A Community Cultural Wealth Approach to Latina/Latino Parent Involvement: The Promise of Family Literacy

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ABSTRACT
Building on Freire’s (1970) emancipatory learning theory and Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) approach, this article examines parents’ participation in a family literacy project. Specifically, we focus on 10 Latina mothers and explore their interactions and relationships as a type of meaningful parental involvement. The research questions were: How does a family literacy project in which participants study literacy strategies through reading and discussing culturally relevant texts facilitate Latina/Latino parental involvement? What types of CCW do participants develop as a result of their interactions and family literacy practices? Data sources include questionnaires, interviews, field notes, and parents’ reflective journals. Study participants developed aspirational capital, social capital, and familial capital during the course of the project.

This conversation between Elizabeth and Ana (pseudonyms) illustrates one of the many potent interactions that took place during a family literacy project implemented at an elementary school in central Texas. In this article we show how 10 Latina mothers developed literacy skills and gained confidence in their ability to support the educational success of their children. They developed aspirational capital, social capital, and familial capital by participating in the project, interacting with other parents, and building relationships with their families and the school.

Building on Freire’s (1970) emancipatory learning theory and using Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth (CCW) approach as our theoretical lens, we examined the role of parent interactions and relationships with special emphasis on practices that facilitated effective parental involvement in children’s literacy development. Two research questions guided our study: How does a family literacy project in which participants study literacy strategies through reading and discussing culturally relevant texts facilitate Latina/Latino parental involvement? What types of CCW do participants develop as a result of their interactions and family literacy practices?

PARENT INVOLVEMENT
As Olivos (2006) explains, “The term ‘parent involvement’ has far too often been diluted in the professional literature...
and in practice to a laundry list of activities that the ‘experts’ feel good parents ‘do’ to blindly support the schools’ agendas” (p. 13). Traditionally, parental involvement has included participating in Parent Teacher Association (PTA*) meetings, attending back-to-school night, and volunteering in the classroom. These are usually one-way forms of communication in which the school transmits information or makes specific requests of the parents to volunteer their time and/or donate money. These forms of involvement make multiple assumptions—for example, that parents understand the U.S. educational system and can volunteer time and resources. They cater to middle-class, two-parent families and usually require parents to be fluent in English. Furthermore, schools consider visible presence at school as the only legitimate form of parental involvement (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

Parent involvement should be meaningful to all and should be designed with diverse families in mind—for instance low-income families, those led by single parents, and families for whom English is not the native language. Parental involvement practices should engage parents by investigating their needs as community members and identifying their resources and talents. Then all kinds of parents would be able to volunteer and employ their strengths. Meaningful parental involvement might boost social capital by providing parents with insider information about the school and about larger educational processes (Domina, 2005; McNeal, 1999). If all parents are not adequately engaged, especially low-income and minority parents who are less likely to be involved, disparities in information and access to resources are likely to be maintained. As the Latina/Latino school-aged population increases, we must examine ways to effectively involve Latina/Latino parents in schools. Engaging parents in literacy practices that benefit both adults and children is one type of meaningful parental involvement (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Larrotta & Gainer, 2009).

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

We situate this study in a conceptual framework that views parental involvement and parent literacy involvement as shaped by Freire’s (1970) emancipatory learning theory and Yosso’s (2005) CCW approach. This framework informs our beliefs that:

1. **Parental involvement requires parents’ active and meaningful participation in their children’s education at all levels.**
2. **Parents are their children’s primary teachers.** Literacy educators can provide parents with strategies and tools to help them fill this role.
3. **Parental involvement in children’s literacy development goes beyond traditional practices such as reading bedtime stories, buying educational toys, and implementing shared reading. Parental literacy involvement also includes oral tradition (e.g., storytelling, music, poetry, riddles, and jokes), consejos (advice or life lessons) and proverbs, funds of knowledge (e.g., talents, strategies, skills, practices, and bodies of knowledge essential to household function and well-being), and literacy practices embedded in daily activities such as preparing recipes and practicing religion with children.**
**Freire's Emancipatory Learning Theory**

Freire's (1970) emancipatory learning theory describes development of "critical consciousness" or what he calls *consciência*. In other words, instructors and students work together to develop understanding and knowledge about the nature and root causes of unsatisfactory circumstances in order to develop real strategies to change them. Critical consciousness aims to encourage learners to become actively engaged in identifying problems, asking questions, analyzing, and developing strategies for transformation. The teacher's role is that of an equal partner who engages in dialogue with learners in the spirit of democratic inquiry and solidarity. Through the process of developing critical consciousness, marginalized or excluded groups (the "oppressed") can learn to identify, interpret, criticize, and finally transform the world and "transcend their reality." More importantly, for critical consciousness to emerge, we need to recognize assets within the community. Rather than focusing on what communities lack in comparison to European-American middle- and higher-income communities, these assets-based approaches seek to illuminate strengths that facilitate academic and social success in diverse communities.

**Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth**

Yosso's (2005) CCW approach identifies six components that reside within diverse communities in general and Latina/Latino communities in particular. Specifically, Yosso characterizes six types of CCW that are culturally validating strengths: aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, linguistic capital, resistant capital, and navigational capital. To have aspirational capital is to have high expectations, to stay focused on one's goals and remain resilient regardless of perceived barriers and real hardships. Familial capital and social capital refer to the knowledge and understanding that are nurtured and passed on through relationships with networks of family and friends, respectively. Linguistic capital highlights the skills and tools developed through communication experiences in more than one language. Resistant capital includes the values, knowledge, and tools used to nurture oppositional behavior that challenges and stands in opposition to inequality. Finally, navigational capital is concerned with the skills needed to navigate through unfamiliar or noninclusive environments (intentional or unintentional) in diverse communities. Yosso's CCW approach is significant to this study because the different forms of capital are interconnected, and CCW allows us to examine their complexity and confounded nature.

**THE FAMILY LITERACY PROJECT**

The main goal of this family literacy project was to give parents an opportunity to participate in a meaningful parent involvement experience. We did the study in partnership with a local elementary school; it was not funded by any entity. Melendez Elementary (pseudonym) is a public school in central Texas with 900 students. Forty-seven percent of the students are considered to be of low socioeconomic status; 90% are Latina/Latino, and 50% are English language learners. The school provided two classrooms, and two of the school's teachers volunteered to provide child care during project sessions.

First author Clarena Larrotta has 16 years of experience teaching adult literacy and is bilingual in Spanish and English. She volunteered to serve as literacy facilitator and was invited by school administrators to do so. Second author Erica Yamamura conducts research on diversity and equity along the P–20 educational pipeline, with a focus on Latina/Latino, students and communities. She served as co-researcher and writing collaborator. Because the school partnered with the researchers on this project, a school administrator and a certificated teacher were present during the family literacy sessions.

We met at the school for two hours each week for 12 weeks in the spring of 2007. Parents used one classroom, and the children used another. For practical reasons, each parent focused on one child during literacy practice. During the project, parents worked with their selected children on one specific activity every other week.

**Curriculum**

Because this was a family literacy project, we created two sets of culturally responsive readings, one for the parents and another for the children. The readings for parents were on topics that we hoped would encourage them to share life experiences with other parents and so build a learning community. We discussed readings by a variety of authors on relevant topics such as immigration (Sandra Cisneros [1994]), economics (Georges Clason [1996]), and ethics (Paulo Coelho [2000]). Parents read the texts and practiced reading comprehension strategies such as Preview-View-Review, think-aloud, K–W–L, concept mapping, and cubing. The children read age-appropriate
Cultural Wealth Approach

and culturally relevant selections on topics such as animals, adventures, and discoveries, written by authors such as Sandra Cisneros (1994) and Isabel Allende (2004).

Class Structure
We established class routines for family literacy lessons as follows. In the first 15 minutes, parents signed in and exchanged greetings, and a school representative explained one of the services the school made available to the families. For the next 10 minutes, the parents wrote entries in their reflective journals. The next hour was dedicated to the main lesson activities. Participants studied and practiced literacy strategies with the whole group, in pairs (parent–parent), and with their children (parent–child), in that order. Parents were coached on how to work with their children before we invited the children to come in to practice the reading comprehension strategies. We explored the readings, engaged in discussion and dialogue, and made connections to literacy strategies and to the participants' lives. For the last 20 minutes of class, parents wrote new entries in their journals. This was their time to reflect quietly about what they learned and to write down any questions or issues that emerged. To conclude our meetings, we asked parent volunteers to share their reflections with the group.

METHODOLOGY

Participants
To recruit participants for our project, the school sent an invitation letter to all parents of children enrolled in classes with English-as-a-second-language (ESL) support. Thirty-two parents enrolled. To be selected for our study, parents needed to attend class regularly, consent to participate in the study, and work with their children and other participating parents to implement the literacy practices required for the lessons and homework. Unfortunately, most male parents attended very sporadically, and we were not able to collect enough data from them. Two fathers who attended more regularly did not provide signed consent; we were not able to use their data. So we decided to focus this paper on data provided by the 10 mothers presented here. All had an 80% or better attendance record. They were from Mexico, were 30–50 years old, and had attended at least elementary school in Mexico. The children the mothers chose to include in the project were in second through fifth grades at the time.

Data Collection
We gathered data from questionnaires, interviews, field notes, and the parents’ reflective journals. We collected the data in Spanish and then translated it into English. Parents responded to three questionnaires, one at the beginning, one in the middle, and one at the end of the project. These included open-ended questions that helped us (a) collect demographic data, (b) access parents’ understanding of both the project and the use of literacy strategies, and (c) examine parents’ views and plans regarding future literacy practices.

Two semistructured interviews, one at the start and another at the end of the project, captured parents’ literacy knowledge, including their perspectives and experiences (Weiss, 1994). These interviews were 40 to 60 minutes long. We asked about parents’ life stories, expectations, and family life; about their experiences in the project; and about their plans for literacy practices after the project.

In addition, we made audio recordings of all lessons in order to capture them in detail and produce accurate field notes (Berg, 2001). The field notes helped us recall important dialogue, interactions, and events. Finally, parents kept reflective journals that described their literacy practices outside the classroom as well as their experiences as adult learners. They wrote entries as soon as they arrived in class and again at the end of each class.

Data Analysis
As a research team, we used open coding techniques (Creswell, 2007) and then discussed emerging themes and collapsed the codes. We examined in this process twice. We examined the ways in which this family literacy project nurtured meaningful parent involvement in light of Yosso’s (2005) CCW framework. Three forms of CCW emerged from the data, and we decided to focus on them exclusively: aspirational capital, social capital, and familial capital.

FINDINGS

Aspirational Capital
From questionnaire data, we learned about the mothers’ expectations when they joined the project and about their desire to help their children excel in an unfamiliar school system. Rather than just having high educational hopes for their children, mothers joined the project to learn how to translate those aspirations into action. Alicia wrote, “I want to help my child a little bit more. I want to learn strategies
that help me do that." Another parent, Ana, talked about helping specifically with her children's literacy: "From the bottom of my heart, I want my children to obtain good grades. I want to help them discover love for reading." This learning process influenced the lives of both the mothers and their children.

As a form of parental involvement, the family literacy project offered an opportunity for mothers to strengthen their aspirational capital for themselves and their children. Data from the questionnaires revealed that parents were motivated to attend the literacy project for a variety of reasons. Rocio wrote, "I am very interested in the education of my children. I want them to succeed." Another parent, Ligia, noted the influence she hoped the project might have on her son: "I want to motivate my son. If I come to these meetings, he will think school is important." Silvia, another parent, commented on her high aspirations for her daughter: "I want my daughter to be successful at school. I want her to be able to study more than me. I didn't have the same opportunities, and I want her to have more than I did." Lastly, another mother, Elizabeth, talked about her aspirations for her child regarding standardized testing. She wrote, "I want my child to pass the [standardized] test and more, not just to pass the test."

Participating in the project offered the mothers a unique opportunity to develop their own aspirational capital, as manifested in the expectations they had for themselves. They envisioned themselves as adults who could improve and develop their learning skills to become lifelong learners. For example, Ligia said in the interview, "I would like to study more. I didn't finish elementary school, and I feel sad about that. If I could, I'd go back to school, but English is so hard to learn." During the interview we asked Ligia if she knew about classes offered at the local community college or at the adult education programs in town. She was not familiar with either. We explained the options to her and encouraged her to pursue these opportunities. Ligia promised to give it more thought and consult her husband. Participating in the project motivated her to think about going back to school. She commented in her reflective journal that "I believe in education; it is an avenue to progress in life...for my children and for me." Also, during the first interview, Ligia shared her experience with her son, Juan:

Juan is 10 and he doesn't like reading. He asks me all the time "Why do I have to go to school?" I always give him the same answer, "Because you want to have a good job when you grow up. You don't want to be a beggar like the homeless people we see on the street. You need to study to get a good job." I want him and the other children to like school and to have an education. I barely finished elementary school and I know I want more education for them. I want them to have a profession and a good life.

Parents wanted their children to achieve educational goals that they had not accomplished themselves. No matter how difficult their immigration pathways or lifestyles, parent participants had high aspirations for their children and maintained hope for their future success. In particular, the parents sought better lives for their children than they had experienced in Mexico or than they had found as adult immigrants in the United States.

Social Capital

The family literacy project provided an opportunity for Latina/Latino parents to come together and share their experiences with the school and in life while also improving their literacy skills. As part of the curriculum, the activities gave importance to the mothers' historical and cultural knowledge and positioned them as experts in these areas. To this end, we chose culturally relevant readings to ensure that the parents could use their background knowledge as Mexican immigrants and their funds of knowledge (Larrotta & Gainer, 2008; Vélez-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992). The readings, written by Mexican American and Spanish writers such as Sandra Cisneros (1994), Georges Clason (1996), and Paulo Coelho (2000), covered issues of immigration, economics, ethics, and culture. Taken together, the culturally relevant readings and associated literacy practices allowed the mothers to share their diverse life histories and experiences with each other, thereby increasing their social capital.

For example, parents read the first chapter in Cisneros' (1994) book, The House on Mango Street. Then they shared their cultural knowledge with other parents in class and with their children at home. As recorded in the field notes, this reading provoked a commotion in the classroom and resulted in meaningful dialogue. The parents quickly engaged in deep conversation, sharing their feelings and comparing the
different neighborhoods and types of houses in Mexico and the United States. They talked about the Mexican houses they grew up in and commented on what it was like to live in those neighborhoods—the traditions, the lifestyle, the differences in architecture—as well as the houses of their dreams. In spite of their lack of formal education, parents tapped into their CCW and gained confidence as they used and shared their expertise on something important: describing their ideal houses and the houses of relatives they would like their children to visit in Mexico.

Ana described another example of CCW development. In an interview, she said, "I take advantage of the experiences of my comadres [female friends] and other families. We talk among ourselves. Later, after reflecting on the new information I acquire, I practice with my children everything that I have learned." Ana's observation demonstrates that parents developed social capital during the project by sharing their experiences and their knowledge of the educational system with other parents in both formal activities and informal conversations. This knowledge extended even further when mothers shared the information with their children.

In another instance, at the beginning of one class, Rocio complained about her inability to speak English well and her difficulty in learning the language. She mentioned that she could not attend ESL classes because they conflicted with her child care-responsibilities. As described in the field notes, Viviana, another mother, interrupted her to say:

You can come to the ESL class offered here at school. It's on Tuesday morning, free of charge...you can come just whenever...I used to come. I don't attend anymore, but you learn, you learn something. I quit because it's too basic for me now. I need to do something else, but it'll be good for you.

In the same conversation, Ana chimed in to say, "I am attending. It is for the parents at the school; it lasts one semester each time. Any parent can attend. They assign homework, but it's good. I'm learning a lot." This interaction illustrates the powerful potential of developing relationships with other parents. Both Viviana's and Ana's CCW was valued and validated. In this way, the family literacy project provided an opportunity for mothers to develop information networks. These mothers developed social capital by sharing information about school and community services that the others were unaware of.

Finally, the mothers were empowered by sharing information about school resources. As noted in the vignette at the start of this article, Elizabeth and Ana exchanged telephone numbers and talked about coming to school together so Ana could help Elizabeth find the resources and services she needed. One day, Ana told the class, "I learned how to do Internet searches here at the school library. I came several times and asked the librarian for help. Now I know how to do it by myself, and I can teach you or you can ask the librarian for help." These two examples illustrate how the mothers' social capital exchange strengthened their learning about available resources and their use.

**Familial Capital**

The mothers reported that they developed familial capital as a result of participating in the literacy project. They enhanced and improved their communication skills and their relationships with husbands and children. The project's culturally relevant readings, when combined with the literacy practices we taught, opened a "third space" (Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López, & Tejeda, 2000) in which wives and their husbands could foster familial capital. Rocio's reflective journal entry illustrates an example of this:

I go to church. I'm Catholic, and the reading you gave us about good and evil called my attention because I didn't know there were so many stories about the origin of good and evil. I discussed it with my husband. I told him about the reading and we had a long conversation. We checked in the Bible in the book of Genesis to compare the stories. That was interesting.

This particular chapter, *The Origin of Good and Evil* (Coelho, 2000), motivated Rocio to discuss and pass on new knowledge to her husband. They negotiated textual meanings together and expanded their existing knowledge by thinking about readings from church and by reading the Bible themselves.

Another parent, Cecilia, described how working on an assignment with her husband sparked a conversation that allowed them to share some of their life stories. Cecilia noted in her journal entry:
My husband and I were discussing about the reading on the origin of good and evil and we just started telling the stories we used to hear as little children back in Mexico—those bedtime scary stories. Our two kids overheard the conversation and started asking about the stories. It was fun to tell our children about these stories.

Nancy said that a discussion with her husband about one reading, "Seven Ways to Fill an Empty Pocket" (Clason, 1996), initiated a conversation about money and savings that she might not otherwise have had. She noted the following in her reflective journal:

My husband joined me to do the reading about saving money. We enjoyed it because it gave us real examples on how to save money. We discussed two ideas presented in the reading: buying a house and paying yourself first. Paying yourself 10% of the money you earn was a new idea for us. We save, but when my husband doesn't have [steady] work then we have to use our savings because my salary is not enough to cover household expenses. The problem is that we only save the leftovers and sometimes there is nothing left of our salaries; this is why the idea of paying yourself first is so important.

In other words, Nancy and her husband discussed an important family topic, household finances, and a new approach to saving money. While the reading itself engaged the couple, the empowerment continued after the reading when Nancy and her husband began to save money in a new way. In her own words, "We started to put money in a jar in an effort to cut unnecessary expenses." They transformed their new familial capital into action.

At home, parents built familial capital by serving as cultural experts and sharing their life experiences with their children. Through the literacy activities, parents and children had an opportunity to delve into aspects of the parents' lives that the children were less familiar with, such as stories about immigration and their lives in Mexico before coming to live in the United States. In her reflective journal, Ofelia explained, "What I love about the class assignments is that the readings make us get together at home and tell stories and remember the way life was back in Mexico. My daughter asks me questions about my town and our family over there. She hasn't been to Mexico since she was two." Parents served as experts in their own life histories and shared family stories with their children, thereby transmitting familial capital.

In-class activities also encouraged parent—child interactions outside of the classroom, which further developed mothers' familial capital. For instance, after a class session Ana said she went home and reread the poem "Four Skinny Trees" (Cisneros, 1994) with her children. In the poem, the author compares herself to trees in winter. They seem weak and do not seem to belong in the harsh environment where they live, but beneath the surface they have strong roots and determination to survive. Ana said:

Rereading the poem with my children and sharing my stories with them, I realized how much they understand about immigration issues and the hard times we had been through. I was telling them about my story coming to this country and my journey to get here without legal documents, a job, or a place to arrive, and they were not surprised. They interpreted the story and showed empathy for the girl in the story.

The topics and readings discussed in the family literacy project motivated some of the participating mothers to share their cultural expertise and knowledge with their children outside the literacy meeting. As the semester moved forward and families continued to engage in these literacy activities, the role of parents as cultural and historical experts continued to solidify and garnered further benefits.

The assignments provided extra opportunities for communication between parents and children. Alicia shared an experience where she improved communication between her husband and daughter by sharing experiences and life stories while working on an assignment. She noted in her reflective journal:

I feel happy reading with my daughter. I enjoy the time we spend reading together. We read, and we connect with each other. I like the discussion we have with her and my husband.
because our life is much better when we have true communication. She is growing up so fast and there are communication gaps with her father. He is not at home all the time, and I am left alone with the responsibility of raising her and the others.

Parents provided a wealth of background knowledge on many of the reading topics in the family literacy project. At home, engaging in literacy activities increased the mothers’ communication with their husbands and children. The readings also served as catalysts that further positioned parents as experts, especially when the parents went beyond the written word and responded to the readings with personal stories and life histories that enhanced the material.

For this project, each mother selected one child to be the focus of training. The physical constraints we faced and the effort to maintain continuity with participants’ literacy practices made working with more children impractical. However, most parents engaged all of their children (not just the selected ones) in the new literacy practices. For instance, Ligia stated in class, “I have four children, and we all work on the readings together. The one that helps me practice the most is Luis, who is 15 years old.” This mother engaged in literacy practices with all of her children; her oldest child (Luis) participated by helping out the younger children. Both Ligia and her son Luis became empowered as teachers.

Having a child help one of his or her siblings with the literacy assignments was also a common practice. Engaging nonselected children in family literacy activities allowed for increased dialogue between children and their mother. For instance, Viviana said in the second interview,

I work more with Omar because he’s the one that has more difficulties at school. [But] my other son helps Omar too. We focus on helping Omar to get better at school. It is hard to agree on something when we discuss the readings, but it’s fun. We talk a lot; we communicate our ideas in good dialogue.

Rocio also shared how she used a tag-team tactic with her daughter to help her son. In the second interview she said,

I like it; I read with my son, but in Spanish. My daughter that is in middle school helps him more with the reading when it is in English. She has better English and she knows how to help him. We sit together and we all read; we listen to each other and we talk about the reading.

For Rocio, engaging the family also meant tapping into each other’s linguistic strengths. Participating in a literacy practice allowed her to capitalize on her strength in Spanish and on her daughter’s strength in English.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Findings from this study are consistent with the literature describing the multiple benefits of parent involvement in children’s education (Epstein, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Our findings show that a family literacy project can promote Latina/Latino parental involvement that is meaningful to the families. While the project was intended to promote family literacy practices and develop reading comprehension strategies for one child, narratives indicate that benefits extended beyond the focal participants. Other children in the family and sometimes other adults such as husbands were included and benefited from the literacy instruction that the mothers received.

Delivering the lessons at the school site was a strategic benefit. Parents and school staff had opportunities to interact and build relationships. In our setting, parents were viewed as assets and could gain confidence as their children’s primary teachers. Every activity was geared toward establishing a stronger connection between the families and the school. The school provided necessary resources and support that allowed the project to take place. In addition to classroom space, teachers volunteered their time to provide supervised child care between parent-child literacy activities. Teachers and administrators welcomed parents and shared information about the school. Parents realized that their families could benefit from the school services they learned about and from the goodwill of school staff who wanted to advance the education of their children and families.

As recommended in Freire’s (1970) emancipatory learning theory, project participants were not treated as recipients of information but as experts with valuable knowledge and talents to share (promoting “critical consciousness”). The participating mothers gained a better
understanding of the school and of the services it made available to families. Parents had plenty of opportunities to get to know each other and the school staff, to ask questions, and to find solutions to problems relevant to their families' educational needs.

In addition, developing social capital through community building was a central piece of the project. Our findings show that projects like ours that tap into parents' cultural assets and foster CCW are effective forms of parental involvement. This project empowered both the parents and their children. Keeping Yosso's (2005) CCW approach in mind helped us, as educators and researchers, to be more aware of the different kinds of capital the Latina mothers possessed, capital that is so important to the way families in these communities function. The mother is usually the catalyst that drives the direction of her children's education. Often, mothers also narrow communication gaps between fathers and their children or other adults in the family.

Study findings suggest the need for more intentional opportunities for high-quality, meaningful parental involvement. School leaders must find ways to be inclusive of all parents, especially of those who lack familiarity with and experience in the U.S. educational system. Nationwide, this is particularly pertinent in schools where teachers and administrators are ill-equipped to deal with changing demographics—from urban districts experiencing "White flight" to middle-class suburban and rural districts dealing with an influx of low-income and minority students. Our study indicates that a parent literacy project for low-income Latina/Latino parents can be one vehicle for facilitating meaningful involvement; in some cases such a project may provide additional benefits for student learning and development. A school's commitment to listening, interacting, negotiating, and engaging in dialogue with the families is crucial.

Many researchers and educators have advocated building stronger connections to families and the local community (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008; Jiménez et al., 2006; Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). However, researchers, teachers, and administrators need to re-examine what effective community building truly entails. As Yosso points out, there is potential for long-term benefit if we consciously develop CCW. While parents' experiences in this project identified some benefits, we can infer that some of these relationships (and some of the benefits) continued. To further strengthen this type of involvement, policy makers, school leaders, and teachers also need to help maintain the continuity of such projects. Policy makers and school leaders must provide the resources to allow teachers to engage in this type of parent and community involvement. Teachers also need to realize that they can be change agents in their communities if they so choose. For effective involvement that leads to empowerment, teachers and administrators must realize the degree to which parents trust and need them to help their children succeed.

CONCLUSION

While this project showed multiple benefits, sustaining such culturally responsive projects for the long term brings some complexities. Teachers and school staff will need to engage in frequent honest dialogue with parents. Schools will also need to attend to their often shallow perceptions of parents and shift to assets-based perceptions in which parents are viewed as cultural experts and capable adults who can play an active role in their children's education. We posit that the process of developing community cultural wealth can lead to meaningful involvement of Latina/Latino parents.

This study focused exclusively on parents' experiences. We examined the ways in which parents developed CCW (aspirational capital, social capital, and familial capital), and we explored how this process fostered substantive parent involvement by

- creating awareness of the parents assets and talents,
- connecting parents to other community members,
- creating channels for open and honest dialogue,
- providing a context for the exchange of information, and
- fostering meaningful relationships within families and among participants.

In this article, we suggested using family literacy activities as a bridge to reach out to low-socioeconomic status communities and link them to lifelong learning outcomes. Our study showed that family literacy can serve as a powerful tool for both schools and families. For schools, such programs can increase parent involvement, build relationships, and encourage children's out-of-school learning. For participating families, such projects can enhance parents' aspirational capital, social capital, familial
capital, and lifelong learning outcomes. Furthermore, the practice of family literacy can promote “critical consciousness” (Freire, 1970) whereby communities become aware of factors that help or impede their children’s academic success. As they gained a better understanding of the reading process, the participating families also passed on to their children and shared their immigration and family stories. We all became “more complete human beings” (Freire, 1970) with more knowledge about the assets and talents of our fellow literacy meeting participants.

**REFERENCES**


