining Spanish.

Summary

The participants aspired to creating an additive bilingual environment in their homes. Rubén and Henriette were having the most success with home language maintenance, and I would argue that their backgrounds and resources have had a positive impact on this achievement. Sharing their strategies with each other, but also within the larger Bay Springs Academy community was important to the group. Finally, they began to embrace the participatory action research model as they reflected on initial findings and took small steps to involve the community in our problem-posing, action reflection cycle.

Language, Ethnicity and Identity

The participants perceived Spanish and their ethnic backgrounds as important components of their identity. Henriette was taking on her husband’s name because it
sounded more “Latina,” and Perla, Gloria, Henriette, and Rubén were specifically proud of their accents. They each expressed pride in their home countries, but they also took part in constructing group identities with other Latinos. Though they appreciated learning about the differences in one another’s cultures and traditions, they also celebrated that which they had in common. Language, of course, was one piece of a shared identity. Other than Gabriel, whose wife speaks mostly Portuguese, the participants felt most comfortable speaking Spanish with family, friends and Latino co-workers.

Phinney et al. (2001), Schecter and Bayley (1997, 2002), and Suárez (2002) concluded that language is not always an obligatory element of group identity. Language patterns and language choice are based on fluid, dynamic, and unfixed conceptions of identity. Most of the participants’ Latino friends were also bilingual, or monolingual Spanish. Perla, however, did have a few acquaintances who spoke little Spanish (Individual Interview, March, 2012):

My cousin’s friend is that way [speaks mostly English]. She’s from Guatemala, came here, bought a house in Novato, she’s very well educated, yeah. She is here [puts hand up to her head] and we are here [motions hand to her waist], according to her. I notice this person is more Americanized. So yeah, she doesn’t have many Hispanic friends. My cousin met her through church, which is English.

Perla contrasted this woman’s language practices and socio-economic background to her own, and to those in her social and family circles. Her cousin’s friend’s monolingualism in the dominant language, Americanized behavior and higher levels of formal education indicated to Perla that she was an outsider. I brought this up at the following group dialogue, and other participants had had similar experiences. They were determined to maintain an “authentic” Latino identity, and to continue building upon a group identity
with other Latinos who proudly spoke Spanish, and who maintained ties to their native cultures.

Phinney et al. (2001) studied influences on the ethnic identities of three immigrant groups of adolescents; they found that ethnic language proficiency, cultural maintenance by parents and interactions with ethnic peers contributed to their identity formation. Perla and the other participants provided their children with daily opportunities to interact with Latino friends and family, to speak Spanish at home, and to celebrate traditional holidays, birthdays, and other celebratory events. Moreover, they felt that this process of identity construction was an important component of home language maintenance.

In some cases, looking Latino and speaking Spanish in public, or speaking English with an accent led to stereotyping or labeling as ‘Other.’ Rubén and Gloria recounted scenarios when they were treated as though they were “dumb,” or “slow,” on account of looking Latino or brown. Denigration of Spanish accented English could be considered a method to establish English dominance over Spanish. Lippi-Green (1997) explains this mechanism:

It is crucial to remember that not all foreign accents [are judged harshly], but only accents linked to skin that isn’t white, or which signals a third-world homeland, that evokes . . . negative reactions. There are no documented cases of native speakers of Swedish or Dutch or Gaelic being turned away from jobs because of communicative difficulties, although these adult speakers face the same challenge as native speakers of Spanish. (pp.238-239)

Their responses to rude store clerks, insulting comments from bosses, or other offenders ranged from verbally defending themselves, trying to see the situation from others’ perspectives, and simply ignoring. Gloria and Rubén felt confident enough in their identities to not allow such ignorant behaviors (as some described it) and
denigration influence their sense of pride. In fact, they felt even more empowered to deliberately construct their Latino identities in the face of such criticism.

Perla, on the other hand, had a different challenge; overcoming the invisible-ness of her identity in the eyes of her stepfather. In addition to responding to what could be perceived as ignorant strangers, as Gloria and Rubén describes, Perla felt as though she had suppressed her sense of pride for many years. She explained how her stepfather shunned her Latino identity by banning the use of Spanish in the household during her youth. For the first time, Perla openly discussed her identity, made it visible, and actualized her sense of pride by reconstructing her Latino-ness. Additionally, she hoped to impart her revitalized Latina identity to her daughters.

**Summary**

The participants articulated the relation between the linguistic and ethnic components of their identities. In some cases, participants had considered these aspects of their identities to be firmly conceptualized, whereas others were in the process of reconstructing their Latino identities vis a vis home language maintenance and verbal assertiveness and expression. The children of those who had the strongest positive connection to their Latino identities were generally more motivated to speak Spanish.

**Honoring Our Roots**

Many of our dialogues, regardless of the specific question we were discussing, circled back to the importance of honoring our roots. The participants repeatedly articulated pride in their Guatemalan, Mexican, Salvadoran, Chilean, and Nicaraguan heritages. Understanding some Spanish, but speaking mostly English was not a scenario with which most participants were comfortable for their children. With the exception of
Gabriel, who had a unique perspective given his family’s upcoming move to a town in Portugal bordering Spain, the group was determined to take the necessary steps to maintain the home language.

Vygotsky (1978) explains that language serves as a tool accessible to a child and used for social interaction. In order to communicate and interact with relatives who only speak the home language, children must also be able to express themselves in that language. Furthermore, Miller’s (2002) definition of culture includes “symbol systems (such as spoke and written language)” (p. 374). In order to fully grasp the cultural concepts within a certain setting, children and older relatives must understand one another’s symbol systems. The participants agreed that sharing these systems was necessary for interaction with relatives in their home countries.

It was very important to the participants that their children know and appreciate from where their families come. They perceived home language maintenance as an element of cultural preservation that demonstrated reverence for their roots. The Spanish teacher heard of our study and asked if she could attend a meeting. She expressed her gratitude to the co-researchers and participants for doing this research because she viewed home language loss as tantamount to losing the culture and connection to one’s origins. The parents spoke about transmitting this sense of pride to their children so that they too would honor their parents’ and their grandparents’ legacies.

Participants communicated this view to their children by taking them, or planning to take them to their home countries so that they could appreciate the differences, and in some cases, challenge their understanding of wealth and value. Gloria and Nicolás were concerned that their daughter would look disdainfully upon her cousins’ clothes, or her
grandparents’ housing situation in Mexico. They were acutely aware of the monetary wealth that surrounded their Sausalito neighborhood and that which was prevalent in their daughter’s school. Yet, they wanted her to feel and experience the cultural richness of her parents’ childhood home life.

As a teacher in the BSA community, I witnessed firsthand the pride that Gloria’s and Nicolás’ daughter felt toward her Mexican and Salvadoran roots. Her mother responsibly asked me for an independent study packet both times she left the country to go to her grandparents’ respective home towns, and I asked her to complete several journal assignments. When she returned from her trips, she gave me a handmade bracelet from El Salvador and a painted clay turtle box from Mexico, and asked when she could share her journal entries with the class. Weeks later she shared a handmade wallet that she got from a local shop in her father’s hometown in Mexico, and told me yet another story behind this precious artifact.

In this example, Gloria’s and Nicolas’ daughter was connecting to her roots as she shared her Mexican identity with the class. She was proud to share a piece of her culture and her family with children of varying socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Her connection to her roots strengthened her connection to her family’s language, and vice versa. Fishman’s (1991) framework of Reversing Language Shift places emphasis on the relationship between the home language and one’s origins and customs.

Perla was not only proud of being a bilingual and bicultural Guatemalan-American, but she also expressed her belief that speaking Spanish was “an advantage in a way, but a privilege also” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). She went beyond acknowledging the paradox of linguistic hegemony (Suárez, 2002), as discussed in the
literature review. By articulating that speaking Spanish is a privilege, Perla, who is fluent in English and Spanish, indicated that she accepted and embraced her linguistic roots, despite the fact that her stepfather and boss perceived the use of Spanish as inconvenient and problematic. Rarely did the notion of Spanish-as-privilege arise in my research involving middle class Latina immigrant mothers. Generally speaking, scholars refer to English as the language of privilege, of opportunity, and of power, as it is the language of the dominant group.

Perla’s counterstory revealed a different experience with the English language because for her, it was the language of oppression and constraint. Now, she felt empowered and respected when her choice to speak Spanish was validated. From her stepfather’s point of view, English was the only language of power, and like other parents in the United States—both American born and foreign born—he forbade his children from speaking any other language in the home. It is common and well documented that parents fear that their children will not gain academic and professional success, or that they will not be socially accepted unless they speak flawless English. As discussed in chapter four, Perla felt that her stepfather’s English Only rule was a reflection of his unwillingness to acknowledge her culture and ethnicity.

Perla stated, “After what I gathered here at this meeting, I’m going to tell him [her brother], you know, instill Spanish in my niece” (First Dialogue, January, 2012). The critical dialogue amongst other Latino immigrants exposed varying perceptions of Spanish, but for the first time, according to Perla, a group of people came together to “appreciate Spanish” (Individual Interview, March, 2012). Openly and expressively appreciating Spanish in this setting gave Perla the opportunity to freely celebrate an
essential component of her identity. From Perla’s perspective, speaking Spanish was a privilege because it was not only acceptable in this space, but honored and valued.

Summary

From the participants’ viewpoint, maintaining the home language played a vital role in honoring their roots and showing pride in their heritage. In the last section, the participants articulated a shared sense of racial and ethnic identity, and in this section I described their connection to their home countries’ values and way of life. Moreover, this connection was also tied to language choice, maintenance or loss.

Researcher’s Reflections

Having the opportunity to conduct a participatory research study with extremely busy, yet dedicated Latino parents was such an honor for me. Initially I was concerned that, given their responsibilities as full-time parents and professionals, we would not have time to complete the research process. I also worried that my role as their children’s teacher could possibly have an adverse influence on their role as participants and co-researchers. Fortunately, this dedicated group came to understand the importance of participating in dialogue, translating for me and other participants, reviewing transcripts, formulating new questions and revising initial questions, and in some cases, presenting preliminary findings to a school committee.

This experience was incredibly rewarding for me as a university researcher and as an elementary school teacher. The participants seemed surprised by my interest and research in the topic of home language loss and bilingualism, and my ability – albeit limited - to understand and speak Spanish. Having these shared interests after having previously built positive parent-teacher relationships with the participants provided a
strong foundation for our study group. Ultimately, their willingness to share experiences that shaped their perceptions of home language maintenance and loss and bilingualism allowed us to address a salient topic within the community.

Originally, I was prepared to formally present how the participatory action research methodology functions, and how we would need to decide as a group what our next steps would be. My co-researchers’ critical thought processes and action-oriented approach led the group to collect and analyze data in such ways that I could not have formulated alone. Reflecting on previous conversations became natural, and thinking about future action plans began as soon as participants realized that home language loss was a topic faced by many Latino families in the community. Ultimately, the co-researchers and participants agreed upon concrete steps to share our findings and continue dialogue with the community.

I initially struggled with my role as co-researcher, rather than teacher, and given the participants’ perception of me as “teacher,” I believe they grappled with this role change as well. Developing a shared leadership took deliberate efforts on my part to always embrace the knowledge that we all have from our experiences and education. As Cahill et al. remind us, “placing emphasis upon the democratization and redistribution of power within the research process, PAR builds participants’ capacity to analyze and transform their own lives and is committed to ‘giving back’ to community collaborators” (p. 98). As we discussed the process of PAR and engaged in dialogue, the co-researchers allowed me to step back as they led the conversation and I became more of a facilitator.

The redistribution of power that took place at my co-researchers’ could not discount the fact that I was still their children’s teacher. Knowing that I could not
separate this part of my identity from the research, I had to acknowledge the power associated with my position. Reflecting on Freire’s conscientization, or critical consciousness, I did not attempt to ignore or dismiss the nature of my social situation, and we accepted the fact that our unique positionalities would have an impact on the research findings. Unlike a positivist approach, PAR allowed me as a researcher to first disclose my socio-political position in respect to that of the participants, and to then “end the culture of silence,” by co-creating a democratic society with the participants. Finally, we took part in deconstructing our identities in order to reconstruct a collective identity as we shared in the process of critical inquiry and collective praxis.

Reflections on the Use and Process of PAR

I chose to utilize PAR as a methodology because of its “emphasis upon the democratization and redistribution of power within the research process. PAR builds participants’ capacity to analyze and transform their own lives and is committed to ‘giving back’ to community collaborators” (Cahill et al., 2007, p. 98). In dealing with parent perceptions – particularly those of minority groups – the problem posing approach gives participants and co-researchers an opportunity to become teachers, learners, and collaborators throughout the process. Quantitative data alone would be insufficient, and “studying subjects” as opposed to collaborating with participants and co-researchers in all steps of the process would be counter-productive. Qualitative methods without significant dialogue or collaboration among participants and the researcher defy the very framework of reversing language shift. In order to give back to the school community, the participants would have to take the leading role in deciding what future action(s) would look like, in terms of reversing home language loss at a larger scale. Ideally,
these actions would illustrate the “redistribution of power” and the “participants’ capacity … to transform their own lives.”

Theoretically, I understood and embraced the PAR process and reviewed several cases which demonstrated the messiness and complexity that would likely accompany this methodology. I do not claim that my participants and I flawlessly implemented PAR, and we too struggled with the untidy nature of this approach. Issues, particularly around gender, class, and status complicated PAR even further. Ideally, the researcher and co-researchers would come together equally to collaboratively solve a problem. The power differentials that ultimately surfaced may not have emerged in another form of qualitative research, whereas PAR illustrated the complicated aspects of language loss and maintenance. It also underscored the relationship between language maintenance and perceptions, counterstories, personal paradigms, and social, cultural and economic factors.

Earlier in the chapter I discussed the tensions that arose during the dialogues, some of which were related to gender differences. Not everyone was comfortable with taking on preconceived gender roles, but because of the problem-posing approach, this reality was exposed. At times, we veered away from the question at hand because participants felt the need to address something specific that came up in conversation. In other instances class distinctions emerged, and finding solutions depended on the participants’ past and present experiences and counterstories.

Given the amount of time and devotion that is required of PAR, I was at times hesitant to ask my co-researchers to take on more. As I reflected on our first dialogue in particular, I realized that I may not have been as explicit about the PAR process as I had intended to be. On the other hand, I wanted to respect the co-researchers’ and
participants’ level of comfort and their perceptions of how to solve the problem of home language loss. Working with participants who are in some cases single parents, working full-time, caring for infants, attending graduate school, traveling to their home countries, or learning English proved to be a logistically challenging, albeit exciting and rewarding undertaking. Ultimately, my co-researchers, participants and I collaborated at a level with which each of us were comfortable. Even more collaboration at every step of the way, however, could have potentially portrayed additional findings.

Ultimately, the co-researchers guided the PAR process and became empowered to take action and involve more members from the community. Without a participatory, action-oriented approach, we may not have had the same impact on the school community. Had we more time and fewer obligations as a collective group, I would expect our research to have an even greater impact on families experiencing home language loss. Nonetheless, we shared a commitment to act upon our findings, which is an essential component of PAR.

Action in the Community

The co-researchers and participants decided to share our findings in at least three concrete ways within the community. First, we shared Parent Perspectives on Home Language Maintenance Strategies (see Appendix D) at a school English Language Advisory Committee (ELAC) meeting in February, 2012. As this meeting was small in attendance, we collectively decided to share again at the first ELAC meeting of the 2012-2013 school year. The Assistant Head of School offered to include this document – designed by co-researchers and me - in the school’s ELAC Master Plan. Secondly, we will have a power point presentation for all Bay Springs Academy Staff in the fall of
2012, followed by questions and answers. Finally, several other parents expressed interest in participation in our study, but for various reasons did not commit. Participants and co-researchers plan to reach out to families and the school Spanish teacher prior to the beginning of the following school year. They hope to engage in monthly dialogue meetings to informally discuss and reflect on perceptions of home language maintenance and loss. A secondary goal of these dialogues will be to provide support for effective language maintenance strategies.

Recommendations for Future Research

Much of the research on heritage or native language loss and maintenance focuses on the experiences of middle and high school children. Based on the data compiled in this study, it is likely that there are many more communities in which elementary school children’s first generation parents have concerns about home language loss. On the other hand, there may be communities in which families are maintaining the home language in such ways that have not been researched at length.

Future studies might address the same problem within another language group or geographic location. This study took place in the San Francisco Bay Area, where there are currently more Latino students than any other ethnicity or race. Investigating the experiences and perceptions of first generation immigrant parents in another part of the United States may yield interesting findings that compare and contrast with the findings in this study. Finally, how are teachers working with parents to support home language maintenance? Research focusing on the collaboration between elementary school teachers and parents who speak their heritage language at home may generate valuable findings from which parents, teachers and school administrators could benefit.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT QUESTIONNAIRE

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

Questionnaire for Spanish Speaking Parents

1. Do you speak Spanish at home?   ____ yes     ____no

2. Do you have children who speak Spanish at home?   ____yes     ____no
   a. If not, would you like them (or her/him) to speak Spanish?  
      ____yes     ____no
   b. If yes, could you briefly explain how you teach them Spanish?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

3. Were you born in a Latin American country? If yes, where ?  
   ____yes     ____no

________________________________________________________________________

4. Would you be interested in participating in a study with Ms. Enstice and a group of other native Spanish speaking parents
   a. who want their children to speak Spanish, but speak mostly English?  
      OR-
   b. whose children are currently bilingual English & Spanish?
      ____yes     ____no

*We would have 4-6 meetings at a time and place determined by the group. Food, friendly discussions, and fun would be included!

Please fill this out and send to school with your child, or email/call Emily Enstice (eenstice@xxxxx.org/ xxx-xxx ext. xxx ) with a response. I hope you are willing to join me and other parents as we discuss research and parent experiences with home language maintenance! Let’s spread the word so other parents can help their children maintain fluency in Spanish! All names and information in the study would be kept ANONYMOUS, if requested.

Your name and your child’s teacher: ____________________________________________
Cuestionario para los Padres que Hablan Español

1. ¿Usted habla español en casa? ____ Sí ____ no

2. ¿Sus niños hablan español en casa? ____ Sí ____ no

c. ¿Si no, a usted le gustaría que su niño hable español?
   ____ Sí ____ no

d. ¿Si sí, pudiera brevemente usted explicar cómo usted les enseña español?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. ¿Donde usted nacido? Nació en un país latinoamericano? ¿Si sí, dónde?
   ____ Sí ____ ningún
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Usted está interesado en ser parte de una participación de un estudio con la Sra. Enstice y un grupo de otros padres natales que hablan español.

   ¿Quiénes quieren que sus niños hablen el español, pero también sobre todo el inglés? - O-
   b. ¿niños quién actualmente son bilingüe ingles y español?
      ____ sí ____ no

*Nosotros tendríamos de 4-6 reuniones a la vez el lugar seria determinado por la cantidad de personas en el grupo. La comida, las discusiones amigables, y mucha diversión serían incluido!

Por favor llene o envíe esta información a la escuela con su niño, a Emily Enstice por correo electrónico/llame (eenstice@xxxxxxxx.org/xxx-xxxx ext.xxx con una respuesta. ¡Espero que usted quiera unirse a mí y a otros padres en discusiones de recursos y experiencias paternales con el mantenimiento del lenguaje de casa! ¡Por favor de informales a otros padres en como pueden ayudar a sus niños a mantener la fluidez del español! Todos los nombres y la información de este estudio serán guardados ANÓNIMOS, de ser solicitado.
Su nombre y el nombre de la maestro de su niño:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

La mejor forma de contactarlos a ustedes:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SAN FRANCISCO

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT

**Purpose and Background:** Ms. Emily Enstice, a graduate student in the School of Education’s International and Multicultural Education Department at the University of San Francisco is doing a study on perceptions of bilingualism and home language maintenance and loss among Latino parents of children who speak some Spanish. More and more children are losing Spanish, even though their parents speak it at home. The researcher is interested in understanding how parent attitudes and perceptions of bilingualism influence home language loss. Ms. Enstice will conduct a Participatory Action Research Study; this type of study involves some participants in data collection and analysis.

I am being asked to participate because I am a first generation (foreign-born) Latino parent who would like his/her child(ren) to maintain Spanish, and hence, English-Spanish bilingualism. I indicated this information in the questionnaire sent out by Ms. Enstice in November, 2011.

**Procedures:** If I agree to be a participant in this study, the following will happen:

1. I will complete a short questionnaire (APPENDIX A) giving basic information about me, including country of birth, languages spoken by parents and children in and outside of the home, and why it is important to me that my children speak Spanish and English.

2. I will agree to meet with Ms. Enstice to formulate surveys and/or questionnaires to give to first generation (foreign born) Spanish speaking Latino parents, if necessary.

3. I will participate in meetings, which will be audio recorded, with other Latino parents from my child’s school. These meetings will allow us to learn more about home language loss, bilingualism, and cultural maintenance efforts in the home. After 4-6 meetings at participants’ homes, we will formulate a plan to address the problem of home language loss. Our methods will include participatory surveys, focused discussions, observations in homes and in school, reflections on parent journaling, and individual interviews.

**Risks and/or Discomforts:**
1. Questions regarding place of birth will remain confidential if requested. The researcher is not asking about a parent’s immigration status, as this study focuses on language, culture and attitudes. Nonetheless, I am free to decline to answer any questions I do not wish to answer or to stop participation at any time.

2. Study records will be kept confidential. Individual identities will not be used in publications resulting from the study, and pseudonyms will be used throughout the study.

3. Because the time required for my participation at each meeting may be up to 2 hours, I may become tired, but Ms. Enstice will provide snacks at each meeting. Participants will be invited to join in potlucks when the group desires.

**Benefits:** It is my hope that I will better understand how to maintain Spanish as the home language, or that I will be given the opportunity to share what works for my family. Secondly, the group will disseminate information to other concerned parents in their community in order to assist as many families as possible.

**Costs/Financial Consideration:** There will be no financial costs to me, other than gas for mileage to and from meetings and groceries for meals that we share with the group.

**Payment/Reimbursement:** Ms. Enstice will provide dinner or lunch at several meetings.

**Questions:** I have talked to Ms. Enstice about this study and have had my questions answered. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (415) 310-7909 or Dr. Emma Fuentes, her Dissertation Committee Chair, at (415) 422-6525.

If I have any questions or comments about participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some reason I do not wish to do this, I may contact the IRBPHS, which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling (415) 422-6091 and leaving a voicemail message, by e-mailing IRBPHS@usfca.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS, Department of Psychology, University of San Francisco, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1080.

**Consent:** I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep. PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not to participate in this study will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at USF.

My signature below indicates that I agree to participate in this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant's Signature</th>
<th>Date of Signature</th>
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<tr>
<td>Signature of Person Obtaining Consent</td>
<td>Date of Signature</td>
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APPENDIX C

Research Subjects Bill of Rights

The rights below are the rights of every person who is asked to be in a research study. As a research subject, I have the following rights:

(1) To be told what the study is trying to find out;

(2) To be told what will happen to me and whether any of the procedures, drugs, or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice;

(3) To be told about the frequent and/or important risks, side effects, or discomforts of the things that will happen to me for research purposes;

(4) To be told if I can expect any benefit from participating, and, if so, what the benefit might be;

(5) To be told of the other choices I have and how they may be better or worse than being in the study;

(6) To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study;

(7) To be told what sort of medical or psychological treatment is available if any complications arise;

(8) To refuse to participate at all or to change my mind about participation after the study is started; if I were to make such a decision, it will not affect my right to receive the care or privileges I would receive if I were not in the study;

(9) To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form; and

(10) To be free of pressure when considering whether I wish to agree to be in the study. If I have other questions, I should ask the researcher or the research assistant. In addition, I may contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS by calling (415) 422-6091, by electronic mail at IRBPHS@usfca.edu or by writing to USF IRBPHS, Counseling Psychology Department, Education Building, 2130 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94117-1071.
APPENDIX D

Parent Perspectives on Strategies for Home Language (HL) Maintenance for Elementary School Children

- Require your child to speak to you in the HL while at home. Give praise for doing so, and do not punish the child for wanting to speak English. Children will need several daily reminders to speak the HL.
- Have one parent do homework with the child in English (as that is the language at school).
- Provide grade level appropriate homework for your child in the HL. If there is not enough time to do this on the weekdays, pick a weekend day to do it.
  1. Incentivize your child. Example: If you do this homework, then we’ll go to the_____________. If you do not finish we cannot go.
  2. "White lies" won’t hurt them😊. You may want to tell your child that his or her teacher gave you this homework in the HL and that s/he wants it turned in on a certain day.
  3. Same thing during the summer: do homework in the HL on a regular basis and tell your child that his or her teacher at school assigned it.
- Find cartoons, music, movies and educational shows to play for your child in the HL. Time spent watching TV should be limited.
- If possible, make it a priority to send your child to your home country if you still have family there.
- Explain to your child why it is important for her/him and your family that s/he speak both languages. Young children can understand and think critically about the importance of bilingualism, such as:
  1. Maintaining the family’s native culture
  2. Maintaining communication with family who only speaks the HL
  3. Having pride in where you come from
4. Being prepared for the future and a bilingual world and workplace

- Give age appropriate examples of how others value their bilingualism. Examples: “My friends at work wish they spoke two languages,” or “your teacher is so proud of you and impressed by your bilingualism,” or “I got my job in part because I speak two languages.”

- Provide a print-rich environment for your child in the HL: Have your child help you choose fiction and non-fiction books in the HL, make grocery lists, write letters to relatives, and do other writing tasks in the HL. Reading and writing in the HL are also important, but take time and effort as well.

- Stay firm, confident and proud of your “HL Only” rule while in the house. Children in elementary school are much more likely than middle school or high school children to eventually accept the rule and adapt to it.

- Think of HL maintenance as part of parenting – you’re the enforcer!

- Do not get discouraged when your child does not want to speak the HL. If your child is just making the change to home language use, start by having your child speak to you in the HL for an allotted amount of time each day.

  1. Be creative and pick a phrase in the HL that your child must use a couple of times a day for that week, for example.

  2. Tell your child it’s like a challenge or a game: “If you speak to me in Spanish after school for 20 minutes and during dinner, you’ll be rewarded with ______.” Sticker charts, point systems, and more will show your child how s/he is progressing and s/he can win a prize after reaching a certain point.

- Do not criticize your child for using incorrect grammar, having an accent, or using the wrong word when speaking the HL. It’s natural to make mistakes, and you can gradually correct him or her with gentle reminders.
• If you have an infant as well, have your elementary school child speak to the baby in the home language only (for the benefit of both kids).

Don’t be afraid and don’t get discouraged if the time and effort to implement a plan seems overwhelming at first. It will become part of your routine, just like anything else you’ve established in your home. Reach out to other parents who are in your situation, visit websites, and do your own research if you have the time. There are many resources out there that can help you! It’s very rewarding when your child can speak to you and to others in your native language😊.