"Yo Soy Su Mama": Latinx Mothers Raising Emergent Bilinguals Labeled as Dis/abled

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“YO SOY SU MAMA:” LATINX MOTHERS RAISING EMERGENT BILINGUALS LABELED AS DIS/ABLED

by

MARÍA CIOÈ-PEÑA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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“Yo soy su mama” – Latinx mothers raising emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled

by

María Cioè-Peña

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

“Yo soy su mama” – Latinx mothers raising emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled

María Cioè-Peña

Advisor: Ofelia García

Parental involvement in the United States has been identified in both academic and mainstream literature as a defining marker in academic achievement. Yet most of the literature regarding parents and schools are written about them without including their voice or their stories. Through the use of ethnographic case studies this dissertation presents the experiences of immigrant, monolingual Spanish-speaking Latinx women raising emergent bilingual children who are labeled as dis/abled. This research is guided by an intersectional framework and the following questions:

1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of emergent bilingual children labeled dis/abled?
2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?

This study uses the participants’ testimonios to reveal the myriad of ways in which they support, love and care for their children through means that may not be in keeping with traditional values but are no less meaningful. These include, but are not limited to, hiring tutors, enrolling them in afterschool programs and religious education, using technology, and engaging in direct home language instruction. This study also showcases the ways in which school-based decisions regarding the language of instruction impact family dynamics. Additionally, the
challenges that mothers undertake as caregivers, wives, daughters, sisters and women are shared. Some of these challenges range from limited English proficiency and work-life balance to domestic abuse and long-term separation from other children. This study brings to light the complex lives mothers’ lead and the ways in which they strive to meet the needs of their children regardless of the financial, physical and emotional costs to them.

This dissertation concludes with recommendations on how to better support these mothers and their children within schools. Particular attention is given to the expansion of educational settings that address students learning needs alongside family language needs. Lastly, recommendations are made as to how to engage mothers more directly within schools in ways that are mutually beneficial.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While this work is entirely mine and I am incredibly proud of it, it would not have been possible without the love, encouragement and support that I received from so many people in my life:

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I was so incredibly fortunate to have a committee comprised of people whose work I respect and admire but whom I also felt genuinely knew me and my work. Beyond being instrumental to my success, all of you have been wonderful models of what it means to be a critical yet visionary scholar. David, my unofficial Riker to Ofelia’s Picard, I am so grateful for all of the ways in which you pushed me, supported my work and answered every “quick question”. Michelle, you are an incredible example of how to stay joyful while fighting fiercely for social justice. Thank you for being so trusting of me in my role as a researcher. Wendy, thank you for being an early supporter of the seed idea that would become this study. I am especially grateful to you for pushing me to do the study I wanted to do rather than the study the NYCDOE would allow me to do.

¹ Ofelia, there is a saying that says "the most valuable thing in my life is not what I have but rather who I have in my life". There are no words to express how much I appreciate and value your presence in my life. Thank you for supporting me, thank you for offering me opportunities, but above all, thank you for helping me to value my work without denying my family. There is no space in these pages to thank you for all that you have done for me but in my life there will be time. With that in mind, my greatest desire for my career is to be for my students what you have been for me. I adore you.
I am forever indebted to Steve Shreefter, a dear friend and mentor, who showed me that a pedagogical identity that is centered on truth, inquiry and social justice is not only possible but necessary. Thank you. While you did not live to see me on this journey, I have carried your memory with me every step of the way.

A sincere and heartfelt thank you to the village of scholarly women who supported me each step of the way as friends, writing partners, readers, therapists, accountability buddies and mock audiences. I had never known the wonder of (intellectual) sisterhood until I met you. And to my scholar-brother, Tom, I feel like we’ve been friends forever. Thank you for all the mornings of parallel play. I treasure all of the reading, writing and questioning that we’ve shared.

I am grateful for my husband who served as sounding board, first reader, editor, and, most importantly, frequent destroyer of doubt, although he did not do any typing.

My children, it is because of you that I too get to call myself an immigrant mother, thank you. Emiliano, thank you for understanding the times that I could not be with you but also for forcing me to create balance in my life. Aurelia, I had never known how much I wanted a daughter until you came along. You were with me at every interview and you slept beside me as I wrote. I hope that one day you will know the power of motherhood. You both have brought me so much joy, you have pushed me to grow and you have given this study so much meaning. I would not be the scholar I am today were it not for the two of you.
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A las mujeres en este estudio, gracias por su tiempo, su honestidad, su confianza y su valentía. Espero poder honrarlas y todos sus regalos.

Finalmente, quiero mostrar mi agradecimiento a las madres inmigrantes que hicieron posible mi vida como estudiante al cuidar de mis hijos y mi hogar. Gracias.

---

2 I would like to acknowledge my mother, Maria Lucinda Hernandez, who in 1990 packed her entire life into a suitcase, boarded a plane for the first time and simultaneously give up everything she knew and loved in order to grant her daughters a better life.

3 To the women in this study, thank you for your time, your honesty, your trust, and your courage. I hope that I was able to honor you and all of your gifts.

4 I also want to show appreciation to the immigrant mothers who made my life as a scholar possible by caring for my children and my home. Thank you.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIXES</td>
<td>xvi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A NOTE ON LANGUAGE USE</td>
<td>xvii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>xviii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I RESEARCH OBJECTIVE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of the Remainder of the Dissertation</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lens 1: Intersectionality</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lens 2: Linguistic Human Rights</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lens 3: The Social Construction Model</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lens 4: Testimonios</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Design</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PART 2 – FINDINGS

IV FINDINGS 1: Dis/ability Labels and the Lives of Emergent Bilinguals

Introduction

Relevant Literature: EBLADs and their Mothers

- Emergent Bilinguals Labeled As Dis/abled (EBLADs)
- Mothers in “Need” – The Deficit Framing of MoEBLADs

Overview of findings

Findings

- MoEBLADs’ Ideologies Surrounding Dis/ability
  - “Bendita herencia” – Origins of disability
  - “Una niña normal” – Disability as social construction
  - “Pequeños problemitas” – The minimizing of disability
  - “Entre menos sepan, major” – Disabilities as guarded secrets

- Functions of the Dis/ability Label
  - “Mas” – The disability label as a resource
  - “Yo no sabía” – Disability diagnosis as information
  - “No le entendía” – The Disability label as relief

- Impact on the Lives of MoEBLADs
  - “Impotente” – The emotional toll
o “Me sentí mal” – Disability labels as a source of sadness 89
o “No me daban respuesta” – Worrying through the evaluation process 90
o “¿Qué puedo hacer?” – The psychological toll 91
o “Por eso no puedo” – Disability labels as confinement 92
o “Me cansaba” – The physical toll 94

Conclusion 95

V FINDINGS 2: The Role of Language and Bilingualism for MoEBLADs 97

Introduction 97

Relevant Literature: Access to Bilingualism 97

• Language Majorities and Bilingualism as Benediction 98
• When Bilingualism is Not for All – the Dis/ability and Minority Exception 100
• The Linguistic Practices and Perceptions of MoEBLADs 105

Overview of findings 107

Findings 108

• Bilingualism for the (uncertain) Future 109
  o “Mi idioma” – Country of birth = Linguistic identity 109
  o “Oportunidad” – Bilingualism for financial security 110
  o “Mi hermano, ¿le contestó?” – Communicating with binational siblings 112
  o “Me puedan deportar” – Bilingualism in case of deportation 114
• The False Dichotomy: Remedy the Dis/ability or Develop Bilingualism/Biliteracy 116
  o “Dificultades en decirlo bien” – language as a disability marker 117
  o “Ellos me dijieron…” – Monomilingual ideologies among school professionals 118
• Language Learning at Home 122
o “Yo le enseño” – Home language education at home 122
o “El catecismo en español” – Teaching Spanish through God 123
o “Uno tiene que aprender el idioma” – Mother’s efforts to learn English 123
o “Es así en ingles ¿okay?” Reciprocal learning 129

Conclusion 130

VI FINDINGS 3: Mothering: “Primero Están Mis Hijos” 131

Introduction 131

Relevant Literature: The Mothers of EBLADs 131

- The Parents of EBLADS – Assigned Roles and Expectations 131
- The Many Facets of Involvement 134

Overview of findings 137

Findings 138

- At Home with the Testimonialistas 138
  o Ana 139
  o María 141
  o Paty 145

- Involvement of the Mothers with their Children’s Academic Development 150
  o “Trato, en lo que puedo…” – Mothers as teachers 151
  o “Mi hija me ayuda” – Mothering by proxy 152
  o “Yo busco a una persona” – Seeking external support 154
  o “El traductor del teléfono” – Using technology 156
  o “No digamos que mucho” – Mothers assess their engagement 159

- Challenges Faced by MoEBLADs 161
o “Ellos me tienen aquí” – Raising children in two countries 162
o “¿Qué va a pasar con él? – Mothering other family members 166
o Tomaba, insultaba, amenazaba, precionaba, lastimaba – Spousal abuse 169
o Sola, vacía, desesperada – Buried feelings 172

• The Mother-Child Relationship 174
  o “Una mamá muy feliz” – The joy of motherhood 174
  o “Es me major amiga’ – EBLADs talk about their mothers 178
  o “Las tareas” – Ostracized by homework 181
  o “Tu no sabes ingles” – Language as power 182
  o “No voy a sacrificar a mi hijo” – The children’s needs come first 184

• Recollections: Finding Community, If Only for One Day 188

Conclusion 189

VII DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION 191

Introduction 191

Summary of the Findings 191

  Putting theory into practice 192
  Communal learning through collective inquiry 194
  Correcting the literature 198
  Intersectional educational policies 201

Implications for Teacher Education 203

Recommendations for Further Study 208

Conclusion 209

ENDNOTES 211
TABLES

TABLE 1. Maternal Background Information  41
TABLE 2. Background Information for Qualifying Child  42
TABLE 3. Summary of Research Design  57

FIGURES

FIGURE 1. NYCDOE Special Education Settings  8
FIGURE 2. NYCDOE Dis/ability classifications  8
FIGURE 3. Chronological sequence of Phase One of study  35
FIGURE 4. Chronological sequence of Phase Two of study – Ethnographic Case Studies  36
FIGURE 5. Ana holds up María Teresa’s math homework worksheet (Image)  140
FIGURE 6. Justin holds my hand as we walk to his house (Image)  142
FIGURE 7. Dan and Tanya introduce me to Bella, the family hamster (Image)  149
APPENDICES

Appendices A: Interview guides

A.1 – Family Inventory
A.2 – Mother – Child Relationship
A.3 – Motherhood & Dis/ability
A.4 – Life in Mexico
A.5 – Struggles of Motherhood
A.6 – Motherhood and Language
A.7 – Child Interview
A.8 – Pre- and Post-IEP meeting Interview questions
A.9 – Collective interview questions

Appendices B: Observation protocols

B.1 – Home Observation Guidelines
B.2 – Focused Observation Game Options

Appendix C: Recollection guideline
A NOTE ON LANGUAGE USE

I have made a conscious choice to foreground the voices of the participants in this manuscript. Therefore, in a nod to Norma Mendoza-Denton’s *Homegirls* (2008), the body of the text will include the participants’ narratives in the original language without the use of italics. Within the Spanish text, key words or phrases are in bold so that readers have a visual representation of the frequency of language usage as well as the ideological and linguistic connections across multiple speakers. English translations can be found immediately after in italics; in-text quotation translations are italicized and contained with brackets.

Explanations of my word usage/choice, along with references for further reading, are contained within the endnotes.
DEDICATION

To all immigrant mothers, who continue to journey far from home in the hope that their children will have more than they did. Thank you for taking on the challenges that you do; your sacrifices may not be recognized in real time but their impact is indisputable.

her dreams become their dreams, the life of an immigrant is hard.
but she prays to god that her kids will become and receive everything she never got.

– unknown
Chapter I: RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The educational needs of [English Language Learners\(^1\) (ELLs)] too often get tangled up in debates over immigration, nationalism, and cultural hegemony. Though language proficiency defines this group, ELLs have a diverse set of educational needs that are not limited to language alone. When the politics of language take center stage, ELLs with dual challenges of language and disability are relegated to the sidelines.

–Claire Raj

Introduction

Parental involvement in the United States has been identified in both academic and mainstream literature as a defining marker in academic achievement. Yet most of the narratives regarding parents and schools are written about them without including their voice or their stories. Additionally, when most people think and talk about parental involvement it comes in a very specific shape and form. The current framing of parental involvement is grounded in first-world, White, middle class values\(^2\): participation in school activities, supporting students with homework, reading to them, offering academic guidance, etc. This definition, however, is in many ways in disagreement with the experiences of families who do not identify as White and/or middle class and for whom this lack of identification also results in varying levels of interactions within schools. These interactions are often viewed through a deficit perspective\(^3\) that views minoritized parents as lacking in, amongst other things, the knowledge, capacity and agency needed to be effective educational participants and advocates for their children. These deficits are magnified when one takes into account the immigration status and linguistic practices of parents who speak languages other than English, as is the case with Spanish-speaking Latinx\(^4\) mothers.

This dissertation aims to not only include the experiences of immigrant, monolingual Spanish-speaking Latinx women, but also to shift the narrative from one that views them through
deficit lenses to one that acknowledges the ways in which they support their children’s academic growth through means that are not in keeping with traditional values but are no less meaningful.

**My Spanish-speaking Latina mother**

Given that this dissertation is heavily grounded in the personal narratives of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers, I find it necessary to include my personal narrative as the daughter of a Spanish-speaking Latinx woman. As an immigrant child growing up in a single parent home, I knew how important it was to be academically successful. My mother moved to the United States in 1990 with two young daughters and one suitcase. Having only finished elementary school, the result of growing up in a patriarchal society in which all education is monetized, she viewed moving to the US as the best way to access a better future for herself and her two daughters. Once here, she dealt with the harsh realities of New York winters and endless cycles of unemployment, underemployment and a need for social services such as Medicaid, food stamps, welfare and housing choice vouchers, more commonly known as Section 8. However much the reality of life in the United States detracted from its imagined vision, the brunt of the move was softened by the fact that my mother had a large extended family here, which she could turn to for support, and a documented immigrant status, which allowed her to access all of the aforementioned social supports. Nonetheless, being predominantly Spanish-speaking and possessing limited literacy meant that even though I was only seven years old when we arrived, she needed my help in order to access information, fill out paperwork and navigate life in an English only environment. I was fortunate in that I was able to participate in bilingual education programs from second through eighth grade. This opportunity allowed me to be not only bilingual but also biliterate, which was of great use to my family. Although I resented how much my mother called upon my bilingualism as a child, I know that it was a necessary part of my
family’s survival. When I went to college, the expectation was that my sister, six years my junior, would take over as linguistic ambassador in my household, but that would never happen. Early in her elementary school career, my sister was identified as a struggling learner. In response, the school placed her in English-only classes. As a result of this decision, she would only develop oral bilingualism in the home. This meant that my sister’s linguistic fluidity could help her sustain cultural and social connections, but not navigate between the Spanish-only world my mother lived in and the English-only world she needed to access.

Through these experiences, my mother would be sure to preach about the importance of an education and the value of being bilingual. I knew the lengths she went to in order to ensure that her struggles did not interfere with my success in school. Still, I was witness to her never-ending balancing act as breadwinner and nurturer, and as such I was privy to some of the sacrifices and the many of the battles that she endured. Yet, when I became a teacher, the experiences of mothers like mine seemed absent from the discourse. Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers like mine were often discussed by teachers and administrators in terms of their needs or their faults rather than their actual lived-experiences. Assumptions were made about their intentions and their capacity to engage with their children’s academic lives. I found this issue to be particularly true when the mothers who were being discussed were those who were raising children who were also labeled as dis/abled (LAD). As a novice teacher, I also struggled to understand how teachers and administrators could view decisions around language of instruction as purely academic, when I knew from experience that there would a significant impact on the home. While my personal experiences have always underlined my practice as a teacher and researcher, it is my professional experience that guides this project.
Origins of this study

I was working as a bilingual special education teacher within an elementary school mixed-grade self-contained class when, in January of 2011, the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), under the leadership of Cathleen Black, began to implement what was considered to be a great equalizer with regards to students receiving special education services: a special education reform policy titled “Shared Pathways to Success” (SPtS). As part of this policy, all NYCDOE schools were required to meet the following expectations by fall 2012:

1. Students will be welcomed into their community schools;
2. Students’ needs will be met in accordance with their [Individual Education Plans].
3. Schools will be responsible for configuring resources to meet the needs of their students with disabilities, which may include creating a fuller continuum of services.
4. Families will participate as meaningful partners in making educational decisions regarding their children. ("Special Education Reform | United Federation of Teachers," 2012).

Shared Pathways to Success intended to create more inclusive learning spaces for most, if not all, public school children. However, there were some unintended consequences. One of the greatest changes that came about because of this reform was the provision that students receiving special education services had the right to be educated in their local community school. No longer could schools turn away children solely on the basis that they did not have the appropriate setting needed to educate that child. This provision meant that schools that had previously filled classrooms with children from around the city/district with similar programming needs now had numerous vacancies (Special Education Reform Reference Guide:...
School Year 2012-13, 2012, p. 1). On the other hand, community schools had to educate students whose needs and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) they were ill equipped to meet (Alvarez, 2012).

Although I was not aware of its existence at the time, this policy would greatly influence the trajectory of my career as a teacher and a scholar. While the changes under SPtS were promoted by NYCDOE representatives, superintendents and administrators as necessary for the academic success and integration of students with dis/abilities, it often seemed as if the decisions made in its wake regarding student placement and classroom structures were haphazard and poorly executed. The administrators enacting them seemed more concerned with compliance than with the needs of the students whose educational experiences the policy was meant to improve. The impact the policy had on my school, my practice and my students was palpable. During the subsequent three years, students, families and teachers within my school were shuffled from one program to another. The first year, I watched as bilingual special education classrooms were shut down and students were moved to monolingual inclusion classes or bilingual mainstream. The following year, teachers and families would express frustration over the new placements, but were left with no alternative and little voice. By the third year, a resigned calm had fallen over the school community, a community that was already collapsing under the weight of external reviews that stemmed from statewide and national expectations. These expectations often did not take into account the diverse population the school was serving. During this time, I would be moved around from teaching in general education settings to experimental inclusion settings. All the while, I felt as if students’ needs were not being met and teachers’ concerns were being ignored. Special education teachers who raised their voices of concern were seen as just wanting to keep students segregated or continuing a failure to set high
expectations. By the end of 2012, I knew that something was amiss, but I did not understand why. I thought that perhaps the problem related to inadequate teacher training. Perhaps it was an issue grounded in poor scheduling. Having had the good fortune of maintaining long-term relationships with my former students and their families, the one thing I was certain of was that inclusive practices were damaging to bilingual children with dis/abilities and their families. When I started pursuing my doctoral degree, I was intent on showing that bilingual special education teachers were undervalued and that inclusion was wrong for bilingual children with dis/abilities.

Six years after that initial experience, I have arrived at a point where I recognize that the faults with SPtS lie not in its desire to include but rather in who remains excluded, both in its production and enactment. The lack of consideration for students who have intersectional identities, that is, identities that consists of multiple minoritized features such as race, language and dis/ability, present an issue for all policies that aim to meet the needs of one subgroup without considering the varying identity markers children posses both inside and outside of school. This whitewashing of intersectional identities also results in the additional failure to understand how academic decisions impact student’s home lives.

Because of my interest in the development and enactment of SPtS, the initial design for this study focused heavily on the experiences of teachers and administrators, but as I began to delve into the literature I realized that their voices and experiences were highly prevalent. However, the voices of parents – in particular mothers – were absent. This dearth of maternal voices is rather concerning given the prominent role that mothers have in the development of children, both in and out of school. As a result of this realization and in conjunction with my experiences as a classroom teacher, the focus of this study shifted from educators to mothers in
order to influence future research and policy development by ensuring that the voices of all stakeholders and educational decision makers are heard.

**Purpose of this study**

The purpose of this project is to explore the ways in which Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers’ navigate the world in relation / in response to their children who have a dis/ability label and a bilingual identity. Given that the voices of educators and researchers are often valued above those of mothers, this study aims to carve a space in which the silenced experiences of these women can be seen and heard. As such, my purpose is in showcasing the contributions that Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers make to their children’s educational development, as well as the potential contributions their experiences can make to policy development. Additionally, I am uncovering the dynamics, tensions, contradictions and gaps that exist within current educational structures as experienced by the mothers of the children we, as educators, aim to serve. As such the following research questions served as a guide:

1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of emergent bilingual children labeled dis/abled?

2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?

The use of the term emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled (EBLAD) rather than English language learners with dis/abilities or English language learners with special education needs aims to dismantle the double deficit model that is produced by combining the term English language learner, which fails to acknowledge the linguistic resources that a student brings, with the terms “with disabilities” or “special education needs,” which negate the social and structural power dynamics that are at play, making dis/ability a result of individual failure rather than
systemic inequality. By using the terms EBLAD an attempt is made at acknowledging a student’s full linguistic potential as well as emphasizing the imposing nature of labeling and categorizing children.

There are many different settings in which emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled can be educated:

Figure 1: NYCDOE Special Education Settings\textsuperscript{12,13}

The restrictiveness of the placement often correlates to the perceived severity of the child’s dis/ability label vis-à-vis the perceived limits of their academic function.

Figure 2: NYCDOE Dis/ability classifications


These dis/abilities are further reduced into low-incidence and high-incidence disability categories. High-incidence dis/abilities are dis/abilities that are the most prevalent in children in U.S. schools. These include, but are not limited to, the NYCDOE classifications of Emotional Disturbance, Learning Disability, and Speech or Language Impairment (Gage, Lierheimer, & Goran, 2012). Low-incidence dis/abilities are those dis/abilities that are rare and “require significant supports” (Kurth, Morningstar, & Kozleski, 2014). These include, but are not limited to, the NYCDOE classifications of Autism, Intellectual Disability, and Hearing Impairment. More often than not students with low-incidence dis/abilities are placed in more restrictive environments (Kurth et al., 2014).

This study includes children labeled with both high- and low-incidence dis/abilities, as well as students who were being educated in settings with varying degrees of restrictiveness. These settings were not just reflective of the special education services the child was receiving, but also the language in which those services were being administered.

Currently many bilingual students labeled as dis/abled are often placed in English only special education programs under the misconception that learning bilingually is counterproductive to their academic growth. However, when students who speak Spanish at home are placed in English only environments not only is their learning impacted, but also the way that the family, particularly monolingual Spanish-speaking mothers, interact with the school and are able to participate in the child’s education. Alternatively, students at risk of being diagnosed with a dis/ability can be inappropriately placed in bilingual mainstream programs that do not fully meet their academic needs. This is often done because the learning issues are perceived as primarily language based and as a way to reduce the disproportional representation of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students in special education. Whereas bilingual
special education programs do exist, they are considered a “special class service” and thus, a more restrictive environment (“Family Guide to Special Education Services for School-Age Children — A Shared Path to Success,” 2014). Whereas the intentions of placing EBLADs in mainstream bilingual settings are altruistic, they can lead to serious issues in the home. In many cases, mothers are frustrated by their child’s academic performance and are unable to adequately meet their children’s academic needs because of a mismatch between the expectations placed on the child and their capacity. This can also lead to an English-only placement because the mother may place the blame on the bilingual learning environment. This often results in children being voluntarily placed in English-only settings, ultimately creating a linguistic disconnect between the home and the school. There are currently not enough settings in which all of EBLAD’s needs can be met.

The experiences of Spanish-speaking mothers with children in English-only special education settings can vary greatly from those with children in bilingual special education settings. In order to provide a multifaceted description of these mothers’ experiences, this study will not only include mothers whose children are in English-only settings, but also mothers whose children are in bilingual settings. There are children who are in a “more restrictive setting” known as bilingual special education (12:1:1) and there are students who are in a “less restrictive setting” known as Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) – English only ICTs and Bilingual ICTs. The scarcity of bilingual special education programs is reflected in the fact that only two of the ten participating families had children enrolled in these settings (see Table 2). Additionally, students who attend both public community schools, which must accept students on the basis of geography, and charter schools, which accept children by way of lottery, were included in this study. The hope is that by bringing the voices and experiences of Spanish-
speaking Latinx mothers to the forefront they will be at the center of future policy and educational considerations both for their individual children and for bilingual children labeled as dis/abled as a whole.

**Organization of the remainder of the dissertation**

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two contains the theoretical framework for this study, whereas the methodology is presented in chapter three. Chapters four through six present the findings of the study. Each is preceded by a brief review of relevant literature before presenting the findings that arose from the data and subsequent analysis. These three chapters are organized thematically. Lastly, chapter seven contains a summary of the study and findings along with conclusions drawn, a brief discussion and recommendations for further study.
Chapter II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction:

I approach this work with a multifaceted theoretical framework building on the concept of intersectionality established by Kimberly Crenshaw. An intersectional framework posits “inequities are never the result of single, distinct factors. Rather, they are the outcome of intersections of different social locations, power relations and experiences” (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 2). As such the theoretical framework for this study extends Crenshaw’s theory beyond race, gender and class to include the role of language and dis/ability on an individual or family’s subjectivity.

In order to do this, I will be borrowing from Tove Skutnabb-Kangas’ work on linguistic human rights, as well as writings on the social construction model of dis/ability by Disability Studies scholars like Vic Finkelstein. The medium by which these intersectional identities will primarily be expressed and explored is narrative. As such, I conclude with a discussion on the power of narratives, particularly for Latinx women through an exploration on the power of testimonios. A multifaceted theoretical approach was enacted for this study because no single theory would be effective at capturing the lived experiences of people with intersectional identities. An intersectional framework is not only crucial to the research approach in this study, it is also the unifying/central lens by which the outcomes/findings are understood.

Intersectionality

We begin with Crenshaw’s theory of intersectionality because, as previously mentioned, it is necessary in order to understand the experiences of the multidimensional women who took part in this study— as mothers, wives and individuals – as well as those of their children. In order to fully see and understand these women as multidimensional people with complicated narratives,
one must first acknowledge the multiple social, political and personal labels they take up and are assigned.

Intersectionality is a Black feminist theoretical approach coined by Kimberly Crenshaw in 1989 as a way to bring to light the complexity of Black women’s experiences in the United States\(^{14}\). For Crenshaw, Black women’s experiences are often absorbed by activists (and social justice movements) that advocate on behalf of race or gender, but not both. Ultimately, these disjointed approaches never address the very particular issues Black women contend with, issues that reside at the nexus of race and gender. While Crenshaw’s support for intersectionality focuses heavily on Black women, her argument is meant to support the needs of all women of color (WoC). Ultimately, intersectionality is “the notion that subjectivity is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality” (Nash, 2008). In short, intersectionality is the ideology that an individual’s experiences are not the result, nor reflective, of any singular demographic factor such as their gender alone but also their race, their social class and sexuality.

In her tenet text “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” Crenshaw briefly weaves in other issues WoC must contend with: more specifically, the way a woman’s immigration status, cultural beliefs/practices and her ability to communicate in English contribute to her continued exposure to violence. However, the core focal group of this framework was (and in many ways continues to be) Black women. As such, whereas Crenshaw presents issues that WoC experience with regards to language (particularly in accessing resources), she never acknowledges that English and monolingualism are representative of Black culture as well. As such, the women who have limited English capacity are part of a community of WoC who have additional struggles that are not represented
by the intersections of race, gender and class alone\textsuperscript{15}. Nonetheless, Crenshaw’s framework is incredibly valuable in capturing and valuing “multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power” (McCall, 2005, p. 1780).

Crenshaw’s work continues to be relevant within present day discourse as people continue to be categorized and find themselves opposing oppressive forces at every turn. The participants in this study are subject to multiple subordinate categories: women, Latinx, uneducated/undereducated, immigrants, undocumented, Spanish-speaking, monolinguals, dis/abled by proxy\textsuperscript{16} and poor. Even as movements fighting for social justice, like those behind #BlackLivesMatter and #EqualPayForEqualWork, continue to strive for improvements for individuals who are minoritized by a hegemonic system, it is important to note that they often present a single story narrative\textsuperscript{17} that often reduces or erases the experiences of individuals holding intersectional identities\textsuperscript{18}. Given its current (and ongoing) fights for equal and civil rights for all, it is no wonder that intersectionality has moved down from the ivory tower and into the mainstream as activists, researchers and theorists continue to challenge and extend the work of intersectionality beyond the identity markers Crenshaw first posited.

Reflective of its longevity, clarity and universality, Crenshaw’s theoretical framework on intersectionality continues to have a particularly strong presence within academia –especially within the social sciences– as many researchers attempt to bring awareness to particular niche and minoritized communities. As such, other scholars and activists have made efforts to expand intersectionality beyond theory and into practice by placing it at the forefront of mainstream discourse around discrimination and systemic oppression (Brah & Phoenix, 2013; K. Davis, 2008; Hancock, 2007; Nash, 2008; Reeves, 2015; Shields, 2008; Smooth, 2011). Additionally, a few researchers like Annamma, Blanchett, Connor, Harry, Ferri and Klingner have made explicit
efforts to conduct research around the intersection of race, class, dis/ability, culture and language. However, for many of these researchers the focus is dis/ability first, race second. Language is often left competing for third, and in many instances gender is completely absent from the discourse. This hegemonic structuring of identity markers is not in keeping with Crenshaw’s theory which argues that these factors all deserve equal importance because they are so intricately intertwined in a woman’s overall narrative that distinguishing which one is more impactful to her overall experience is not only arbitrary but also harmful. Additionally, the removal of the role of gender contributes to the continued silencing of women. Lastly, a great deal of the current educational research that is grounded in intersectionality, whether the theory is named or not, focuses on the ways in which oppressive factors impact the child’s experiences rather than how they impact the mothers’ experience in relation to their ability to be (and be seen as) an effective advocate for their child. In doing so, the feminine/feminist component is effectively removed from the discourse. By centering the experiences of the mothers, this study attempts to stay true to Crenshaw’s theory by giving equal importance to language, dis/ability and gender with an understanding that depending on the situation one of these identity markers may be more prominent and, as such, more impactful to the experience of the participant. However, as will be evident in the findings and discussions sections, it is incredibly difficult to parse out what experiences relate to issues of only gender/motherhood, only language and/or only dis/ability.

Intersectionality not only shapes the lens with which researchers approach the lived experiences of women, but also the methods with which those experiences are gathered and framed. As such, intersectionality is not used in this study as a way to sustain ideologies that frame the participants as oppressed and subordinate, but rather to show “The potential for both
multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power,” thus highlighting the numerous facets of oppression participants must contend with in order to advocate for their children and themselves (McCall, 2005, p. 1780). An intersectional perspective is not meant to further diminish a woman’s worth, but rather to indicate her will and drive in the face of so much opposition (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Additionally, while this study focused on the women’s roles and identity as mothers, it became evident throughout the data collection process that their subjectivities as women, as Latinxs, as learners, as wives, and as daughters are also present. This makes an intersectional framework necessary not only for understanding the way external labels impact a woman’s ability to move through the world, but also the way in which her interpersonal labels free her up and/or weigh her down.

As previously mentioned, in order to fully understand the stories or experiences of the Latinx women in this study, a focus on gender and/or race is not sufficient. As such we move on to the next anchor of this framework: Tove Skutnabb-Kangas’ theory on linguistic human rights.

**Linguistic Human Rights**

Linguistic human rights (LHR) are language rights that are so basic that they are necessary for a dignified life. Essentially, they are the linguistic rights one must be guaranteed in order to be/feel human. Skutnabb-Kangas’ work on LHR dates back to the early nineties when she first proclaimed that individuals have a right to access the world they inhabit in the language/s they possess. Skutnabb-Kangas’ asserts that LHR should be “a universal declaration [that] guarantee at an *individual* level that, in relation to

*The mother tongue(s)*[^19, 20] everybody can
- identify with their mother tongue(s) and have this identification accepted and respected by others,
- learn the mother tongue(s) fully, orally and in writing (which presupposes that minorities are educated through the medium of their mother tongue(s)).
- use the mother tongue in most official situations (including schools);
Other languages, that everybody whose mother tongue is not an official language in the country where s/he is resident, can
- become bilingual (or trilingual, if s/he has 2 mother tongues) in the mother tongue(s) and (one of) the official language(s) (according to her own choice);

The relationship between languages,
- any change of mother tongue is voluntary, not imposed
  - Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994, p. 361

Skutnabb-Kangas also warns that “if these rights are not guaranteed, deprivation of the mother tongue may follow” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994, p. 361). Skutnabb-Kangas’ work on LHR was rather novel too because it introduced a multidisciplinary approach to the sociolinguistic topic of language education by incorporating the legality of language access into the discourse of how people use languages as well as why and how languages are abandoned, or better yet actively killed.

This vocalization of LHR aims to create an understanding of how some (if not all) language rights are in fact human rights. LHR are based on (and in some instances critical of) the language rights and human rights declarations made by the United Nations. By creating a legal understanding of linguistic practices, Skutnabb-Kangas shifts home language education out of the dismissible realm of “wants” and “niceties” to the authoritative platform of rights and duties. Embedded in Skutnabb-Kangas’ work is an understanding of how language policies within the government and within schools contribute, both passively and actively, to linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2005). While the focus of much of Skutnabb-Kangas’ writing is the active destruction of languages, with particular attention given to the plight of the Kurdish people, her work also explores the covert ways in which many countries attempt to change the use of a minoritized citizen’s mother tongue, be that through a lack of promotion of the home language in education and/or official government business or by asserting that mother tongue education is
too costly or counter to the goals of assimilation within the nation state (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994, 1997, 2002). This assertion of the covert ways in which nations deny the conservation of a mother tongue is critical to understanding the current state of home language education in the United States.

While there is some home language education access within the United States through the promotion of bilingual education, more often than not home languages are used only temporarily and as a scaffold for English language acquisition in the education of minoritized children (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). In most cases, linguistically, racially and ethnically, minoritized children are subject to English only education; this is even more true for students who are labeled as dis/abled. This reductionist approach to language education is reflective of the United States poor alignment to the Hague Recommendations regarding “[mother tongue medium] education for all or most national/immigrant minorities in state schools, even if it is transitional” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, p. 143). It is so poor in fact that it “outright [denies] the existence of at least some national [and immigrant] minorities” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2002, p. 143).

Given its assimilationist history and the current resurgence of nationalism within the United States, it is not surprising to see incidents of systemic violence against immigrant communities take aim at the use of languages other than English by minoritized people. The first and most visible attempt at silencing Spanish speakers in particular came hours after the Trump administration took office and removed the capacity for Spanish translation from the White House’s official website. As a result of this erasure, Spanish-literate citizens (documented or not, immigrant and US-born), who encompass the largest non-English speaking community in the US, were denied access to the most basic level of civic engagement (Zeigler & Camarota, 2016).
Other attempts at silencing speakers of other languages have been outright violent. The effects of this type of violence are not limited to the United States. English is increasingly viewed as the lingua franca of the world, even though it is not the most populous language (Gu, Patkin, & Kirkpatrick, 2014; Jenkins, 2013, 2015; Jenkins & Leung, 2013; O’Regan, 2014; Simons & Fennig, 2017). So strong is this effect that even nations like Mexico, whose citizens are often the target of monoglossic language policies in the US, have increased their desire to educate their citizens in English even as the US actively denies their US-based citizens access to Spanish-language development.

Skutnabb-Kangas’ work on LHR is critical to countering the current social and political perspectives that regard the linguistic diversity of immigrants and minoritized people as interfering with the cohesiveness of the United States. While the US does not have an official language, the strong association between American identity and English dominance is reflected in the Pew Research Center’s findings that to the United States public “language matters more to national identity than birthplace” (Stokes, 2017). According to Pew, over ninety percent of those surveyed stated that “it is [somewhat or] very important to speak the dominant language to be considered truly a national of” the United States, a number far greater than the 45% who believe that sharing national customs and traditions is very important to national identity (Stokes, 2017). This sentiment of English only/English first is so intense that it permeates the linguistic practices found within immigrant homes. Many of the mothers whose stories are presented in this dissertation made claims that ascribed English as the language belonging to their US born children, regardless of the family’s linguistic capacity or cultural identity.

While Skutnabb-Kangas’ description of LHR is deeply rooted in the maintenance and survival of indigenous and minority languages internationally, her perspective on educational
LHR can be used to understand the way that language policies and practices in US schools impact ethnically, linguistically and politically minoritized families, and as a result, subsequently shape individual and community language practices. Whereas there are few states and situations in which de jure denial of LHRs exists within the US, there are plenty of de facto ways in which EBLAD students and their families are denied access to the full use of their own language, in both the acquisition and use of said language. Skutnabb-Kangas concept of linguistic genocide can be used to understand the nature of destructive de facto language policies and measures that are enacted by schools and experienced by minoritized people. These policies can apply to, but are not limited to practices such as, providing homework assignments in only the dominant language, not making bilingual program options available to all students, counseling families out of bilingual settings, offering special education services only in the dominant language, and failing to provide qualified interpreters (Fish, 2008; Harry, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Turney & Kao, 2009). Skutnabb-Kangas’ work on LHR is critical to unearthing the way that mothers approach and value the use of Spanish within the household, as well as their understanding of the role English plays in the academic and social lives of their children. Additionally, my experiences as an immigrant, as a teacher and as a researcher are heavily influenced by my relationship to my mother tongue and my belief that access to an education in one’s own maternal language is not only a privilege but an inalienable right.

**The Social Construction Model**

The third theoretical anchor of this dissertation addresses the framing of dis/ability. As such this final section will discuss the social construction model (SCM) of dis/ability, which serves as the theoretical grounding for the field of Disability Studies.
Disability Studies\textsuperscript{28} (DS) is a multidisciplinary field that is rooted in the belief that dis/ability is socially constructed. As a result, people with dis/abilities\textsuperscript{29} are the victims of oppression and discrimination on the basis of a perceived, rather than legitimate, deficit (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Whereas the formal field of DS is relatively young, the ideas that it represents date back to the 1960s when dis/ability activists began to challenge the ways in which people with dis/abilities were formally and systemically ostracized from society. From this activism arose the philosophy that “disability was an idea, not a thing,” which was supported by the understanding that dis/abilities were context dependent (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 270). An oft-cited historical example of a context dependent dis/ability relates to deafness. Deafness can be isolating for an individual within mainstream society where communication is primarily based on oral language. As a result, the Deaf are placed at a disadvantage thus creating a context-based dis/ability. However, in communities like the one that existed in Martha’s Vineyard where a substantial part of the population was deaf and where a general communication system consisted of sign and oral language, a deaf individual had no limitations. Thus, the dis/ability was non-existent (Groce, 1985; Scheer & Groce, 1988).

The social construction model, similarly to social interpretation(s) and the minority (group) model\textsuperscript{30}, of dis/ability is intended to counter the medical model of dis/abilities which perceives a dis/ability\textsuperscript{31} as an “inherent inferiority, a pathology to cure, or an undesirable trait to eliminate” rather than a representation of human variance (Garland-Thomson, 2005). This lens of dis/ability as socially constructed is not to be perceived as an equivocation that to be dis/abled is not to be disadvantaged, but rather to place the fault on society’s inability to make room for all types of people rather than on an individual’s inability to conform to a set of arbitrary standards that denotes a person as \textit{normal} or \textit{abnormal}. While this may seem like a foreign or complex
concept to understand, one just has to take a moment to consider the ways in which race is also socially constructed. In this example, race and racial hegemony, like dis/ability and normalcy, would be viewed as socially constructed in that a person of dark phenotype is born at a disadvantage not because they have an inherent deficit but because of the way society has constructed Blackness. The applications of socially constructed deficits and subsequent perceptions of inferiority and discrimination exist can be applied to a myriad of discourses including but not limited to class, gender and age. Scholars who uphold the SCM view the construction of dis/ability as deficit and the mistreatment of people with dis/abilities as equally baseless and unjust.

The social construction model allows for the dismantling of hegemonic systems that are constructed on the basis that normal is better and expected while perceiving anything else as not only less valuable but extremely undesirable. The SCM also allows for critiques of segregationist ideals that advocate for separate and unequal social spaces under the guise of treatment or remediation. Instead, SCM highlights the fact that these settings do not benefit the individual labeled as dis/abled but rather serve to sustain hegemonic divisions of power and ideals of normalcy. The SCM aims to create counter-narratives that reduce stigmatization and improve the lives of people with dis/abilities by attempting to change the way society views difference and by acknowledging equal value and humanity to people with dis/abilities (J. Harris, 2001). This is done by engaging in research that is reflective of the lived experiences of people with dis/abilities, that views people with dis/abilities as informed participants and/or co-investigators and that questions/challenges labeling and societal structures that place some individuals in the role of outsiders (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Taylor, 2006). Disability Studies research originates from an understanding that people are different
without reducing those differences to deficiencies and without attributing a lesser value to the individual. Neither Disability Studies nor SCM attempt to erase the term dis/ability because they also recognize that while dis/abilities may be stigmatizing to some, there are countless individuals who identify as dis/abled with a sense of pride and autonomy – who do not wish to erase their difference, and only wish to be treated as would any other person without a minoritizing\textsuperscript{33} label (Brown, 2003; Darling & Heckert, 2010; J. Harris, 2001; P. Harris, 1995; Magasi, 2008; J. L. Martin, n.d.).

As previously mentioned, the social construction model is a key tenet of Disability Studies and it is in part because of this inclusionary stance and its multidisciplinary nature that DS serves as an umbrella for other subfields like DisCrit, Disability Studies in Education and Feminist Disability Studies. While Disability Studies focuses primarily on the ways in which socially constructed dis/ability labels impact peoples' lives, the subfields of DS such as DisCrit and Feminist Disability Studies are intersectional perspectives of DS, which reflect the experiences of people who encounter oppression at the nexus of dis/ability, race and gender, respectively. The field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), which is particularly relevant to this study, sprouted from DS as a way to address the ways in which labeling and diagnosing people with dis/abilities contributed to their isolation within school settings and subsequent social spaces, as well as perpetuating ideas regarding the segregation\textsuperscript{34} of people with dis/abilities as beneficial (Connor et al., 2008). DSE considers not only the ways in which society is constructed to alienate people with dis/abilities, but also the ways in which medical and educational professionals contribute to that alienation by making decisions regarding the educational trajectories of the individual without considering their wants, needs or desires. This ultimately compromises their autonomy (Connor et al., 2008). DSE like DS is a field that is
strongly rooted in social and political transformation. Its grounding in the social construction model facilitates the questioning of institutions and special education with a final aim on increasing the integration of people with dis/abilities into mainstream (education) settings (Taylor, 2006).

The Social Construction Model is a valuable theoretical stance for this study for many reasons. First of all, as previously mentioned, it has been shown that dis/ability labels impact entire families, not just individual children. Thus SCM affords me a lens with which to understand and interpret the ways in which schools perceive students’ abilities and how these are discussed and presented juxtaposed to the ways in which mothers perceive their children’s ability levels. Secondly, it incorporates an additional level of criticality with which to discuss the ways labels, beyond race, class and gender, further contribute to the stigmatization of immigrant families and families of color. Third, SCM highlights the blurriness that surrounds judgment-based dis/abilities like learning disabled which relates to the ongoing discussions regarding the overrepresentation of linguistically diverse children within special education. Fourth, DSE uses SCM as a way to place a strong emphasis on privileging the voices of the labeled above the voice of those doing the labeling. Fifth, DSE and SCM’s emphasis on creating counter-narratives allows for the production and presentation of discourse which pushes back against ideologies that frame professionals as experts by acknowledging the ways in which these ideologies disempower families while at the same time expecting them to be equal partners. Lastly, one of the first pieces of research to hint at the need for an SCM stance within education was a report titled *The Six-Hour Retarded Child* which “showed that many children placed in special education, especially those from minority groups, were only ‘retarded’ during school hours and functioned perfectly well at home and in their communities” (Taylor, 2006, p. xvii).
The EBLADs presented in this study are not only students that are “dis/abled” for six-hours a day, many are also forced monolinguals for that same period of time. This is all because of judgments that not only deem them as dis/abled, but also incapable of bilingualism “without regard to [their] adaptive behavior, which may be exceptionally adaptive to the situation and community in which [s/he] lives” (President's Committee on Mental retardation, 1969 as cited in Taylor, 2006).

Similarly to the previously discussed lenses, the social construction model within a Disability Studies/Disability Studies in Education framing helps to ground this study in the ideals that not only acknowledge but also perceive differences as neutral attributes of individuals rather than inherent deficits. Additionally, this aspect of the theoretical framework also allows for a critical understanding of the way in which people are minoritized because of the ways they are evaluated and subsequently valued, and not on the basis of any fundamental features or causes.

**Testimonios**

The final prong of the theoretical framework in this study concerns not only the use of narratives as a data collection method, but also the valuing of narrative as a political and intentional act. *Testimonio* refers to the intentional and political act of telling a singular experience—or a collection of interconnected/related experiences— with the hope of exposing an injustice that is both personal and systemic (Acevedo, 2001; Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Beverley, 2009; Lindsay Pérez Huber, 2009; Passos DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). *Testimonios* have a long-standing history in Latin American politics and activism and it is in that spirit that it is included in this study. While testimonios are similar in nature to narratives, the fact that they are intentionally political as well as representative of a collective systemic issue makes them feel particularly relevant to the issues explored by this
study. Additionally, given that the focal community of this study is Latinx women of color it is important to use a lens that is not only connected to story telling as a device, but also Latinidad, LatCrit, womanhood and Chicanx/Latinx feminist theory (Acevedo, 2001; Bernal et al., 2012; M. S. González, Plata, García, Torres, & Jr, 2003; Lindsay Perez Huber, 2009; Prieto & Villenas, 2012). Similarly to intersectionality, the importance of testimonios lies heavily in the epistemological understanding that a woman’s experience is influenced by the multiple identity markers she dons with particular attention to her gender, race and ethnicity. Lastly, testimonios recognize and acknowledge the power difference that exist between the speaker and the listener while also giving over a sense of autonomy to the speaker by highlighting the fact that they choose which narrative to share, when, how and to what end (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). While traditional narrative perspectives focus on the goals of the listener/interviewer, testimonios focus equally, if not more so, on the goals of the speaker (Beverley, 1989). It is also important to note the importance of language in the word testimonio. The term testimonio translates directly to testimony – yet, the direct translation does not fully encompass the weight of the Spanish word which refers to the unpacking and unloading of a story to a witness with an allusion to both a legal confession and a religious one (Beverly, 1989). By maintaining its Spanish presentation the word testimonio also acknowledges that language is an important part of the speaker’s narrative and that some meaning can be lost in the translation (Bernal et al., 2012). This final point is of critical importance and relevance to this study given that all of the interviews were conducted in Spanish in order to privilege the voices of the speakers. However, given my role as an interlocutor, they must be translated to English in order to make them widely available and accessible. Thus testimonio also serves as an analytical guide.
Testimonios are a multipurpose instrument. They can serve as a theory, a literary device, a methodology, a process, a product and a pedagogical tool (Bernal et al., 2012; Beverley, 2009; Lindsay Pérez Huber, 2009; Passos DeNicolo & Gonzalez, 2015; Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). Testimonios date back to the 1970s when Latin American activists began using it as a literary mode by which to voice their oppressive experiences to the outside world (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). In time it was developed into a theory for understanding the positionality of both the speaker and the interlocutor/researcher who promoted and disseminated the narrative that was shared (Huber, 2009). In the last twenty years, it has also emerged as a methodology employed by LatCrit and Chicanx/Latinx feminist scholars as a way to explore their own (and other speakers’) oppressive experiences (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012; Huber, 2009). Regardless of the platform upon which it is employed, testimonios are universally used as a means to center the knowledge and document the experiences of oppressed groups, and to denounce injustices whether they take place in the farmland, the political arena or in the classroom (Reyes & Rodríguez, 2012). Testimonios also aim to create a connection between the Testimonialista/s and the reader in order to effect change by making the reader bear witness, thus politicizing the narrative and leading the reader to understand that the personal is political and vice-versa. (Beverley, 2009).

While testimonios can arise from multiple mediums be they oral histories, interviews, confessions, etc. there are many elements that define it. According to Huber (2009) some of those elements include, but are not limited to, a verbal journey, an authentic narrative and a transformational story telling. However, it seems as though one of the major factors that distinguishes a testimonio from a traditional Eurocentric narrative is the role of the gatherer/researcher. Unlike traditional narratives, the role of the researcher/listener/interlocutor is
very important to the development of a *testimonio*. Rather than just sustain the “common training of researchers to produce unbiased knowledge, *testimonio* challenges objectivity by situating the individual in communion with a collective experience marked by marginalization, oppression, or resistance” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 363). As such it allows a researcher like me to connect with those stories and the *Testimonialista(s)* who share them on a sociocultural level in which I am able to acknowledge my own subjectivity as a Latinx woman. This connection between the researcher and the participant is based on a “Chicana/Latina *femenista* sensibility and attempts to situate the researcher-participant in a reciprocal relationship where genuine connections are made between the researcher and the community members” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 366).

Ultimately, “[i]testimonio, then, can be understood as a bridge that merges brown bodies in our communities with academia” (Bernal et al., 2012, p. 364). This bridge harks back to Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on the borderlands and mestiza consciousness through which Anzaldúa explored connections between the mind and the brown body across different sociocultural spaces (Anzaldúa, 1999; Reuman & Anzaldúa, 2000; Yarbro-Bejarano, 1994). This bridge is also significant because it extends Spivack’s work on the subaltern by recognizing that women of color who have moved from traditional subversive and voiceless spaces into academic/formal spaces can still find themselves in the role of *Testimonialistas* whose testimonios have the power to uncover and vocalize experiences of oppression and resistance (Acevedo, 2001; Bernal et al., 2012; Spivak, 1988).

The inclusion of testimonios as a theoretical standing for this study is reflective of multiple aims. The shape and design of this study allowed for the natural production of testimonios because it is grounded in the Latinx experience, immigrant histories and language. Additionally, the interactions between the participants and the researcher focused more on story
telling that was grounded in trust and relationship building than on questions and answers. As a result, the participants were able to have some control over the direction of the interactions and share only the stories and experiences that they wanted to expound.

One of the overarching goals of this study is to reframe the narrative around EBLAD mothers through the use of their own voices, making their experiences worthy of consideration in the development of educational policies. Secondly, the focus on this particular population arose from the fact that White, middle class values and experiences are often privileged above those who are other[ed]/minoritized/marginalized and so it is important to include a theoretical standpoint that originates from a cultural and historical place that is reflective of the experiences being shared by the participants. Third, the focus is on story telling as a vehicle for community building, as a means to center the knowledge of the silenced which can provide healing through sharing, and as an entry point for change. This is compatible with Patricia Carini’s work on descriptive inquiry which is employed in this study as a data collection method (Himley & Carini, 2000). Lastly, one of the desired outcomes for this study was not only to raise awareness to the challenges of these individual participants, but also to gather individual voices to address a collective injustice that is being overlooked within an intersectional community. In the end, viewing the stories shared through a testimonio perspective allows for each participant’s experience to be valued on its own, while also building a collective voice of dissent and hopefully a collective call to action.

Conclusion

All of the theories presented within this framework are grounded in criticality, social justice, advocacy and activism. Most importantly, they are all grounded in the understanding that individual experiences are complex and must be presented in multidimensional ways. To attempt
in any way to fully parse matters of language from matters of dis/ability or motherhood from the
lives of the participants in this study would be reductionist and disingenuous. As such, the
readers of this manuscript will find many instances of overlap and interplay across the relevant
literature, research methods and the findings.
Chapter III: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this research project was to explore and record the ways in which Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers’ navigate the world in relation / in response to their child who has a dis/ability label and a bilingual identity. The lives of mothers are often discussed in relation to how they influence their children’s development, yet there is a lack of understanding as to how the varying labels placed upon children by schools influence the lives of mothers. As noted previously, the following research questions served as guides in this inquiry:

1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of emergent bilingual children labeled as dis/abled?
2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?

These questions helped to anchor this study around three objectives. The first was to collect the stories of the Latinx mothers of students whose academic lives exist in the nexus of being labeled as English language learners and students with dis/abilities. Secondly, the study aims to capture the experiences of these women in order to counter the deficit-based narrative that currently surrounds the education of emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled (EBLADs) but also the approaches enacted by schools and education agencies when interacting with their parents. In doing so, this study aims to identify the ways in which these mothers actively support their children’s educational development. Lastly, this study aims to inject the voices of a marginalized, minoritized and silenced community into the literature, so as to expand their framing inside and outside of educational contexts.
Current educational research is saturated with quantitative data that is often devoid of people’s narratives even though it is designed to improve the conditions of said people. The advancement of any community, be it social, political or educational, cannot occur without taking into account their lived experiences, as well as their stories and the voices that carry them. Given the political climate in the US, it is imperative that the experiences of these mothers be included in present and future discourses regarding the education of EBLADs. These narratives are also crucial to ensuring that the experiences of EBLADs and their families are considered when promoting the vital work that immigrant families do in the advancement of their children’s social and academic lives.

**Research Design**

The focus of this study was Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of EBLADs in grades 2-6 who have been given a dis/ability label that impacts their academic performance. Although New York City schools service students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, Spanish-speaking students remain the largest linguistic minority at 61.8 percent of students who speak a language other than English at home (Department of English Language Learners and Student Support, 2015). The focus on students in grades two through six is a direct result of research that indicates that the identification of dis/ability increases exponentially in third grade as a result of high-stakes testing which begins that same year (Samson & Lesaux, 2009) This is also a crucial time in the academic experiences of EBLADs because pressure for schools to perform well on high-stakes tests can result in an increase of English-only instruction (Huang, Han, & Schnapp, 2012).

Most Latinx students receiving SpEd services are often labeled as “Learning Disabled,” and/or “Speech and Language Impaired.” As a result, Latinx children are overrepresented within these two high incidence dis/abilities (Zhang, Katsiyannis, Ju, & Roberts, 2014). Given the
cultural construction of motherhood, Latinx mothers are the primary caretakers of their children, and as such are the primary points of contact between the home and the school. While the prior aforementioned reasons relate to the children and labels ascribed by schools, this study was interested in showcasing the voices of the mothers over those of the school because as Aceves (2014) has said: “[i]n traditional research the interpretations of professionals are privileged over those of parents” (p.50). Thus the goal of this study was to provide mothers with a space in which they could share their understanding of their children’s linguistic and socioeducational practices both inside and outside of the schools.

In the current age of accountability, schools have increased the amount of quantitative data that they collect in order to measure student achievement and teacher efficacy. Student-gathered data is often used to report to parents and teachers about an individual child’s development. However, school-based measures do not present a complete picture (Westby, 2009). Very little, if any, data is collected from the families and rarely does the data collected explore the impact that school policies have on the family life.

Qualitative research methods such as narrative interviews give participants an opportunity to talk about their lived experiences (Seidman, 2006). The outcomes of these interviews were not viewed as narratives, but rather testimonios in an effort to recognize the linguistic and political importance of the stories shared. As such, the accounts that were shared have the potential to serve as catalysts for social change. This research project aimed to create a space for the voices of the mothers of children who are doubly discriminated and as such are often themselves the victims of discrimination and disenfranchisement.

This study employed a combination of qualitative research methods in order to gather an understanding of the lived experiences of the mothers of EBLADs and their families, both inside
and outside of the education system. Qualitative research methods have been found to be useful in “understanding parental views on language development and disability” (Ijalba, 2015b). The particular methods will be discussed in further detail within the Procedure section. However, brief overviews are offered here as well.

The data from this study originated from a combination of narrative interviews that called forth testimonios, observations, communal story telling through recollections, and the gathering of relevant artifacts. This multipronged approach to data collection was enacted in order to construct as complete an image of these matriarchs as possible so as to best counter the deficit-based perspectives that currently permeate their presence within the literature and society. Additionally, in order to offer a space to those mothers who have received the least amount of attention within the current scholarship, the data for this project was gathered primarily in Spanish.

The participation of the mothers in this study occurred in two phases.

The first phase took place from October to December 2016. This phase was marked by two interview stages. During the first stage (Appendix A.1, Interview#1), ethnographic interviews were conducted with 10 Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers individually. These interviews consisted of general questions to collect demographic information and an inventory of the family, as well as open-ended questions in order to elicit narratives related to their children’s bilingualism, dis/ability labels, the mother’s parental identity and their relationship with the school. The second stage (Appendix A.2, Interview #2) focused explicitly on the mother-child relationship. Six of the ten participants were individually interviewed for this stage. The Phase one interviews took place in one of three places: a local community center, a local church or the participant’s home. The participants chose the interview location exclusively. On average each
interview was between 30-45 minutes long. The testimonios were then transcribed and analyzed for preliminary themes using narrative analysis. After this, four participants were identified for participation in Phase two.

These methods were employed in an effort to privilege the voice of the participants and to contribute to the quantitative conversation that is currently taking place with regards to the educational needs and accomplishments of EBLADs. Additionally, by focusing on the participants’ testimonios, the hope was to instill or increase participant agency by allowing the mothers to see that their narratives are valuable and meaningful.

Finally, in the second phase, four mothers were invited as the main participants for four ethnographic case studies. Only three accepted. The fourth participant excused herself for personal reasons. The remaining core group of three mothers, whom will be referred to as the Testimonialistas, then participated in four additional narrative interviews grounded in their experiences, and on the collection of interviews conducted in phase one (Appendix A.3-A.6).
1 The IEP interviews were conducted throughout the second phase since each family’s meeting took place at different points in the school year.
2 The home observations and child interviews took place between individual interviews #5 and #6
3 The child interview took place immediately after home observation #2

In addition to new interviews, the second phase of the study also include two unstructured observations of each Testimonialista and her child in the home (Appendix B.1), as well as one observation in which the Testimonialista and child were observed performing a focused task that required linguistic collaboration (Appendix B.2). There was also an individual interview with each child in which they were asked to talk about their mothers (Appendix A.7).

Phase two interviews were conducted in either a community church or the participants home, again as determined by the participant. However, the observations were all conducted in the participant’s home, and while a secondary site option was not provided, mothers were told they could decline the observations. In addition to the interviews and observations, artifacts such as individual education plans, report cards, homework and school-home communication were also collected as appropriate. There was also an opportunity to interview each Testimonialista before...
and after she took part in an Individual Education Plan meeting at the child’s school (Appendix A.8).

The final part of phase two consisted of gathering the inner circle of mothers in order for the Testimonialistas to come together through their experiences by sharing a memory facilitated through a recollection. A recollection is a component of a Descriptive Review. Descriptive Reviews (DR) are a pedagogical and epistemological practice which was developed at the Prospect School in Bennington, Vermont in the 1960s by Patricia Carini. As part of a DR, educators, and occasionally parents, gather to listen to detailed descriptions of a child/student. These descriptions are based in five areas: physical presence and gestures, disposition and temperament, modes of thinking and learning, connections to others and, strong interests and preferences (Himley & Carini, 2000). These descriptions come from deep observations that are enacted by the reviewer (in most cases a teacher).

A recollection is what Carini calls the gathering of a group of people to remember and share their individual experiences around a guiding question or theme. These are often done by educators prior to engaging in a descriptive review of a child. The recollections are typically used to “alert adults to the inner world of adolescents, of the new life beginning by grounding that experience in our own. The Descriptive Review of an Adolescent is intended to safeguard that interiority and to honor the young person’s sense of self” (Himley, 2011, p. 23). The recollections also serve as a way to ground the participants in the practice of description and to prepare them to hear a very detailed description of a child, free of judgment and pathologizing. As such the recollections usually center on a topic or theme connected to the child or the focusing question being presented.
In this study, the recollections did not focus on a childhood event but rather on a time when each Testimonialista helped her child with a school-based task since the focus of this study is on the experiences of the mother and not on the experiences of the child. Recollections were included in this study in order to give the participants an opportunity to hear their stories alongside each other. Additionally, recollections have an ability to create entry into a community as well as highlight a connection amongst participants (Himley, 2011). There was only one recollection; it is explained in greater detail below. The recollection lasted approximately an hour and a half and was followed by a dinner during which the mothers engaged in collaborative conversation. For this session, the mothers were invited to the researcher’s home.

The use of a multipronged approach (narrative interviews, observations, the gathering of artifacts, the collective recollection following descriptive inquiry) ensured that the data collection was triangulated, allowing for a more secure understanding of the issues being investigated by this study (Maxwell, 2012).

Field notes were written at the end of each meeting in order for me to organize my thinking, reflect on the encounter and identify preliminary themes. This array of materials provided a rich bounty of data on which to base the analysis and interpretation.

Setting

This research project was conducted primarily in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn over the course of seven months spanning the fall of 2016 through the spring of 2017. My connection to this community is both personal and professional. After immigrating to the US at the age of seven, my family lived in this neighborhood. I attended the local elementary and middle schools and was an active member of community activities. Upon earning my master’s degree in education, I returned to this community as a bilingual special education teacher.
Whereas my recruiting efforts originally spanned the entire city, I found the most success recruiting participants from this community, largely in part because I was already a familiar face within the community which allowed for community leaders to advocate for me and my work.

Sunset Park can be described as a neighborhood in flux. Historically an immigrant community established by Scandinavian newcomers, it has remained an immigrant enclave though the country of origin of the immigrants has changed (Hum, 2014). Sunset Park is a working class community with a high concentration of Latinx and Asian immigrants. Fifty-two percent of the population is foreign born, over 19% originating from Mexico – which has the largest Latinx representation by country of origin (King et al., 2015). More than 77% of the residents speak languages other than English at home of which 40% speak Spanish (US Census as cited in Statistical Atlas, 2015). Although the neighborhood is currently fighting back a wave of gentrification being brought on by new developments in Industry City, a great deal of the community continues to live below the poverty level (Hum, 2014; King et al., 2015). This is particularly true for young children as is evident within the data regarding schools (King et al., 2015).

Sunset Park is home to 8 elementary schools, 3 middle schools and 2 high schools (Polesinelli, 2017). All of the schools serve predominantly students from low-income, foreign born and racially, culturally and/or ethnically minoritized households, and as such many qualify as Title 1 schools (United Federation of Teachers, 2017; Zimmer, 2017). All but two of the participating mothers’ EBLAD children attended one of four schools – three elementary and one middle school – in the Sunset Park neighborhood. The two students who were not enrolled in a school within Sunset Park at the time of data collection had at some point in their educational careers attended schools within the community. In those cases, one child attended a public
elementary school in Park Slope, while the other attended a charter school in Carroll Gardens.

Participants

This was a convenience sample, as there is currently not enough data on this population to determine at which point saturation would be reached a priori. Additionally, “the range of narrative possibilities within any group of people is potentially limitless” (Chase, 2010, p. 226). This study was not designed to be exhaustive, but rather to provide an “insight into what is possible and intelligible within a specific social context” (Chase, 2010, p. 226).

The ten participants of this study were selected from a pool of interested Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers within the Sunset Park, Brooklyn community. A first attempt at recruitment was made through the use of flyers posted in community centers, churches, pediatrician’s offices and local businesses. Flyers were also shared through social media and mass emails to varying parent and teacher networks. However, this method proved to be unsuccessful and resulted in zero participants. Community outreach events proved to be much more effective. Participants were recruited at three events: a three-day Mexican consulate event at a community center in the Greenwood Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn, a town hall meeting at a middle school in the Sunset Park, and a parent workshop at a local Catholic church. In the end, nearly forty parents expressed interest in participating in the study, but only twelve met the inclusion criteria.

Mothers were included in this study if they identified as Latinx (or Latino/Latina), spoke Spanish in the home, identified their home language as usually Spanish and had a child enrolled in grades two, three, four, five or six who was identified as an English Language Learner (ELL) with a dis/ability label. Mothers that identified their home language as English and mothers of children also identified as students with an interrupted formal education (SIFE) were specifically
excluded. All qualifying participants were invited to participate. Although twelve participants were enrolled, two were lost when I followed up.

The ten women who took part in the study represent a range of experiences. Table 1 presents their demographic information: their nationality/country of origin, their age, marital status, number of children they have, how many of them have individual education plans, their education level and the time they have lived in the US.

Table 1: Maternal background information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th># of Children</th>
<th># of Children w/IEPs</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
<th>Time in US (in years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlota</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>College</td>
<td>25+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paty</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4; 2 in Mx, 2 in US</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prof. degree</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elodia</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Ecuadorian</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6th grade</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5; 1 deceased</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>15+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Primary school</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmela</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 (1 decertified)</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hi School (US)</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5th grade</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 All names have been changed to a pseudonym of the participants choosing.
6 A shaded row denotes that that mother is a part of the Testimonialistas.
Table 2 presents information on the child who qualified their mother for inclusion in the study.

Table 2: Background Information for Qualifying Child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Disability classification</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Program model</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlota</td>
<td>Darius</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Speech or Language Impairment (SLI)</td>
<td>Charter ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paty</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Learning Disability (LD)</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>12:1:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elodia</td>
<td>Alexis</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hearing Impairment (HI)</td>
<td>Public MS</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Maria Teresa</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>Bil. ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carmela</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>LD/SLI</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosario</td>
<td>Caitlin</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>SLI</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sara</td>
<td>Robert</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>LD</td>
<td>Public ES</td>
<td>ICT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phases two of the study focused on the experiences of the Testimonialistas; consisting of three of the ten phase one participants. The Testimonialistas grouping (which was like a focus group, but were treated differently, according to testimonios’ and Carini’s epistemologies) was developed in order to explore more deeply themes and ideas that had arisen in phase one (Englander, 2012). Participant selection for phase two was intentional and purposive (Polkinghorne, 2005). Mothers for phase two were selected based on their enthusiasm for discussing their children’s education and willingness to share further. Attention was also given to their and their children’s demographic data, which ensured that the participants were representative of the overall sample. The mother of a fifth grader and a second grader were
included because it reflected the two most popular grades in the sample. Additionally, two of the mothers had only completed primary school, since this was representative of the sample. Four of the ten mothers were invited to participate, three accepted. Using three of the five descriptive review headings developed by Carini as guides, I present a description of each Testimonialistas that is free of judgment:

**Ana - Physical Presence and Gestures:** Ana is a small and midly full-figured woman. She has fair skin and medium length, light brown hair that she regularly wears up. She dresses in very boxy clothing that conceals her figure: oversized hoodies, slacks and work boots. Her clothing is often part of a dark neutral color palate with the exception of a red parka. She is very soft-spoken, I regularly had to ask her to speak up during one on one conversations, in order to make sure the recorder would pick her up. **Disposition and temperament:** When she laughs she exudes a very youthful and feminine giggle. When she is sad or upset she tends to touch her face and cover her mouth as if she’s telling a secret. When she cries, she wipes the tears before they reach her cheek. Her overall body language is very insular/protective – she speaks quietly, makes herself small, she doesn’t carry many belongings with her and when she does she keeps them close to her. She does not to take up much space. She tries to present herself as a very happy person and her life as very serene. When she’s around her children she is very even tempered. One cannot tell outright from her behavior if she feels stress or frustration. She never raises her voice. She often speaks using diminutive terms. **Connections to others:** While she does not volunteer much information, she is always open when asked a follow up question. She answers questions honestly and frankly, when she doesn’t want to talk about something she often repeats the phrase “no quiero recordar” [*I don’t want to remember*] but still proceeds to share. She believes that if she doesn’t talk about something, it isn’t real. At the end of one particularly
emotional conversation she appeared to be angry with me for making her remember, even though I had only asked a benign follow-up question: how did you learn to text “by chance”? She is a very private person who lives her life with a code of solitude: “me reservo lo mío” [I keep my things to myself]. Lastly, she speaks very positively of her children, especially María Teresa. At home, she is very patient and attentive to her children’s needs often asking them if the need anything “una meriendita” [a little snack], “una agüita” [a little water]. She also engaged in projects with them; during one household observation she was helping her children build Paper Mache Easter baskets using household items.

**María - Physical Presence and Gestures:** María is a short, medium-build woman. She has an olive skin tone and wavy, medium length, dark hair. She dresses in clothing that conforms to her shape: soft cotton tops and jeans or slacks. Her clothing is often part of a varied color palate; she wears a lot of blues, purples, reds and white. She walks very quickly and purposefully. Her tone of voice is even but when she gets excited she raises her voice, the ends of her sentences are higher pitched and she engages her hands. **Disposition and temperament:** When she laughs she has a guttural, almost belly laugh that is infections. When she is sad or upset she tends to sink into her seat and cocks her head to one side. When she cries, her voice changes and sounds deeper, heavier. Crying often seems to catch her by surprise as she is often scrambling for tissues in her bag as tears stream down her face. However, she is able to readily access her emotions and seems at ease with crying. Often when she is done, she sighs, almost as if to communicate relief. She believes in “llorar para desahogar” [crying for relief]. She answers questions openly and often speaks in stories or events. By the nature of her son’s Justin’s disability, she has become a very precise planner always making sure that her schedule is in keeping with what she told him to expect. **Connections to others:** María makes an effort to other
women. She was the only participant who brought someone with her to any of the interviews. While I expected this to result in more muted conversations, it did not. She brought her close friend Jessenia, “ella es la que me apoya” [she is the one who supports me] and “me comprende” [understands me], to one session. She also brought her mother to another session because even though she is binational she “ayuda” [helps] and “apoya mucho” [offers a lot of supports]. It seems as though she is transparent with people she trusts. When her mother is in town, she enlists her help with household tasks so that she can focus more on the children and for educational supports for Justin (her mother is a retired teacher). She speaks very positively of her children, but there is a sense of tiredness when she talks about them. However, at home, she is energetic, collected and very attentive to her children’s social-emotional needs. As soon as they get home from school she engages them in play and talks to them about their day.

**Paty - Physical Presence and Gestures:** Paty is a petite woman with a thin to medium-build. She has tan skin although her face has some red/pink undertones. When we met she had shoulder length dark brown hair, which she cut into a medium-length bob during phase two of the study. We often met after she had come home from work, so she was usually dressed in a shirt and pant uniform reminiscent of a hotel maid or a home health aid. When she had not been working she wore casual yet tailored clothing – button shirts, cardigans and slacks. She would also wear deep red lipstick. Paty was one of the loudest participants. She often spoke authoritatively and fast. She has a very particular accent that reminds me of the way Cantinflas used to talk; with intermittent high-pitched sounds that don’t necessarily follow any pattern. Her body seems to always be in motion even when she’s sitting down. **Disposition and temperament:** When she laughs she has a very open mouth laugh, and a twinkle in her eye. She laughs at herself easily. However, she also has a lot of self-doubt. After answering questions regarding
Dan’s education, she would often end the statement by saying “no sé si hago bien o hago mal” [I don’t know if what I’m doing is right or wrong] and shrugged her shoulders. She would also often seek approval by asking “¿qué piensa usted maestra?” [what do you think teacher?] Paty also views herself as a fighter – she is constantly “peleando por mis hijos” [fighting for [her] children]. For the most part, Paty comes across as a happy, jovial and loud person. However, when she is upset her face gets very red and her voice softens. When she cries, she wipes the tears with her bare hands, in a brushing motion. Connections to others: In conversation Paty often seeks physical contact. She touches a hand or gestures in the direction of the listener. Paty is an incredibly open person, she is very honest and frank. She often can answer multiple questions in just one narrative and can speak for minutes on end. She is an engaging storyteller. However, as mentioned above, she frequently seeks affirmation from the listener. Lastly, she speaks very truthfully about her children, especially Dan. She acknowledges that she treats Dan differently than his sister Tanya, in part because he is a boy and in part because he pushes back more. While she engages with her children, she does so while also managing the household – She is often in the kitchen yelling over at Dan “¿terminaste de leer?” [did you finish reading?] “¿terminaste la tarea?” [Did you finish the homework?] and “apaga el teléfono” [turn off the phone]. Paty is also very concerned with taking care of others; at every visit she would offer me a bottle of water, a snack or would invite me to stay for dinner.

Even though all three of the Testimonialistas were different in terms of personalities and demeanor, they came together to form a diverse and dynamic representation of a community with shared experiences.

Data Collection

The purpose of this research is not abstraction or generalization, but extended, active, layered, perhaps intersubjective engagement with others […] Thus the processes, by
forgoing prediction and explanation and judgment, produce a context of meaning and
significance for a different aim: to recognize and remember and revalue the richness and
complexity of human beings.

(Himley & Carini, 2000, p. 129)

The focus of this study was first and foremost to center the lived experiences and the
narratives of the mothers, as such their testimonios were central to this study. A variety of
interview methods (open-ended interviews, structured interviews, and Participatory rank
methodology, more on this later) were used in order to elicit narratives, but also to help the
discourse move beyond the joys of motherhood into the unfiltered reality. The configuration of
processes enacted in this study relate back to the ideology and practices enacted by the
descriptive inquiry process established by Patricia Carini at the Prospect School (Himley, 2011;
Himley & Carini, 2000). While major tenets of the descriptive process such as observations and
recollections were included, the processes, which were developed as a way to understand
children, were not enacted in their entirety. However, the philosophical stance behind them
served as a guide for developing the data collections described here.

**One-on-one Interviews**

The narratives for this study were elicited primarily through the use of narrative
interviews. Narrative interviews were used as the primary mode of collection as a way to counter
the stories that are currently being crafted using only the quantitative data that currently
permeates education/al research. Narrative interviews allow for an in-depth understanding of a
phenomena by giving participants an opportunity to join the discourse, while enabling
researchers to ensure that clarity is maintained throughout the process (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

The data for this study was gathered primarily through the use of semi-structured and
narrative interviews. Narrative interviews have been shown to “generate detailed accounts rather
than brief answers and general statements” (Riessman, 2008, p. 23). Additionally, semi-
structured interviews “are well suited for the exploration of the perceptions and opinions of respondents regarding complex and sometimes sensitive issues and enable probing for more information and clarification of answers” (Barriball & While, 2013, p. 330). Similar to recollections in which the speaker is in control of what will be shared and to what extent, semi-structured narrative interviews also allow for a potential redistribution of power by allowing the participants to determine the direction of the interviews. According to Riessman (2008) “[g]iving up the control of a fixed interview format” can result in feelings of uncertainty but it also “encourages greater equality in the conversation” which can then lead to “[g]enuine discoveries about a phenomenon” (p. 24).

In phase one, ten participants took part in one interview and six participants took part in two interviews (see Table 1). The first interview in the study consisted of both a brief family inventory which collected demographic information about each participant and their family, as well as open-ended questions about their identity as a mother, the role of language inside and outside of their home and their relationship to their child’s school (Appendix A.1). The second interview asked them open-ended questions about their child, their experiences mothering that child and the role of language and dis/ability within their lives (Appendix A.2). Both sets of interviews also included probing questions in order to elicit richer responses. Each interview took on average 30-45 minutes and was held no more than two weeks apart, depending on participant availability.

Phase two consisted of four individual ethnographic interviews (see Table 2). Each interview was guided by a theme:

#3-Motherhood & Dis/ability,

#4-Life in Mexico,
#5-Struggles of Motherhood, and

#6-Motherhood and Language (Appendix A.3-A.6).

There was a seventh interview that did not fall into a chronological order: the pre and post- IEP meeting interview. This interview was centered on the mother’s expectations of, and the lived realities of, IEP meetings.

These short interviews would take place shortly before and after each family’s meeting, at different points in the school year, and were on average 10-15 minutes long (Appendix A.7). In the end, the Testimonialistas took part in seven interviews across both phase one and two.

The third interview, Motherhood & Dis/ability, consisted of questions grounded in ideas of motherhood and dis/ability. Additionally, participants were asked to define three terms/ideas: mother, mother to a child with a dis/ability, mother to a bilingual child. This was followed by open-ended questions about their journey through motherhood, their life after their child was diagnosed with a dis/ability and their perceptions of their child in relation to other children (Riessman, 2008).

The fourth interview, Life in Mexico, was grounded in the participants’ experiences as immigrants. They were asked to discuss their move to the United States – the process and the motivations. They were also asked to imagine how their lives would have been different in their country of origin – with a particular focus on their capacity as a mother, their child’s dis/ability, bilingualism and overall educational trajectory (Riessman, 2008). Lastly, the mothers were also asked to talk about their own mothers and the way that their mothers manifest themselves in their own experiences as mothers.

The fifth interview, Struggles of Motherhood, consisted of two parts. The first part involved the use of participatory rank method (PRM) and the second part involved one open-
ended question reflecting on the topics/ideas that arose from the PRM task (Ager, Stark, Sparling, & Ager, 2010)\textsuperscript{38}. PRM is described in further detail below.

The sixth interview, Motherhood and Language, was dedicated to the mother’s experiences as Spanish-speakers in the US. Questions for this interview focused on their ability to access resources and spaces both for themselves and for their children as monolingual Spanish-speakers (Riessman, 2008).

Another interview was conducted with each of the three focus children (Appendix A.8). This interview was designed to get the children’s perspectives on the role their mother played in their education, the ways in which they feel supported and the ways in which they feel their mothers struggle to support them (Poole & Lamb, 1998).

**Participatory Rank Method**

Participatory rank method is a methodology similar to pile sorting that is traditionally used within the field of public health. Pile sorting is a qualitative participatory method that is often used in anthropological studies in order to identify themes (G. W. Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Pile sorting is also used within the sciences to understand “the needs and perceptions of the target audience” (Cambell, 1999; Quintiliani, Campbell, Haines, & Webber, 2008, p. 1).

Participatory rank method (PRM) incorporates pile sorting and provides more opportunities for meaning-making (Brewer, 2002; G. W. Ryan, Nolan, & Yoder, 2000). PRM is more appealing because it is rooted in three components (Pile, Rank and Meaning) rather than two (Pile and Sort). Meaning making was crucial to this study in order to understand the effect that the pile topics and their ranking had on the participant.

According to Ager, Stark, Sparling and Ager:
PRM is a participatory method designed to provide detailed and elaborated information in response to ONE key, framing question. It is vital that this question is both SPECIFIC enough to direct discussion towards the issues relevant to the assessment, but OPEN enough to encourage a full range of responses. (2010, p. 2) PRM is typically used to assess humanitarian emergencies and is often used alongside “other measures such as key informant interviews” (Ager et al., 2010, p. 2; Findley et al., 2012).

Additionally, the process traditionally takes place in a group setting. However, the group approach was modified in the interest of privacy. Participants were interviewed individually as is typical of the pile sorting method.

As part of this study, each Testimonialista was given a minimum of three minutes to explore and list all of her responsibilities, then she was asked to rank these by order of importance. Although the mothers were not explicitly asked to explain the list or the rank, they all volunteered this information. Secondly, each Testimonialista was given an additional three minutes (as a minimum) to explore and list all of her worries and concerns. They were then asked to organize this list in order of intensity from most concerning to least. Lastly, she was asked to talk about the things that worry her and how those impact her abilities and experience as a mother. Probing questions were asked regarding the child’s dis/ability, bilingualism and overall education, when needed.

PRM was used in this study in order to help the mothers name and explore the different stressors that had either been mentioned or alluded to in previous interviews (ie. spousal abuse, health concerns, financial limitations). This was done in order to understand what impact external factors have on their ability to engage or participate in their child’s education.

Observations
There were three observations included as part of this study. All three observations took place in the mother and child’s home. Two observations were unstructured and one consisted of a focused-task assigned to the participant and their child.

The first observation was conducted during the weekday for the two hours after the child arrived home from school. A second observation took place on the weekend for two hours during a time of the participants’ choosing. The third observation, which consisted of observing the mother and child engaged in a game, took place immediately following the second unstructured home observation.

For the third observation the pairs were given a choice of two games: Sketch Artist and Are You an X or a Y? Sketch Artist was a low-impact physical task in which one player had to describe an object (which I provided) to the other [the listener] without naming it. The listener in turn would draw the item using the description as a guide. The listener then had to guess what the object was. The mother and child each had a turn being the listener. Are You an X or a Y? was a mental game in which one player had to think of a person, animal or thing which the second player had to guess by asking questions. Picture cards where available in the event that a player needed support. The games were chosen because they offered opportunities for the players to engage in rich dialogue and they met varying accessibility points across cognitive and physical function. This third focused observation took approximately 10 minutes.

According to Carini, “[t]o describe a person, child or adult, requires a certain humility. However full and embedded in respectful observation, a description is always partial. Nothing human is set in stone. The person described is true to her own self, recognizable to herself, in terms and ways accessible only to her, even as she is also changing” (Himley, 2011, p. 20). Traditional observations within the descriptive process are conducted in order to give a more
complete presentation of a child or individual. However, because the child/ren in question were not the focus of the study, the headings traditionally used within descriptive inquiry were reduced to the headings that focused on the child’s language practices and their interactions with their mother. In this way, the observations could be organized loosely under the headings “modes of thinking and learning” and “connections to other people.” These modifications are within the scope of descriptive inquiry given that “[t]he headings [were developed in a way that was] deliberately broad. What particularizes them are the descriptors of what a [researcher] might include within its boundaries to prompt thought, reflection, recollection, and further observation of the person being described” (Himley, 2011, p. 20). These observations were conducted in order to complement the narratives shared by the mothers in regards to the way that language influences their relationship with their child, and in some cases the way that dis/ability labels also impact those relationships.

The observations focused on the natural interactions between mother and children, with a particular focus on the role of language within these interactions. The observations were recorded using field notes which were gathered in a double-entry style with one side recording all observed events and the other allowing for space for questions, comments and reflections that arose at the time or upon later review (Ballenger, 2014; Hellesø, Melby, & Hauge, 2015; International & Mack, 2005; Maxwell, 2012; G. W. Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

**Collective Discussion**

The final mode of data collection used in this study consisted of gathering the Testimonialistas for a collective session. While the design of this study was heavily dependent on individual narratives, a group session was included for its ability to both expand, clarify and reaffirm the data that was presented during individual interviews (Lederman, 1990). Collective
discussions, such as focus groups, have been shown to be incredibly beneficial for qualitative studies because they facilitate the examination of similar themes in a group setting, allow for the exploration of collective experiences and can serve as a therapeutic means for building cohesion and community across/within the participant pool (Connaway, 1996; Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008; Lederman, 1990; Rabiee, 2004).

The collective discussion took place during the final data collection event in the study. The Testimonialistas and I gathered together for a two-part session: a collective recollection and a collective interview. During the first part, the three mothers and I took turns sharing our recollections (I describe it below). For the second part, I asked semi-structured interview questions that were meant to elicit responses from all of the participants. The questions centered on the types of school-based supports that the mothers have available to them, as well as the types of supports to which they would like to have access (Appendix A.9). The session concluded with participant directed conversations over dinner. The entirety of this session was recorded and transcribed.

**Recollection**

While the second half of the collective recollection session centered on the use of semi-structured interviews similar to those employed during the individual interviews, the first half was grounded in the use of recollections, again using the Carini descriptive review method, which serves as both a point of entry and a means for community building. Recollections are “stories of experience” that are shared in a group setting (Rodgers, 2011, p. 213). According to Himley (2011), recollections are valuable because it “is moving to hear stories that all bear on a common experience. The differences and complementarities give voice to the diversity of our humanness and to our common human ground” (p.60). Additionally, stories “illuminate the
thickness, selectivity, and complexity with which each person (and all persons) craft the stuff of a life” into their own personal narrative (Carini, 2001, p. 2). The stories shared in recollections offer opportunities for growth for both the listener and the teller. Carini writes that

[w]e are all story weavers and tellers. We all recognize the sustaining and healing and hurting power of story. […] To hear another’s story with open heart and mind, to receive it as a gift, uplifts both teller and the one honored to hear it. To hear one story is to be reminded of others, a spiraling of stories spinning across centuries, and through them, to catch glimpses of the complexities, time immemorial, of living a human life.

Himley, 2011, p. 60

Recollections also offer a collection of strangers an opportunity to find connections among them while valuing and honoring their differences. Giving each participant an opportunity to enter into the collective as a part of it rather than as an outsider (Carini, 2001). It is in these experiences that communities are constructed.

As with all of the components of the descriptive process, “the process for convening a Recollection as a constructed conversation, like other Prospect processes, is governed by guidelines intended to ensure that all participating can be assured of respect, and that their stories will be held in strictest confidence” (Himley, 2011, p. 58). As such, recollections are typically developed in advance to the gathering in order to allow the participant time to decide on which memory to share as well as the details they would like to include and structure they would like follow. All of the participants are provided with the same prompt/guide and are allotted the same amount of time for sharing (Himley, 2011). There is also a structure to be followed during the session itself.

Prior to each participant sharing their recollection, there was a few minutes allotted for introductions after which the Chairperson (in this case the investigator) reviews the order of the session and the need for confidentiality.

Following introductions, the Chairperson reviews the guidelines sent in advance with attention to the theme of the stories that will be told and the expectation that hearing
stories on the same theme told from each tellers’ perspective will widen and deepen its meaning. The Chair reiterates the confidentiality rule: that the only person who has permission to retell or discuss a story told is the person who told it in the first place. With that single exception, all stories are to remain within the group privileged to hear them. The Chair explains that the story telling begins with a volunteer in the expectation that the first story will invite another, followed by yet another, until all the stories are told. The stories are heard seriatim without comment, questions, or cross-talk. To ensure that all tellers have equal time for their stories, it is usual to assign a time-keeper to keep the session on track.

The Chair encourages participants to keep notes of recurring themes and also complementarities and divergences among the stories. When all the stories are told, the Chairperson draws forward main themes, with attention to points of convergence and divergence, and invites participants to join in this process. Following this pulling together, and as time permits, participants are invited to comment to what the session makes them think about. The session closes with a final reminder from the Chair of the confidentiality of the stories told.

Himley, 2011, p. 60

While it is not mentioned in the previous quote, this process also contains the option for a group reflection on a word in order to help center the group on the focus of the session (Himley, 2011).

For this study the participants first engaged in the reflection of the word “apoyar” [to support]. After taking turns sharing “phrases, words, and images evoked by the word” the investigator gathers all of the thoughts shared into “threads” which are shared back with the group (Himley, 2011, p. 42). The group then proceeds to engage in the recollection process. As is standard procedure, the participants in my study were given the prompt two weeks prior to the gathering and it was revisited at the beginning of the session. The recollection prompt was based on a moment during which each mother had attempted to support her child’s learning (Appendix C). Given that this was a new process for the participants, the investigator shared her recollection first, after which each participant volunteered to go next and so on.
Table 3: Summary of Research Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers</td>
<td>One-on-one interviews • Pre- and post- IEP meeting interviews • Collective interview with the Testimonialistas • Recollection</td>
<td>Thematic narrative analysis of individual interviews Thematic narrative analysis of Testimonialista interviews and recollections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of emergent bilingual children labeled dis/abled?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?</td>
<td>Home observations • One-on-one interviews • Pre- and post- IEP meeting interviews • Mother-child game observation • Collection of artifacts (IEPs, home-school communication, homework, etc.)</td>
<td>Thematic analysis of observations audio and field notes Social semiotic multimodal analysis of observation field notes Triangulation of parent, child and collective interviews, field notes and artifacts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis:

Two different types of data were collected through this project and as such two different methods of analysis were used to interpret the data: content/narrative analysis and semiotic multimodal analysis. Underlying the use of these methods is again my core belief in, and long standing use of, descriptive inquiry, which states that one, must first describe before attempting to interpret. This value of description is grounded in the core tenet that all acts are intentional and as such offer insight into the maker vis-à-vis the participant (Himley & Carini, 2000). Added to this is the epistemological stance that narratives within the context of this study are also understood under the framing of a testimonio that views storytelling as a form of active liberation and opposition against systemic oppression.
Narrative analysis

The interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and interpreted using content and narrative analysis (Riessman, 1993). The interviews were coded and interpreted with the guidance of thematic and structural analysis (Riessman, 2008). Additionally, field notes were taken during the interviews and memos were written following each interview. The goal was to provide both a detailed analysis of crucial sections of the narratives collected while also identifying, analyzing and describing potential points that may lend themselves to points of connection among the participants collectively.

The narrative analysis process followed an organic structure: the audio was listened to and/or the transcripts reviewed multiple times with each session being guided by a different purpose/goal. The first round of analysis consisted of reviewing the audio and transcripts in order to ensure that they were accurate and matched. The second round of analysis consisted of listening to the audio and reviewing the transcripts with a set of predetermined codes: language, dis/ability, school/learning, and motherhood. Interview segments that matched these codes were marked and collected in individual “interview notes” documents that were developed for each participant. The third round of analysis was dedicated to free listening during which interesting comments, contradictions or inconsistencies made by the participants were noted and marked.

Additionally, a list of inductive codes was created for each interview (ie. how a participant would use the word “mother”). These codes were then used to guide subsequent reviews of the transcripts. Lastly, the findings of individual interviews were collected and organized into thematic sections. The deductive codes were reduced to three: language, dis/ability and motherhood. The inductive codes were then organized into themes that could be discussed/presented under the aforementioned deductive codes. Eventually the transcripts and
the codes were transferred to Dedoose, a password protected and encrypted online data analysis platform. Subsequent reviews of the data led to the creation of multiple mother and child code sets. Field notes were also taken after every analysis session in order to make note of patterns that were arising as well as to track themes that needed further exploration.

This sequence was followed for both phase one and phase two audio. Phase one interviews were analyzed in the winter of 2016-2017, while phase two audio was analyzed during the summer-fall of 2017. Phase one data was revisited at later dates as needed.

**Social semiotic multimodal analysis**

The observations were audio recorded, transcribed and then analyzed using social semiotic multimodal analysis (Hodge & Kress, 1988; Kress, 2010). This method focuses on how individual uses all of the resources available to them to communicate and make meaning (Hodge & Kress, 1988). In turn, this methodology was used in order to develop an understanding of how the participants used their bodies, language, and physical space to communicate and make meaning. Additionally, by analyzing the observations through a semiotic multimodal lens particularities that relate to ideologies and power relations could be identified (Kress, 2010).

Field notes documented the space in which the observations took place, the individuals that were present, how they used the space, how they interacted with each other, the oral languages that were used by each speaker, as well as the physical gestures and signs that were used as either primary means of communication or to supplement communication. The notes were also used to keep track of questions and noticings that arose during the observation. The observations were also audio recorded and transcribed. As previously stated, the transcriptions were reviewed along with the audio to ensure consistency and accuracy. The transcripts, notes and audio were
then reviewed using four deductive codes: language, mode of communication, nature of communication, activity.

Additionally, photos were taken of any artifacts that served as focal objects during the observation such as books read, homework completed and pictures drawn. Secondary reviews of the notes, audio and transcripts were used to identify inductive codes (ie. the ways in which technology was used). The findings from these reviews were then used to support findings that arose from the interview data.

Validity

Validity in this study is ensured in three ways.

First, in an effort to avoid researcher bias, the lenses that underlie this investigation have been introduced within the theoretical framework chapter in order to provide some transparency regarding my positionality and approach to the data (Maxwell, 2012). Additionally, potential findings were presented and work-shopped during collective writing group sessions in order to ensure that the conclusions being made adequately and convincingly matched the data being sampled.

Secondly, attempts to ensure validity (and reduce researcher bias) were also made by ensuring that the data collection was rich and reflective of “intensive, long-term involvement” (Maxwell, 2012, p. 110). Multiple types of data were collected for this study – individual interviews, group interviews, field notes, audio recorded observations and the collection of artifacts– over a period of eight months. As a result of a dense data collection process, it was possible to be judicious and selective of the conclusions that would be presented. For example, conclusions were only included in the findings if they were supported by more than one type of
data or across multiple data collection sessions (ie. an interview and an observation but more commonly if the phenomenon was evident in the data collected from multiple participants).

Finally, this study was composed of data collection methods and tools that had been used and validated in prior studies with consistent and reliable results. No new survey, interview or observation methods or tools were being tested in this study.

It is important to note that while external generalizability was not a goal of this study, the aforementioned measures also ensure that generalizability to the context described was attained.

**Limitations and Strengths**

Limitations for this study may arise from the small sample size (10 participants), the locality of the study (New York City) and the attention to one specific ethnic group (Latinx mothers) that originated primarily from one country (nine of the ten participants were Mexican nationals). While a study of this nature will garner some insights to the experiences of the participants, those experiences cannot be perceived as universal for participants with similar backgrounds or features. As such this study is not an end point but rather an initial point of inquiry regarding the needs and assets of this community.

However, the strengths of this study are grounded in these same factors. By focusing in on a small group of Latinx families, the study is able to delve deeply into their experiences and as such provide a rich a description. Secondly, by narrowing in on one ethnic group, attention is given to a community that is often minoritized and disenfranchised. Additionally, Latinxs are the largest growing population (both US and foreign-born) making this study crucial to the continued success of public education. Latinxs also comprise the largest subset of students in New York City, which has the largest school district in the nation, and as such it is an oft-studied site because it offers the opportunity to understand the needs of and the services offered to a
diverse population. Also, by sharing the experiences of predominantly Mexican women space
and attention is given to a subpopulation that is being silenced through mass deportations by an
increasingly oppressive and anti-immigrant federal government.

The small sample size allows for the development of more rich and fruitful relationships
with the participants that result in in-depth understandings of their experiences (Crouch &
McKenzie, 2006; Dworkin, 2012; Marshall, 1996; Sandelowski, 1995). The locality of the study
allows for the data to be situated in a particular context as well as an understanding of the
educational and social landscape of a community and increases the probability of gaining access
to participants (Symon & Cassell, 2012). The focus on one specific ethnic group allows for the
identification of themes, while also highlighting points of dissonance that are reflective of
individual life experiences (Symon & Cassell, 2012). It is also important to note that as Latinxs,
all of the participants are representative of the largest minoritized ethnic group in New York City
as well as in the United States. Additionally, Latinxs originating from Mexico represent the
largest foreign-born demographic in the US and as such their experiences are incredibly relevant
in any effort to enact policies that will garner the greatest impact both for parents and their
children (Lopez & Dockterman, 2011; Pew Research Center, Hispanic Trends, 2015).

Lastly, the greatest strength of this study lies in its specificity and ethnographic showcasing.
Given its qualitative nature, this study is not meant to be generalizable, but rather to give context
to the quantitative data that currently drives most education policy. It is because these narratives
have not been considered or included with the same regard as statistical data that there continues
to be a lack of understanding of the educational and linguistic needs of EBLADs within (and
outside of) public schools and an ongoing misrepresentation of EBLAD families within the
literature (Ijalba, 2015b; Westby, 2009).
PART II

FINDINGS

The findings are organized into three chapters. Each chapter will address one of the following topics: dis/ability, language and motherhood. Each chapter is organized into two sections; the first is a brief review of relevant data and the second are the findings related to that topic. Within the findings chapters I will use the mothers’ own words to answer each of the research questions:

1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of emergent bilingual children labeled dis/abled?
2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?

When presenting the data, I will highlight emotions and ideologies that were shared or expressed by most, if not the entire, cohort, while using individual experiences from the focal mothers to illustrate the complexities of this system from the mother’s perspective. While there were many findings that arose from this study, this manuscript will focus on the aforementioned three.

Lastly, in order to discuss the values, perspectives and ideologies that mothers of EBLADs (MoEBLADs) hold regarding their child’s bilingualism and dis/ability, I have chosen to showcase their words rather than mine. In keeping with this goal, all of the findings chapters will present the ways in which mothers talk about dis/ability, language and motherhood using their own words; translations have been bracketed.

This first chapter, chapter four, will focus on the dis/ability labels that EBLADs are given and the way these impact their lives and the lives of their mothers.
Chapter IV: Dis/ability Labels and the Lives of Emergent Bilinguals

Introduction

Before presenting the complex ways in which mothers navigate dis/ability discourse and special education, it is necessary to understand how they and their children are framed within the literature of the past and present. This brief review of the literature will first present the ways in which EBLADs (most frequently referred to as ELLs with disabilities) are discussed. This scholarship about and around this population focuses heavily on over-representation, inappropriate diagnosis and dis-proportionality as they relate to issues of language and poor diagnostics. However, notably absent is talk of the role of language after the diagnosis or classification.

EBLADs’ family lives and their relationships with their mothers – both social-emotional and academic relations – are often missing from the literature. Instead, the most common mention of mothers centers around the need for schools to provide them with services such as training workshops were they are taught new mathematical concepts and/or literacy skills. This presentation of mothers frames them as empty vessels. Their voices and their experiences are not present; rather, they are noticeably absent.

Relevant Literature: EBLADs and Their Mothers

In order to understand the experiences of the mothers who participated in this study, it is important to consider the way in which their children including (their dis/ability labels and their linguistic practices) are framed within current educational literature. Educational research does not exist in a vacuum; it shapes future research, educational policies, school-home interactions and pedagogical practices.
Emergent Bilinguals Labeled as Dis/abled

The literature on Emergent bilinguals labeled as dis/abled (EBLADs) has been in development since the 1980s when linguists like Cummins (1983) and Bruck (1978) began to examine the implications of monolingual versus bilingual program models on the education of “exceptional minority students” (Cummins, 1983, p.374). Since then, countless academic papers and books have been published with the intent to improve the education of this particular population. The recognition of the particular needs of this population has resulted in a litany of scholarship focused on the identification, categorization and instruction of EBLADs, with a great deal of academic energy taking aim at reducing the number of emergent bilinguals (EB) in special education (Cartledge, Kea, Watson, & Oif, 2016; Cartledge et al., 2016; DeMatthews, Edwards Jr., & Nelson, 2014; Fernandez & Inserra, 2013; Ford, 2012; E. Garcia, 2015; Kangas, 2014; Lerma & Stewart, 2016; Rueda & Windmueller, 2006; Sullivan, 2011). Although emergent bilinguals do face an increased risk of being placed in special education when compared to their non-EB counterparts (Fernandez & Inserra, 2013), this emphasis on overrepresentation and disproportionality focuses so much on keeping EB out of special education that it ignores the question of how to address their needs once they are in special education. Additionally, of the studies that do focus on the needs of these students, many attempt to address academic need or English language learning needs rather than addressing both needs simultaneously (Dray & Hickman, 2014; Hibel & Jasper, 2012; Kangas, 2014; Linn & Hemmer, 2012). This fragmented approach may be a consequence of studies that aim to meet the needs of children without speaking about children, their language practices or their experiences within a variety of linguistically varied learning spaces.
While the term EBLAD is grounded in a social justice approach to education, the field that has emerged in order to service these students is not\textsuperscript{40}. Although better terminology has emerged (see García, Kleifgen, & Falchi, 2008, and Harris, 1995), more often than not, these students continue to be addressed as English language learners and students with disabilities. The term “English language learner (ELL)” persists because it quickly identifies a need: the need to learn English, while the term “students with disabilities (SWD)” serves as an instantaneous diagnostic. Due to the entrenched nature of labeling and sorting in the United States educational system, these labels will be used within this section when presenting the current literature—not in support of them but rather as a means to mark how these deficit-based models continue to shape the current discourse, research and educational approaches.

Data that present how many EBLADs there are in the United States is hard to access. According to Watkins and Liu (2013),

[d]etermining the exact number of ELLs with disabilities nationwide is a challenge because there is a limited amount of publicly-available information on students who are both ELLs and have an identified disability. Estimates may differ depending on the purpose for which the information was collected, and the way in which the information was collected. For example, the Office of Special Education Programs reports on the number of students in special education for ages birth through 21 who were also limited English proficient (LEP). This information is included in federally mandated child count data provided annually by schools. However, it is reported by school special education staff and not by ESL or bilingual education departments, and thus may not reflect the total number of enrolled ELLs. In addition, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) data identify the number of students of various racial/ethnic groups in each disability category, but do not break out the data for ELLs. It is possible to find national data on the number of Hispanic students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, for example, but not on the number of Hispanic ELLs in this disability category.

Additionally, a great deal of the data that is collected and presented addresses race, gender, and socio-economic status, but few report on language because that data is not collected for SWD even when they are identified as EB (Zehler et al., 2003, as cited in Sullivan, 2011). This separation remains true even when the literature is about students who carry both labels. As a
result, there is a lack of consensus as to how many EBLADs are currently enrolled in K-12 public schools in the United States (Liasidou, 2013a; Watkins & Liu, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014). Any data that is offered in an effort to present a national picture is based on inferences and a piecemeal construction (Goldring, Gray, & Bitterman, 2013). The reason for this might be that in many communities students who meet the criteria for both types of services ultimately receive services to meet either the needs identified by their EB status or their dis/ability label, but not both (Fetler, 2008; Rinaldi & Samson, 2008). The catalysts for this single-service model approach are limited funding and teacher shortages within the specializations of bilingual education, English as a Second Language (now known as English as a New Language in New York State) and special education (George, 2015; Jacob, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education, 2015). In the end, responses to fiscal and personnel constraints have resulted in the fragmented presentation and servicing of EBLADs. However, some data is available at the local level. For example, New York State reports that 52,890 (21.9%) of the EB enrolled in 2013-2014 were also LAD (New York State Education Department, 2016) and the New York City Department of Education reports that it serviced 36,286 EBLADs during the same academic year (23.3% of NYCDOE’s EB population) (Department of English Language Learners and Student Support, 2015).

Although the presentation of this community in numbers can be very convoluted, one thing about this population is evident: EBLADs represent a heterogeneous group with diverse racial, ethnic, linguistic and migratory backgrounds (Ford, 2012; T. González & Artiles, 2016; T. Gonzalez, Tefera, & Artiles, 2014). However, it is easy to ascertain that large portions of that population are Spanish-speaking Latinx children.
Spanish speakers represent a very large sub-sect of the EB community, accounting for 71% of the current EB population in the US, even though they only account for 20.41% of total enrollment. Within the EB demographic, Latinxs also represent the third largest racial/ethnic group within special education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). According to the Department of Education, of the almost 7 million children who received early intervention and special education services in the 2012-2013 academic year, nearly 1.3 million (18.5%) were Latinxs (Emenheiser, 2014). Lastly, Latinxs are “the numerically largest, rapidly growing, youthful, racial/ethnic group in the United States” (Arredondo, Gallardo-Cooper, Delgado-Romero, & Zapata, 2014; Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2003, as cited in Moreno & Segura-Herrera, 2014, p.35). Armed with this information, it is possible to deduce, although not conclusively, that a substantial portion of the EBLAD population are Spanish-speaking Latinxs.

It is extremely difficult to effectively define who the term EBLAD represents. The complexity of this population – with regards to language, race, nationality and migration – in contrast to the urgency of their academic needs may be part of the reason why so much of the literature focuses more on their identification and education, rather than on their identity and/or experiences (Abedi, 2006; Artiles, 1998; Artiles & Ortiz, 2002; Burr, Haas, & Ferriere, 2015; Fletcher, 2008; Ford, 2012; T. González & Artiles, 2016; Harry, Klingner, Cramer, & Sturges, 2007; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Liasidou, 2012, 2013b; Orosco & O’Connor, 2013; Raj, 2014; Sadowski, O’Neill, & Bermingham, 2014; Sanchez, Parker, Akbayin, & McTigue, 2010; Sullivan, 2011; Sullivan & Bal, 2013; Wang & Woolf, 2016). If the term “English language learner with disabilities” is understood through this lens, it is easy to recognize why it remains so pervasive. Even though it offers a disjointed view of these students, the term is very effective for both policy and research because it immediately gives the reader a sense of place and space.
When the label is seen and used, it immediately grounds the work in the English-speaking academic world, while simultaneously highlighting what the learners supposedly need (to learn English), in contrast with the barrier to achieving this goal (they have a dis/ability). However, this desire for simplicity in the interest of efficiency may also be the reason why so little is written about who these students are outside of the classroom. Nonetheless, policymakers and researchers must understand that in order to better serve EBLADs, one must look beyond their expectations of what they cannot do — learn English, graduate on time, earn high scores on standardized tests, etc. — and instead take a holistic look at their experiences outside of school in order to uncover the abilities they possess.

The need to expand the lens beyond the classroom and into the home is critical because the linguistic choices and subsequent program placements made by schools for EBLADs do not exist in a vacuum. The decisions made within schools by teachers and administrators heavily influence the way children interact with their families and their communities. EBLADs are often placed in more restrictive environments than their non-EB counterparts, have limited or unequal access to general education classrooms and other mainstream settings, and “are more likely to remain in more restrictive classrooms” for the extent of their academic experience (Gonzalez et al., 2014; González & Artiles, 2016; Zhang et al., 2014, p. 119). Latinx students in particular are often placed in self-contained ESL programs before entering special education where they are then placed in self-contained special education classes, ultimately moving from one segregated setting to another (Zhang et al., 2014). Moreover, EBLADs are not only subjected to intellectual and linguistic segregation from their peers, they are also often the subject of physical segregation (T. Gonzalez et al., 2014).
Additionally, while the labels “English Language Learner” and “dis/abled” are ascribed to the singular child, the impact of these labels extend beyond the individual and are also superimposed onto the family. These labels have a particularly profound impact on the parents, especially the mothers. The impact of these labels not only changes the parents’ role in their child’s education, as perceived by the school, but also the way that parents perceive and interact with their child(ren). Given that the focus of this study are the mothers of EBLADs, the subsequent brief review of the literature will address the presentation of the parents of EBLADs.

Mothers in “need” – The deficit framing of MoEBLADs

Latinx mothers of EBLADs (MoEBLADs) lead lives that are often bounded by the oppressive nature of a lower socioeconomic status. This leaves them at the mercy of stereotyping and discriminatory practices, both of which result in a lack of agency and subsequent lack of advocacy on behalf of their children (Aceves, 2014; Cohen, 2013; Montelongo, 2015; Rodriguez, Blatz, & Elbaum, 2013; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Latinx MoEBLADs are a particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable group. According to Cohen (2013), Latinx mothers are unaware of the barriers that they face, be they socioeconomic, racial or linguistic. They also tend to be uneducated at higher rates than other MoEBLADs and may be unaware of the resources available to them. Studies also show that Latinx mothers participate in fewer IEP meetings than Euro-American mothers, have a harder time understanding the IEP/special education process and lack the confidence to communicate their needs (Aceves, 2014; Montelongo, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2013; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Additionally, according to Wolfe and Durán (2013), Spanish-speaking MoEBLADs participate in fewer IEP meetings than their English-speaking counterparts.

Although they are often disenfranchised, Latinx MoEBLADs are overwhelmingly aware of the disconnect between their values and the schools’ values. MoEBLADs express frustrations
with schools that do not respect their cultural values and do not value their voices (Ijalba, 2015b). MoEBLADs also express a desire to be more involved, while feeling ill-informed and wanting the school to provide them with more information and support (Aceves, 2014; Lalvani, 2015; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). MoEBLADs also express feelings of dissatisfaction with schools and school agents, a sentiment that has not changed since the 1980s (Cohen, 2013; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). This is particularly true in relation to the disjointed linguistic practices of the families and the schools. Mothers of EBLADs are often presented in two lights: either as meek and respectful or as dissatisfied yet resilient. According to Cohen (2013) those who voice their dissatisfaction say that it stems from poor communication, language barriers and experiences in which they have been subject to discrimination. These feelings are supported by Montelongo's (2015) findings in which mothers shared that they were aware of the bias against them, while also expressing feelings of frustration with the lack of cultural considerations on the part of the schools. For these mothers, advocating for their children did not feel like a right so much as “a fight” or “a struggle” (Montelongo, 2015). Alternatively, those who can engage sometimes choose to remain quiet out of fear that their interjections will disrupt the process, thus delaying their child’s access to support (Montelongo, 2015).

It is in an effort to alleviate this tension between mothers and schools that researchers make recommendations as to how that knowledge can be transferred to the mothers – through trainings, the use of interpreters, introductions to community organizations, etc. (Aceves, 2014; Ijalba, 2015a; Rodriguez et al., 2013). However, this focus on teaching/training the mothers as a way to impart knowledge rather than asking them to share their knowledge fails to see mothers as equal partners who are experts on their children. Instead, it positions mothers as being in need of an education, which can then influence the way that teachers and other people in positions of
power approach them. Additionally, this focus on information distribution is based on the premise that the reason why mothers do not participate is because they do not know how or even that they can, while ignoring the fact that schools position themselves as the experts and as such do not readily welcome discourse that originates in, or results in, opposition.

The existing power dynamic between schools and mothers allows schools to define parental involvement and as such sets the standard for high or low levels of involvement within a very rigid framework. This framework measures involvement by keeping track of how often mothers are physically present at the school and how vocal they are once they are there (Vandergrift & Greene, 1992).

**Mother’s understandings of their emergent bilingual children’s disability and labels:**

**Overview of Findings**

As previously mentioned, very few researchers—with the exception of Harry and Klingner in collaboration with a few others (2014; 2007; 2006)—have discussed the lives of minoritized children beyond the school, much less centered the experiences of the mothers. In order to expand the current notions regarding these students’ realities, and in order to understand the impact that existing policies and practices have on families, the first set of findings are organized around the perception, values and ideologies that the mothers hold regarding dis/ability. Given the intersectional nature of this study and of the lives of the participants, one can expect to find some overlap between dis/ability findings and findings that relate to the themes of language and motherhood. The findings in this chapter are organized around three subthemes:

1. “MoEBLADs’ ideologies surrounding disability” which will focus on the mothers’ perceptions regarding the origin of the disability, their assertion both to themselves and society
that their child is normal, and their understanding of disability as temporary.

2. “The function of the disability label,” which will look at the ways in which the disability labels serve as both a resource, offering an explanation for a child’s delayed speech as well as a more individualized education

3. “Impact on the lives of MoEBLADs” explores the negative emotional, psychological, physical and social impact that these labels take on the lives of the mothers. The mothers often understand their children’s disability label as a hinderance, leaving mothers feeling worried, uninformed and ill-equipped to meet the needs of their children.
Dis/ability Labels and the Lives of Emergent Bilinguals

MoEBLADs’ ideologies surrounding dis/ability

A mother’s understanding of a disability is heavily colored by her experiences with her children and family. The mothers were curious about the origin of their child’s disability – was it hereditary? Was it an accident? Still they viewed their children as normal and considered both the disability and the label to be temporary—able to be remedied by the service providers, and by God. However, even with hopeful outlooks, the mothers discussed feelings of sadness and concern when their child was diagnosed with a disability. Mothers were also heavily concerned about the stigma that comes with a disability label and found ways to shield their children from it – primarily by keeping the diagnosis a closely guarded secret.

Although the origin of their children’s disability is seldom blamed on a curse, as in the past, the mothers wondered whether their child’s disability was a test from God, due to a genetic condition or illness, an “herencia” from some ancestor, or even an accident.

“Bendita herencia”– Origins of disability

Long gone are the mentions of disability being the result of a hex or curse (Larson, 1998, 1998; Mackelprang & Salsgiver, 2016). But most mothers wonder about its origin. For Nancy, her child’s disability is viewed as “una prueba” [a test] from God:

Ay, dios mío. ¿Qué hago?’ Pues yo siento que es una prueba que tendré que pasar, ’pero no la quiero pasar yo sola, quiero contigo, porque yo sola me vuelvo loca’”.

[Oh, my God. What do I do? Well, I feel like it is a test that I have to pass, ‘but I don’t want to go through it alone, I want it with you, because alone I will go crazy.’]

Nancy believed or that her child’s disability was genetic, from her grandmother. She uses the word “bendita” not as blessed, but as damned:
Cuando me dieron los resultados, yo le dije a mi esposo que me imaginaba que era una herencia de mi abuelita, porque yo recuerdo que mi abuelita era muy joven, y ella ya no veía y ya no oía. Yo le dije, “Bendita herencia de mi abuelita,” porque no me quedó de otra más que decirle eso.

[When I got the results, I told my husband that I imagined that it was an inheritance from my grandmother, because I remember that my grandmother was very young, and she no longer saw and did not hear anymore. I said, “Damned inheritance from my grandmother,” because I had no other option but to say that to him.]

Another mother, Ana, blames her own thyroid condition for her child’s disabilities:

“La doctora me decía que es por los síntomas de la tiroides que yo le pasé”

[The doctor told me that it was because of the thyroid symptoms that I had passed on to her.]

Carlota believed that her child’s special education needs were the result of “un accidente”

[an accident] when the child was younger:

[…] parece que esa fue la reacción, cuando él y yo tuvimos un accidente en la nieve. Caímos y él voló. Se me zafó de mis manos y él voló, y se golpeó la cabeza. De ahí fue la reacción, de que él dejó de hablar.

[...] it seems that was the reaction, when he and I had an accident in the snow. We fell and he flew. He slipped out of my hands and he flew, and hit his head. That's where the reaction came from, that he stopped talking.

Despite the mothers’ wonderings about the origin of their children’s disability, it was surprising that they did not see disability as something their child had, in fact, most claimed that their children were “normal.”

“Una niña normal” – Disability as social construction

It was surprising that half of the group spoke of disability not as something inherently wrong with their child, but rather society’s failure to recognize neurodiversity⁴³, including Ana who, as cited above, was told by a doctor that her daughter’s delays were due to genealogical factors. When asked whether or not they agreed with their child’s disability label, these mothers
responded by affirming that their child was like any other child. In the quotes that follow, the mothers assert that their child(ren) may be “diferentes, pero no es discapacitado” [different but are not disabled] and the child “no está enfermo” [is not sick]. Rather, these children just learn differently, they are simply children who are “más lento” [slower], “no pone atención” [don’t pay attention] and “no entiende” [don’t understand]. Carlota does not believe that her child is disabled, but different:

Yo no creo que nadie sea discapacitado. Tienen cosas diferentes, o--., diferentes, pero no es discapacitado. No creo que haya un solo niño que sea discapacitado.

[I do not think anyone is disabled. They have different things, or--., different, but they are not disabled. I do not think there is a single child who is disabled.]

Both Ana and Sara use the word “normal” to describe their children:

Ana: Ella nació con unos poquitos problemitas [...] es una niña normal, es bien dulce, bien tierna, bien alegre, que todo el tiempo me anda diciendo, “Mamá, mamá, te quiero,” o así, con el papá, o con el niño. Pero ya en la clase, como que no pone atención, como--., no entiende lo que a ella le dicen.

[She was born with a few little problems [...] she is a normal girl, she is very sweet, very tender, very cheerful. All the time she is saying to me, "Mom, mom, I love you", or so, with her dad, or with the boy [her brother]. But in class, it’s like she does not pay attention, like ..., she does not understand what she's being told.]

Sara: Un niño normal. Sí. [...] O sea, que--., pues como todos los niños. Le gusta jugar, comer, dormir, de todo.

[A normal child. Yes. [...] That is, what--., like all children. He likes to play, eat, sleep, everything.]

These mothers believe that their children are not deficient, they are merely different.

María describes how she tells her younger son that his brother is not sick, he merely doesn’t think like him:

Yo trato de explicarle a [su hermano menor] lo que es, que su hermano no está enfermo, sino que no piensa igual que él.

[I try to explain to [his younger brother] what he is, that his brother is not sick, but that he does not think the same as him.]
And Carmela views her son’s disability as within the range of normalcy. He is merely slow, but not disabled:

Siento que hay niños que aprenden más rápido, otros más lento. En el caso de él, aprendió a hablar más lento. Pero eso no significa que tenga una discapacidad.

[I feel that there are children who learn faster, others slower. In his case, he learned to speak slower. But that does not mean that he has a disability].

It is interesting that these mothers understand disability as social construction rather than an inherent deficit; at least half of the mothers expressed feelings that align with this perspective: “un niño normal” [a normal child], “no está enfermo” [is not sick]. This feels especially true, when one notes the fact that seven out of ten participants used the word “normal” to describe their child at some point in the study. Not only do these mothers feel that their children are like all other children, but also they feel that the small ways in which they are “diferente” [different] or “lento” [slower] are used as ways to unfairly label and categorize them.

There is also an underlying sense that to be dis/abled is something grave. It is not simply a child who is “lento” [slow], “diferente” [different], or who “no presta atención” [does not pay attention]. Although it is not named, to these mothers, disability appears to be something much more profound than what their children exhibit.

Perhaps it is for this reason, combined with a dislike for the term “disabled,” that the mothers tried to explain away their child’s disability as something other than a disability. The mothers did not believe their children’s disability was serious or permanent. Many of them would use minimizing language to describe their child’s struggles, or they would discuss the child’s learning needs using transient language in an effort to indicate its temporary nature.
“Pequeños problemitas” – The minimizing of disability

Upon closer inspection, one can see that the mothers also carry with them the negative feelings associated with being identified, or having a child that is identified, as disabled. This is particularly evident in the ways that the mothers would attempt to minimize their children’s needs. Some of this happened through minimizing language. Some used diminutive forms:

Ana talks about “pequeños problemitas” [little problems] and says that the children “tienen problemitas con el aprendizaje” [have little problems with learning]. María believes that her child’s autism “no es severo” [is not severe]. Many mothers highlight the ways in which the child has grown since the original evaluation/diagnosis. They have gotten “mejor” [better]” and know “más” [more]:

Nancy: Lo que pasa [es] que él no lo necesita mucho, porque si yo me voy entre él y el niño grande, él habla mejor, el chiquito .

[What happens is that he does not need it very much, because if I go between him and the older child, he speaks better, the small one.]

Rosario: Cambió mucho, en que ella aprendió más. Aprendió más.

[She changed a lot, in that she learned more. [She] learned more.]

Carlota: […] yo creo que ya, en este momento, ya él es demasiado—, es igual o mucho mejor que los otros niños. […] Tengo tres hijos, pero es lo mejor que le ha pasado porque avanzó demasiado, yo creo que avanzó más que los niños regulares .

[… I think that already, at this moment, he is already too much ..., he is equal or much better than the other children. […] I have three children, but it is the best thing that has happened to him because he advanced too much, I think he advanced more than the regular children.]

Rosa: Él cuando era chiquito, no podía hablar bien. […] pero ya--, o sea, bastante ha superado. Sí, bastante.

[When he was little, he could not speak well. [...] but already ..., that is, he has overcome quite a lot. Yes, quite a lot.]
Not only have the children grown and even overcome their limitations, the mothers overwhelmingly feel that now their children have learned and advanced “más” [more] or “bastante” [quite a lot] and even “demasiado” [too much]. In fact, both Nancy and Carlota compare their EBLAD child to others and deemed their children as “mejor” [better]. Nancy believes that her EBLAD child is “mejor” than her other child. Carlota thinks her child is now “mejor” than her other two children.

Others would talk about their expectation or hope that the disability label (and/or the disability itself) would be temporary:

Nancy: Tengo que aceptar que el niño va a usar el aparato. Mi confianza es que sea por algún tiempo, porque también tengo la confianza que no hay mejor doctor que el de allí arriba, ¿verdad? Pero, todo eso lleva su proceso y si él no lo ha dado es porque a lo mejor no ha llegado el tiempo, ¿verdad?, todavía, pero algún tiempo. Y, pues lo he aceptado que el tiempo que él lo tenga que usar, lo ha de usar.

[O have to accept that the child will use the device. My faith is that it is for some time, because I also have the confidence that there is no better doctor than the one above, right? But, all that takes its process and if he [God] has not given it it is because maybe the time has not come, right?, not yet, but sometime. And, I have accepted that the time he has to use it, he has to use it.]

Carlota: Sí, yo sentía que me-- , iba yo a tener el apoyo, para que el saliera de tener la--, de dejar pronto la--, los servicios. Y sabía yo que con la ayuda de ellas, y con mi ayuda, ibamos a sacarlo. Tengo un primo, que cuando era pequeño, lo único que sabia decir es, “Sí, sí, sí, sí”. Ahora cuando él habla, son las palabras perfectas, simples. Simplificadas las palabras y perfectas. Entonces, yo decía, “Oh, algún día mi niño también va a ser así.”

[Yes, I felt that I-- I was going to have the support, so that he would get out of having-- , to soon leave the-- , the services. And I knew that with their help, and with my help, we were going to get him out. I have a cousin, who when he was little, the only thing he could say is, "Yes, yes, yes, yes". Now when he speaks, they are the perfect words, simple. Simplified words and perfect. So, I said, "Oh, someday my child will also be like that."]

Mothers have the “confianza” [faith] that their children’s disability is only “por algún tiempo” [for some time] and “algún día” [someday] everything will be taken care of. The
mothers maintain their hope; they are not only hopeful, but also patient. They trust both God, “el de allí arriba” [the one up there] and also the help of the therapists who work with their children and the help that they themselves give them: “con mi ayuda” [with my help]. They are hopeful, patient and trust in God, in others, and in themselves not only to overcome the disability, but also to terminate the services some day. In a way, for Carlota “los servicios” [the services] and for Nancy “el aparato” [the device] are the only indicators that their child has a disability. So when those are gone, so too is the deficit.

Another way that the mothers attempted to minimize the disability, or at least its impact on their child’s life, was by limiting the number of people who knew that their child was identified as disabled. As a result, knowing about the disability was strictly on a need to know basis, often limited to school-based personnel, as we see in the next sub-section.

“Entre menos sepan, mejor” – Disabilities as closely guarded secrets

Mothers’ ideologies around disability are complex. For the most part they view their children like any other child – for them the concern arises when other people look upon their children as “disabled.” Perhaps it is for this reason that many of them keep their child’s disability diagnosis and label a secret. In the quote that follows, Ana discusses why only a select group of individuals: “las maestras” [the teachers], “la doctora” [the doctor], and “la trabajadora social” [the social worker] know about her daughter, María Teresa, and her dis/ability:

No, sólo con las maestras. Con la maestra o principalmente con la doctora o la trabajadora social, que a ella cualquier cosa le dejo saber.[…] porque--, no sé, pero yo siempre me reservo lo mío, y sólo cuando hay--. Por ejemplo, ahora en la escuela que estoy preocupada por [María Teresa] es donde yo le digo a la maestra, que tal vez es porque ese defecto que tiene [María Teresa] en la cabecita, a lo mejor eso le estará afectando el aprendizaje.

[No, only with the teachers. With the teacher or mainly with the doctor or the social worker, I let her know anything about it […] because … I do not know, but I always keep
my business mine, and only when there is-. For example, now in the school that I'm worried about [Maria Teresa] is where I tell the teacher, maybe it's because of that defect [María Teresa] has in her head, maybe that's affecting her learning.]

For Ana, a person knowing that Maria Teresa has a disability is solely on a need to know basis. Unless there is a problem, there is no need to discuss the matter with anyone else. For her, “entre menos sepan, mejor” [the fewer who know, the better]. Ana’s secrets regarding her daughter’s disability label was such a private matter that when she enrolled in the study her friend blurted out “¿[María Teresa] recibe servicios?” [receives services]. Ana slowly glanced up from the clipboard and quietly nodded in agreement. When asked about this, Ana simply explained that she didn’t want people to think of her daughter differently. She is so concerned with maintaining other people’s perception of her daughter as “una niña normal” [a normal girl] that she doesn’t even talk about María Teresa’s disability with her extended family:


[No, no. No one in the family. […]Because no. Only me and the dad, and my mom and my sister. […] No, for me she is a normal girl. Very normal. But the fewer that know, the better.]

In a matter of sentences, Ana highlights the contradiction that so many mothers carry with them: the belief that their child is just like any other, that she is normal, and a huge sense of responsibility to keep any hint of difference private. Ana goes to such great lengths to guard this secret that she even keeps it a secret from María Teresa. It is also possible that since Ana suffers from epileptic seizures (and feared that she could lose custody of her children because of it) and is also someone who “siempre me reservo lo mío” [always keep my business mine], keeping Maria Teresa’s disability a secret may be a way for her to keep her own disability a secret and ultimately, protect her family. And yet, despite the mothers’ reluctance to accept the concept of
disability, in the ways in which professionals described it, they saw the disability label as useful to their children and to them, as the next section describes.

*Functions of the disability label*

As presented in the previous segment, most mothers talked about their children within the realm of neurodiversity, however, none of them had denied outright the designation or the diagnosis of their child as disabled. This was often due to the fact that the disability labels offered support: a source of “más” [*more*] resources for their children and information and relief for them.

The primary role that disability labels served in the lives of these families was in offering the children an individualized education focused heavily on services and small class sizes. The stance of disability labels as “more” is explored in the first sub-section.

“Más” – The disability label as a resource

Many mothers said that the disabled label served a purpose; more often than not it provided the child with added support in school, with “más” [*more*]. Mothers overwhelmingly acknowledged that the label meant that the teachers “ayudan más [*help more*]” and “ponen más atención” [*pay more attention*]. The repetition of the word “más,” when asked about the label, tells the story. There was not only more help, there were more teachers, “dos maestras” [*two teachers*] and, in some cases, even “tres” [*three*].

Elodia: […] **le ayudan un poco más** con sus estudios.

[[...] they help him a little more with his studies.]

Rosario: Tiene **dos maestras**[…] según porque **las ayudan más**, y porque ella está como con esa discapacidad, entonces, **ayudan más**. Les **ponen más atención** a los niños. […]Las otras clases, son clases regulares. Por lo que me explicaron a mí, son clases regulares, y entonces, en la clase que ella está, **les ayudan un poco**
más. Por eso tienen dos maestros. Le han tocado tres maestros.

[She has two teachers[...]supposedly because they help them more, and because she has that disability, then, they help more. They pay more attention to the children. [...] The other classes are regular classes. From what they explained to me, they are regular classes, and then, in the class that she is in, they help them a little more. That's why they have two teachers. She has had three teachers.]

Paty: [Y]a está en una clase integrada, pero sigue habiendo los dos maestros. O sea, él me dice que los dos son maestros, y yo pregunté, “El maestro, ¿cuál es?”, que si la otra era una ayudante. Y me dijo que, “No”. Los dos son ya maestros, maestros. Lo que pasa, que como ahorita ellos—, es un maestro de clase especial y un maestro normal. Entonces, tienen así. Dice que las opciones, de que ayudan más a los niños. Y a mí me gusta eso.

[[H]e is already in an integrated class, but there are still two teachers. I mean, he tells me that they are both teachers, and I asked, "The teacher, which is he?", if the other was an assistant. And he told me, "No". They are both teachers, teachers. What happens, right now they—it’s a special education teacher and a normal teacher. Then, they have it like that. He says that the options, that they help the children more. And I like that.]

Carlota:… es muy bueno saber que tiene más apoyo porque tenía un bajo--, un nivel de que no podía hablar igual que todos los niños.

[... it's very good to know that he has more support because he had a low - a level that he could not speak the same as all children.]

As a result of being labeled as disabled, the qualifying children were enrolled in classes with lower student-teacher ratios and had access to specialized instruction designed specifically to meet their unique needs. Ultimately, the mothers thought that the individual education plan was a means to individualized learning and they appreciated it: “es muy bueno” [it’s very good], “a mí me gusta eso” [I like that]. This was particularly true for mothers who came from countries where they themselves had not had access to a free and/or public education. In many ways, the special education system was viewed as a boutique education. It is perhaps for this reason that the mothers expressed great interest in keeping their children in self-contained classes, making sure to maximize the amount of services the child was receiving as well as securing a
one to one paraprofessional for their child.

While many of these services may indicate a more restrictive environment for these mothers, it represented a more individualized and rigorous education, and certainly más, “se siente más” [it feels like more], “hace más” [he does more], he interacts with “más niños” [more children], and even “habla más” [speaks more]. Paty certainly feels that the disability label is providing her child with “más” and this way the child “avanza mucho” [progresses a lot], which she repeats twice.

[P]ues él-- lógico, todavía sigue con su retraso, ¿verdad?, porque no lo puede sacar. Pero sí, avanza mucho. Avanza mucho, y sirve que-- actúa con más niños, se siente él con más --, como que hace más --, convivir con más niños. Y pues siento que él se enseña así, a hablar más, y como ya no ser tan tímido .

[[W]ell, he - logically, he still continues with his delay, right ?, because he can't get it out. But yes, he advances a lot. He advances a lot, and it serves that-- he interacts with more children, he feels more-- it’s as if he does more--, coexists with more children. And, well, I feel that he teaches himself like that, to talk more, and how to not be so shy anymore.]

Paty encapsulates the mothers’ sentiments when she states that her son’s special education placement helps her child move forward. Being in small groups for services helps him make progress and get over his shyness. In this way more restrictive settings offer not only academic support but also support in social development.

The disability label was also beneficial to the mothers because it offered them an understanding of why their child had exhibited any delays, particularly in speech. As such, the disability label was a source of information.

“Yo no sabía” – Disability diagnosis as information

The second function of the dis/ability label was as a source of information and relief for the mothers. Nine of the ten qualifying children in this study were initially referred for an
evaluation by, or in conjunction with, their pediatrician or teacher. The most often indicator that something was “wrong” was delayed speech.

Carmela: Él aprendió tarde para hablar.

[He learned to talk late.]

Rosa: Él cuando era chiquito, no podía hablar bien.

[When he was little, he could not speak well.]

Paty: [O] sea, simplemente era el defecto de que él no podía hablar.

[Well, it was simply the defect that he could not speak.]

Carlota: Para hablar, cuando él hablaba, que solo hacía: ‘Ah, ah, ah’. Que yo no sabía [lo que decía] y yo decía: ‘¿Se va a quedar mudo?’

[To talk, when he spoke, he only did: 'Ah, ah, ah'. That I did not know [what he was saying] and I said: 'Is he going to become mute?']

Nancy: a veces en las palabras, le sobraba o le faltaba. Yo, para mí que hablaba bien, pero ellos son los que decidieron. Pero no lo necesita mucho. Para mí la terapia del habla, no.

[sometimes in words, there were extra [words] or missing [words]. I, for me he spoke well, but they are the ones who decided. But he does not need it much. For me, speech therapy, no.]

These mothers felt that the problem was that their child was slow in speaking, but this was not considered a serious problem, although some were worried. It was when they were “chiquito” [little] that they couldn’t speak well, or it was “simplemente” [simply] a defect, or for them “no lo necesita mucho” [doesn’t need it a lot]. And yet, the mothers repeatedly were relieved to find people who knew more than they did and who were willing to answer their questions: “Se va a quedar mudo?” [Is he going to become mute?]. Additionally, as Nancy indicates the decision to label the child as having a disability and to enroll them in services was not one that the mothers made: “ellos son los que decidieron” [they are the ones who decided],
“they” being the doctors, the teachers, and the service providers. María spoke similarly about her situation:

Cuando yo empecé a notar más cosas distintas de él, yo hablé con el médico y fue que me mandó a un referido, para hacerle la prueba del autismo. Y ahí fue cuando lo diagnosticaron que tenía autismo, no es severo su autismo, pero sí tiene autismo.

[When I started to notice more differences in him, I talked to the doctor and he sent me a referral, to test him for autism. And that’s when he was diagnosed as having autism, his autism is not severe, but he does have autism.]

Still, the label of disabled offered an explanation, an answer of sorts. However, Nancy and María’s statements indicate that perhaps they do not have much choice and so they are making the best of the situation.

For these mothers, the disability labels offered the children many advantages, and the identification process offered them information. As a result, many of the mothers viewed the disability label as a source of relief. Before the diagnosis, the mothers were unclear about their child’s needs but after the diagnosis they had an understanding of their child’s needs and the support the child needed to progress.

“No le entendía” – The disability label as relief

In the end though, most mothers ultimately viewed the disability labels as an informational tool – a tool that allowed them to understand why their child was not talking or behaving as “expected”. This was particularly true for María:

En casa, igual le daban berrinches, y yo no sabía ni por qué. Yo pensé que porque él era un niño berrinchar, y yo no sabía qué estaba pasando con mi niño. […] Es bien difícil porque a veces--, cuando al principio me dijeron que el niño tenía autismo, yo no sabía qué era eso. Para mi fue como, “¿Qué es lo que le está pasando?” No sabía cómo lidiar con él. […] No, yo no sabía qué es lo que era el autismo. Y hasta después de que me lo diagnosticaron, yo supe qué era el autismo. Pero al principio fue muy alarmante y muy triste para mi, porque no tenía información de eso. […] [E]staba un poco inquieta y preocupada, pero después como
me fueron explicando las cosas, ya fui como tranquilizándome un poco más. Pero sí, no, me preocupaba, porque poco a poco, fue su aprendizaje, por lo mismo que él tenía autismo y yo no lo sabía. Entonces, ya fue poco tiempo que el empezó a hablar y decir sus primeras palabras. Y fue frustrante porque pues él no se podía comunicar conmigo ni yo con él. Y él lloraba cuando yo no le entendía las cosas. Y con las terapias, le digo, fue largo el tiempo que él estuvo para aprender, a decir palabras y comunicarse.

[At home, he also had tantrums, and I did not know why. I thought that because he was a tantrumy child, and I did not know what was happening with my child. [...] It's very difficult because sometimes-- when I was initially told that the child had Autism, I did not know what that was. For me it was like, "What is happening to him?" I did not know how to deal with him. [...] No, I did not know what autism was. And even after he was diagnosed, I knew what autism was. But at the beginning it was very alarming and very sad for me, because I did not have information about that. [...] I was a little restless and worried, but after they explained things to me, I was like settling down a little more. But yes, no, I was worried, because little by little, it was his learning, because he had autism and I did not know it. Then, it was not long before he started talking and saying his first words. And it was frustrating because he could not communicate with me or me with him. And he cried when I did not understand things. And with the therapies, I tell you, it took him a long time to learn, to say words and communicate.]

For María, learning that her child was autistic offered her not only an explanation for her son’s outburst but also a means by which to communicate with him and subsequently an understanding of how to support him. She repeatedly says, “no sabía” [I didn’t know], “no entendía” [I didn’t understand], “no tenia información” [I didn’t have information]. So although the label was “alarmante” [alarming], “triste” [sad], and resulted in her being “inquieta” [restless] and “preocupada” [worried], the label offered some measure of comfort and understanding.

This sentiment was shared by most of the mothers regardless of their child’s disability label. In many ways, the disability labels gave these mothers access to information and to services, which ultimately gave them access to their children. This is especially true for the mothers whose children had delayed speech. For them, the diagnosis symbolizes the line that marks the before and the after. In the before, the mothers were unable to communicate with their
children. Then, after receiving a diagnosis and being enrolled in services, their child could talk – and, equally as important, the mothers felt they could finally meet the needs of their children. Although the mothers openly discussed the ways in which the dis/ability label benefited their child, this is not to say that those benefits did not come at a cost; a cost that was most often paid by the mothers.

**Impact on the lives of MoEBLADs**

While the mothers identified their child’s additional support and services by way of the disability label as a gain, they also expressed the ways in which having a disability label had placed additional strain on them and put into question their role as mothers and caretakers. A child’s disability label often placed an immeasurable strain on their emotional, psychological, physical health as well as their social interactions.

One of the most common feelings expressed by the mother in this study was a sense of powerlessness. The mothers felt powerless to help, support, guide, educate and even advocate for their children.

“**Impotente**” – The Emotional toll

Several mothers also used the word “impotente” [*powerless*] to describe how they felt in relation to their inability to support or do more for their child upon getting a diagnosis. Although like others, they were “triste” [*sad*] y “preocupada” [*worried*], Carmela, Paty and María repeat the word “impotente.” There was nothing that they could do to communicate with their child or “ayudar” [*help*] nor could they “apoyar” [*support*] their children; they didn’t “saber” [*know*] how.

Carmela: Bueno, siempre uno se siente un poco **triste**, pero como ya había pasado con la experiencia de mi otro hijo—, igual, cuando pasó la experiencia de mi primer
hijo, sí, yo me sentía tan preocupada, tan como impotente de no poderle ayudar, de no saber por qué estaba tardando en hablar.[...], como ya había crecido, y vieron que realmente tenía el problema--, y entonces, yo quería que tal vez le dieran más terapias, pero ellos decidieron que solo necesitaba del habla. Entonces, a veces uno se siente impotente, porque quisiera conseguir más ayuda para los niños.

[Well, you always feel a little sad, but since it happened with my other son - likewise, when this experience happened with my first child, yes, I felt so worried, so helpless I could not help him, I did not know why he was slow to speak, [...] as he had grown up, and they saw that he really had the problem-- and then, I wanted them to give him more therapies, but they decided that he just needed speech. So, sometimes you feel helpless, because you would like to get more help for your children.]

Paty: Yo me sentía impotente porque no podía ayudar a mi hijo, él no podía hablar. Él no más pedía leche, "Mhm, mhm". Le decía, "Leche" y él me decía "Le". Algo así corto. Luego le decía, "Vuelvélo a repetir", pero si él repetí dos veces, a la tercera ya no la repetía. Y na’ mas empezaba señas, o llorar, y eso era como una impotencia para mí.

[I felt helpless because I could not help my son, he could not talk. He only asked for milk, "Mhm, mhm." I would say, "Milk" and he would say "Mi". Something like that, short. Then I would tell him, "Repeat it again", but if he repeated it twice, the third time he would not repeat it. And he just started signing, or crying, and that was like a helplessness for me.]

Maria: Porque yo a veces me siento impotente, porque no estoy ahí como para apoyarlo.

[Because I sometimes feel helpless, because I'm not there to support him.]

Again, some of this may be reflective of the fact that none of the mothers identified a deficit in their child until an individual whom they viewed as an expert told them so. Even when they have something in mind for their child “yo quería que tal vez le dieran más terapias” [I wanted them to give him more therapies], they get shut down: “pero ellos decidieron que solo necesitaba del habla” [but they decided that he just needed speech]. This lack of power and control over the situation also made the mothers feel sad about the possibility that the disability label would erase their child’s humanity.
“Me sentí mal” – Disability labels as a source of sadness

Rosa was the only mother to state explicitly that she did not agree with her child’s dis/ability label because she did not like the way it “sounded.” She stated that:

O sea, como que suena algo--. ¿Cómo sabría? No sé, no me gusta. Como--. [...] Como tristeza de--. O sea, porque de esa escuela lleva como un número de discapacitado, o algo así. Me sentía mal que--, la maestra de él--, él le va a llevar un número, que si va a una escuela, y él lleva un número. Entonces, eso, me sentí mal porque--. una tristeza.

[I mean, like it sounds like something-- how would I? I don’t know, I don’t like it. Like--. [...] Like a sadness of--. I mean, because from that school carries a disability number, or something like that. I felt bad that--. his teacher --. he is going to carry a number, that if he goes to a school, and he has a number. So, that, I felt bad because ..., a sadness.]

Rosa really struggles to articulate why she does not like her child being labeled as disabled. Ultimately she worries that her child has become a number in school. Not just any number, a disabled number. That fills her with feelings of “tristeza” [sadness]. This negative reaction to her child’s diagnosis is emblematic of her desire that her child’s teacher view him as complete, as a person, and not a mere number. It is that invisibility that leads her to sadness and feeling “mal” [bad]. This fear of invisibility could be residual from the mothers’ own sense of invisibility during the evaluation process. This process often left them waiting in worry.

“No me daban respuesta” – Worrying throughout the evaluation process

Being told that their child was not performing as expected was stressful for many mothers. In the end, none of these mothers identified a problem in their child until an external person made that conclusion. The evaluation process made the mothers feel “preocupada” [worried] and often left them “desesperada” [in despair]. These feelings continued even after a diagnosis was made.

Rosa was worried because of all the uncertainty:
Rosa: Me sentía **preocupada**. [...] Porque--, no sé qué va a pasar.

[I felt worried.] [...] [Because--, I don’t know what’s going to happen.]

Sara was deperate for answers and for information on how to help her child. When I asked how she felt during the evaluation process, she shared:

Sara: Un poco **desesperada** porque no me daban respuesta. [...] [Y me sentia]

**preocupada** [...] Porque no sabía cómo ayudar a mi niño.

[A little desperate because they would not give me an answer.] [...] [And I felt]

worried] [Because I did not know how to help my child.]

While the diagnosis did offer explanations as to why certain things were happening with their children, it also brought with it a great deal of uncertainty: something was wrong but “no sabía cómo ayudar a mi niño” [I didn’t know how to help my child] and, at the time, they did not know what to expect nor “qué va a pasar” [what will happen]. Once again, we see that this is in part due to a shift in power dynamics. Because the mothers had not been the ones to identify a problem in their child, they no longer felt like experts in their children and those who they considered experts “no me daban respuesta” [would not give [them] an answer].

This increased sense of invisibility combined with feelings of powerlessness took an eventual toll on the mothers’ psychological well-being, often leading them to deny their own capacity as advocates for their children.

“¿Qué puedo hacer?” – The psychological toll

The fact that the children were labeled as disabled by a school or medical professional results in some mothers not feeling “conforme” [satisfied], yet feeling powerless because they believe that the label is “necesaria” [necessary]. Even when they disagree with the label, the only question they feel that they can ask is, dismissively, “¿pero [...] qué puedo hacer?” [but
[...] what can I do?]. When asked if they agreed with their child’s disability label Paty and Sara replied as follows:

Paty: Pues, no, no estoy conforme. Pero a veces, ¿qué puedo hacer? ¿Cómo podría ayudarlo yo?

[Well, no, I'm not happy. But sometimes, what can I do? How could I help?]

Sara: Pues, es necesaria.

[Well, it's necessary.]

In this case, neither Sara nor Paty acknowledges being in support of or in agreement with the disability label. Sara simply states that it is necessary. Paty, on the other hand, answers by saying that while she did not agree with the disability label, she did not feel that there was anything she could do – either to change it or to help her child.

For these mothers, this feeling of helplessness/powerlessness is a byproduct of the disability evaluation process. At one point or another, every single participant uses some version of the phrase “ellos decidieron” [they decided]. These mothers, for the most part, have limited educational backgrounds and lack the linguistic resources necessary to access appropriate supports and information with which to push back against individuals who represent and are backed by powerful institutions. This results in compounded feelings of powerlessness that last beyond the evaluation and into the child’s academic career.

While many of these disability labels have the most relevance at school, they often had consequences for the lives of the mothers beyond school. These mothers were limited in their ability to seek employment because they needed to always be available for their child even during school hours. In many ways the mothers were beholden to the disability more than their children.
“Por eso no puedo” – Disability labels as confinement

This sense of powerlessness also extends to the choices that the mothers had over their own lives. As a result of having a child who was diagnosed with a disability many mothers expressed feeling limited in their ability to access work, even when this resulted in additional financial strain for the families. This is the case of Maria:

[Yo sé que si me pongo a trabajar, me puedan llamar en un rato y decirme “Justin le pasó esto”. O me da miedo de que algún día se pueda salir del salón, ahora que no esté el Para con él. Y no encontrarlo. Como en kinder, que me lo perdieron. Entonces, por eso no puedo trabajar. Porque si yo me pongo a trabajar pueden llamar, y no voy a poder salirme del trabajo. Ese es el problema.]

Maria is hesitant to acquire employment out of fear that something might go wrong and she won’t “poder salirme del trabajo” [be able to leave work].

Paty discusses the complications that can arise from being the working mother of an EBLAD:

Yo, dos veces, tres veces en la semana, tenía que irme, salirme del trabajo, irme a recogerlo, porque él lloraba de una hora, hora y media, a dos horas. Y me hablaban porque decían, "Tu hijo ya no sabemos cómo controlarlo, cómo callarlo". "¿Pero qué le pasó?". Yo salía tan nerviosa del trabajo, me iba para allá en taxi, en algo más fácil que yo llegara, y había días que lo encontraba llorando. Él, los ojos hinchados, rojos. Le decía a la muchacha, "¿Pero por qué, por qué, por qué?". Y ella decía, "Pues es que no sabemos, no sabemos, y no sabemos".

[I, twice, three times a week, had to leave, leave work, go pick him up, because he cried from an hour, an hour and a half, to two hours. And they talked to me, “because” they said, "we no longer know how to control your son, how to keep him quiet." "But what happened to him?" I’d leave work so nervous, I’d go there by taxi, the easiest way for me to arrive, and there were days when I found him crying. Him, his eyes swollen, red. I said to the girl, "But why, why, why?" And she said, "Well, we do not know, we do not know,"]
For Paty, work was an additional source of stress because at any moment in time she could get a call from the school that would force her to leave work and rush to Dan’s side. Often the call came without any explanation from the school.

After learning of some of the ways in which these mothers have been tasked with constant availability in order to meet their child’s needs it is not surprising to learn that this overload also manifested itself in physical ways. Not only did the mothers talk about feeling tired, they often looked it.

“Me cansaba” – The Physical toll

This inability to work leads these women to be entirely dependent on their partners, which brings with it its own set of complications (for more on this see chapter 6). However, it is Ana who reveals how taxing this sacrifice can be on a mother’s physical and mental health, and how difficult it was to have her young daughter, María Teresa, receive services:

Bueno, sí fue un poquito estresante para mí, porque desde que nació pues me costó crecerla yo sola. Aunque uno tiene familia, pero usted sabe que aquí uno se las tiene que ver solas. Entonces, de ahí creció, después cuando me dijeron que le iban a hacer evaluaciones, le hicieron las evaluaciones, y no las pasó. Que tenía que recibir las terapias. Fue un poquito muy complicado para mí. Yo creo que para ella también, porque también fue cansada. Y pues así fue pasando.[…] No, yo pensé que no más a los tres años. Como era bebé, nació prematuro y no se podía sentar.

[El que ella ha continuado a necesitar servicios es] un poquito difícil, pero ya ahora como que está pasando. Sólo [quedan] las preocupaciones de la escuelita. […] [El proceso f]ue bueno, pero también estresante para mí. Para ella, un poco. […]Estresante, porque desde que ella nació, necesitaba todo el tiempo estar conmigo, toda la atención. Y, hay veces que sí, a veces, como mamá, me cansaba. A veces ya llegaba a las ocho, a las nueve, yo lo que quería ya es dormir. Porque todo el día me la pasaba yo abrazando. Cuando el papá, él llegaba del trabajo, a veces, él la abrazaba y me quedaba yo dormida. De tanto cansancio,[… P]or una cierta parte es bueno quedarse con ellos. Pero, por otra parte, es un poco difícil, porque con el tiempo ellos se acostumbran a la mamá.[Y para mí es] un poquito difícil, porque cuando ella entró a la escuela, se la pasaba llorando, porque siempre me buscaba.
[Well, it was a bit stressful for me, because since she was born it was hard for me to raise her on my own. Although you have a family, but you know that here you have to fend for yourself. Then, from there, she grew, then when they told me they were going to do evaluations, they did the evaluations, and she didn’t pass them. That she had to receive the therapies. It was a bit too complicated for me. I think for her too, because she was also tired. And well that’s how she was passing ... I thought it was only until she was three years. Since she was a baby, she was born premature and could not sit. [The fact that she has continued to need services is] a bit difficult, but now it seems she’s passing. Only the concerns [left are] with school. [...] [The process] was good, but also stressful for me. For her, a little. [...] Stressful, because since she was born, she needed to be with me all the time, all the attention. And, sometimes I do, sometimes, as a mom, I got tired. Sometimes it would be eight o’clock, at nine o’clock, I just wanted to sleep. Because I spent all day embracing her. When the dad, he came home from work, sometimes, he hugged her and I would fall asleep. From so much fatigue. [...] In certain ways its good to stay with them. But, on the other hand, it\'s a bit difficult, because over time they get used to the mom. [And for me it\'s] a little bit difficult, because when she went to school, she would go crying because she was always looking for me.]

María also reveals the burden that the diagnosis has been for her:

Y [el diagnóstico] fue más peor para mí, porque toda la carga y todo el estrés está en mí. Porque [mi esposo] se va a trabajar. Él ya llega tarde. Él casi no lidia con el niño. Soy yo la que tiene que estar lidiando con él.

[And the diagnosis] was worse for me, because all the burden and all the stress is on me. Because [my husband] goes to work. He arrives [home] late. He does not really deal with the child. It\'s me who has to be dealing with him.]

Here, Ana and María reveal the overall effect of the disability label on an EBLAD family: for the child it means access to more support at school and at home, but for the mother it means shoudering “toda la carga y todo el estrés” [all the burden and all the stress]. They are the only ones that their children seek, the only ones who can comfort them, the only ones who can “lidiar con el niño” [deal with the child]. At the end of the day, after tending to their children “sola” [alone], they are left too “cansada” [exhausted] to do anything other than “dormir” [sleep].

Conclusion

In this section the mothers revealed the complexity that arises from labeling a child with
a disability. While these mothers can view the process that follows the evaluation and diagnosis process as beneficial, they also acknowledge the ways in which these same experiences can impact their capacity to mother their children and to be autonomous women. Although these principles may not be unique to the mothers of children labeled as disabled, these issues are further complicated by the role of language within these families as these mothers guide their children through life in and out of school. The next chapter (chapter five) will focus on the linguistic aspect of their life.
Chapter V: The Role of Language and Bilingualism for MoEBLADs

Introduction

A great deal of the literature around EBLADs and their mothers presents the home language as a hindrance that can thwart appropriate evaluations for culturally and linguistically diverse children while also obstructing adequate parental academic involvement. Yet these children and families are often absent from scholarship that discusses access to bilingual education, which one could argue has the potential to remedy both of the aforementioned issues. However, EBLADs are not only left out of the literature, they are also often excluded from bilingual learning spaces. This chapter will focus on how present and past literature frame bilingualism for different populations, as well as the ways in which home language practices are discussed in relation to MoEBLADs. Subsequently, the ways in which the mothers in this study speak about bilingualism in relation to their child and in relation to the disability label will be shared.

Relevant Literature: Access to Bilingualism

Beyond ability, another way that EBLADs are categorized and subsequently segregated in schools is by linguistic practice (Pedalino Porter, 1998). While many children can and will be labeled as English language learners, a select few get to be “bilingual.” Unlike the negative stigma that surrounds “being disabled” or “being an English language learner,” “bilingual,” for some, means to be smart, successful, and cultured. This section will review how these ideologies came to be, as well as the impact that monolingual language practices in school have on the child’s life at home and the mother’s participation at school.
**Language majorities and bilingualism as benediction**

According to the American Community Survey Reports, 16 percent of the American population is believed to be bilingual, which means that in the United States monolingualism is much more common and as such is deemed to be normal (C. Ryan, 2013). However, the United States has been undergoing an ideological shift in how it views bilingualism. Grosjean (2012) writes:

Bilingualism in the United States has traditionally been transitional—a passage, over one or two generations, from monolingualism in a minority language to monolingualism in English. However, there is an increasing awareness that the country's knowledge of the languages of the world is a natural resource that should not be wasted. Hence a growing number of families are fostering bilingualism either by making sure the home's minority language and culture are kept alive or by encouraging their children to acquire and use a second language. (para. 8-9)

This shift is not an altruistic one and has more to do with “the need for young Americans to be able to compete in a globalized economy” than with the cultural preservation of America’s immigrant population (Rohter, 2008, para. 4).

At one point bilingualism was believed to result in decreased verbal development and lower IQ (Deutsch, 1965; Peal & Lambert, 1962; Saer, 1923). However, the scientific community has spent a few decades “peer[ing] deeper into the brain [in order] to investigate how bilingualism interacts with and changes the cognitive and neurological systems” (Marian & Shook, 2012, p. 2). As a result, the research community has reversed its position and has been very vocal about the great cognitive, social, economical and developmental gains that can be made simply by learning a second language (Bak, Nissan, Allerhand, & Deary, 2014; Fradd & Lee, 1998; Keysar, Hayakawa, & An, 2012; Marian & Shook, 2012; D. Martin & Stuart-Smith, 1998; Mechelli et al., 2004; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). Bilingualism has been cited not only for increased linguistic abilities, but also for protecting against age-related decline such as Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, and through increased information processing abilities (Craik,
Bialystok, & Freedman, 2010; Marian & Shook, 2012). Social scientists have contributed to the field by highlighting the social and economic gains that are available to bilinguals: opportunities to connect with other cultures, more and better paying jobs, and wider social circles (Fradd & Lee, 1998; Zelasko & Antunez, 2000). The gains of being a bilingual are so great that they have their own collective name: The Bilingual Advantage (Bialystok, Majumder, & Martin, 2003). As a result, bilinguals are considered smarter, more flexible, and more aware (Bhattacharjee, 2012; Kalkan, 2014; Valian, 2015).

As presented above, for some scholars, to be bilingual is to be intelligent, agile, gifted, and superior (Bowern, 2014; Kinzler, 2016). These are not the words typically used to describe a person with a dis/ability. Rather, bilingualism is even seen as a preventative measure for dis/ability. Scientific research papers are full of phrases like this: “[b]ilingualism appears to provide a means of fending off a natural decline of cognitive function and maintaining what is called ‘cognitive reserve’” (Marian & Shook, 2012, p. 8), Whereas newspapers contain phrases like this: “[r]esearchers, educators and policy makers long considered a second language to be an interference, cognitively speaking, that hindered a child’s academic and intellectual development [but recent findings have prove that ] being bilingual [actually] makes you smarter” (Bhattacharjee, 2012, para. 2). Statements like these uphold an ableist ideology while elevating the status of bilingualism from a cultural function to a dis/ability-prevention tool. Using the terminology “natural decline in cognitive function” implies that those with differing levels of “cognitive function” at earlier ages are somehow unnatural. Stating that bilingualism makes you smarter positions bilingual speakers as better than monolingual speakers rather than different. As a result, bilingualism is framed as the antidote to the mental deterioration that results from age-
related disabilities. Bilinguals are often presented as superhumans who can avoid the trappings of the most prevalent dis/ability known to man: aging.

Although the science clearly indicates that being bilingual is beneficial in all aspects of life, access to bilingual education remains rather limited. One of the primary reasons for this is that in the United States while it may be beneficial for some to be bilingual, it is problematic to be an English language learner or a bilingual Latinx.

*When bilingualism is not for all – the dis/ability and minority exception*

Aside from ableist ideologies and a superhuman perception of the bilingualism of some, there are additional reasons why access to bilingual education is limited for most EBLADs. The first reason is that the educational policies that address dis/ability and linguistic variance do not converge. The second reason is that, as stated previously, monolingualism is the norm, but often that norm is defined by English, and so bilingualism in the US is appreciated only when the bilingual speaker’s first language is English (Erard, 2012). The third reason is the false belief that students with disabilities cannot be bilingual.

The academic needs of EBLADs are addressed by two differing federal policies – Title III of the Elementary and Second Education Act: Language Instruction for Limited English Proficient and Immigrant Students (ESEA Title III) addresses linguistic needs; whereas the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, previously known as PL 94-142) addresses dis/ability related needs. Both policies also come with their own set of issues.

Although IDEA has its faults, its primary goal of ensuring that students with dis/abilities receive the services they need is often met. Additionally, IDEA has been responsive to the changing demographics within American public schools. When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, modifications were made that required that emergent bilinguals be evaluated in their native
language in an effort to reduce the erroneous classification of students on the basis of poor English proficiency rather than the presence of a true dis/ability (U.S. Congress, 2004). However, while congress recognizes the need for EBs to be assessed in their home language, it still has not mandated changes that would require access to bilingual education for children who speak a language other than English and are identified as needing special education services. Artiles and Ortiz (2002) noted the fact that even within monolingual settings, EBLADs “(in general) do not receive the type of instruction they need (due to the lack of ESL instructional methodology and other professional development for special education professionals)” (p. 1). This focus on English-only within special education may stem from the fact that the nation’s educational policies have shifted from being supportive of bilingual education in the 1980s to cautioning against it in the early 2000s (Hornberger, 2006). Prior to 2000, the linguistic needs of EBs in the nation’s public schools were supported by the Bilingual Education Act of 1968 and its subsequent reauthorizations. However, with the introduction of No Child Left Behind in 2002, the Department of Education shifted its focus from multilingual teaching and learning to English acquisition (Crawford, 1989; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Hornberger, 2006; Ricento & Wright, 2008; Tanenbaum et al., 2012). As such, multilingual spaces within public schools continue to be very contentious. While some states, like New York, work on expanding bilingual education, others, like California, abolished it in 1998 through Proposition 227, although they have reauthorized it in 2017 through Proposition 58. Those who oppose multilingual learning see bilingual education not as a research-driven pedagogy that supports student achievement, but rather as a precarious and propaganda-rich practice that results in segregation, hinders English acquisition, thwarts assimilation, delays student growth and threatens American values (Bethell, 1979; Gándara & Aldana, 2014; R. D. Gonzalez, Schott, & Vasquez, 1988; Krashen, 1999;
Pedalino Porter, 1998; Ravitch, 1985; Rohter, 2008). Given the prevalence of these niche policies, it is not surprising to find that although the research indicates that children with disabilities “will most likely have problems learning a second language and will experience difficulty with cognitive development as well” (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002, p. 4) unless they develop native language competence, most EBLADs continue to be labeled as ELLs rather than bilingual or multilingual, and as such only have access to ESL services (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002).

In the United States, English-speaking monolinguals resist the bilingualism of immigrants and people of color for a variety of reasons including xenophobia, nationalism and the misconception that bilingualism for Juan will lead to capital loss for John (Bowern, 2014; Chiswick & Miller, 2016; Hakuta, 2011; Zehr, 2010). As a result, the circumstances under which bilingualism is supported are limited to those that will result in maintaining the status quo (Johnson & Johnson, 2014; Tollefson, 2013; Valdes, 1997). In this political climate, bilingual programs are overwhelmingly supported when they are offered as enrichment opportunities for English proficient children from white, middle class families as opposed to language maintenance programs for ethnically minoritized children (Bowern, 2014; Carr & Cheung, 2015; Cervantes-Soon, 2014; Flores, 2015; Palmer, 2010). In other words,

bilingualism is often seen as ‘good’ when it’s rich English speakers adding a language as a hobby or another international language, but ‘bad’ when it involves poor, minority, or indigenous groups adding English to their first language, even when the same two languages are involved. (Bowern, 2014, para. 3)

The reason for this dichotomy is that the former manifestation of bilingualism does not challenge the current distribution of power. Bilingualism as enrichment builds on the idea that bilingualism is a superlative that can only be gained once the basic criteria for normalcy has been met. In this case in order to be considered “normal” one must have dominion of the English language (Hinton, 2016). “English proficient” is a title that is automatically granted to white,
middle class children, but for many emergent bilinguals the road to proficiency is a long and treacherous one, littered with tests and evaluations (Boals et al., 2015; Carroll & Bailey, 2016; Flores, Kley, & Menken, 2015; Han, 2012; Sotelo-Dynega, Ortiz, Flanagan, & Chaplin, 2013). Most emergent bilinguals (EBs) spend years working towards English proficiency; all the while their home language literacy is neglected (Colon & Heineke, 2015; Flores et al., 2015; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). English-only or English-mostly education for linguistic minority students persists because linguistic and cultural deficit myths persists (Flores et al., 2015; Howard, 2015). These myths, like the label English Language Learner and other forms of cultural bias, position the student as needing remediation, and their home language and home culture as obstacles to be overcome (Paris, 2012; Valdés, 1997). Additionally, ethnic minority children are often seen as disadvantaged compared to mainstream children (Mann, 2014; Oropeza, Varghese, & Kanno, 2010; Valdés, 1997). This ultimately grants EBs their very own scarlet D. This branding in relation to the normal bell curve places EBs to the left of center – equating linguistic variance with “disability”. And so it is that an EBLAD comes to be viewed as doubly disabled. Add an increased probability to live in poverty and you have an amalgamation of all the features “[that]people think of as outside the norm, that is, the person of color, the disabled body or mind, the person living in poverty” or as Chan (1980) once dubbed them: the “triple threat” (Reid & Knight, 2006).

When bilingualism and dis/ability are understood through an ideology of normalcy, the “labeling and segregated education [of students carrying high-incidence and legally defined labels] seem natural and legitimate” particularly for “students of color and those living in poverty” who are often seen as “Other” (Reid & Knight, 2006, p. 18). This Othering not only legitimizes segregation but also validates the denial of bilingual education to EBLADs. Bilingualism has
been found to be beneficial for children with low incidence dis/abilities such as intellectual
disability, autism and Down syndrome (Bird et al., 2005; Hambly & Fombonne, 2012; Kay-
Raining Bird, Trudeau, & Sutton, 2016; Kremer-Sadik, 2005; Petersen, Marinova-Todd, &
Mirenda, 2012; Ware, Lye, & Kyffin, 2015). Additional research shows that even for children
with language impairments being bilingual does not have a negative effect on their ability to
communicate; on the contrary, being bilingual can be beneficial (Kay-Raining Bird, Trudeau, et
al., 2016; Korkman et al., 2012; Paradis, 2007). Yet EBLADs, who more often than not are
labeled with high-incidence, high-functioning dis/abilities, continue to receive services in
predominantly English-only settings (de Valenzuela et al., 2016; Kay-Raining Bird, Genesee, &
Verhoeven, 2016; Liasidou, 2013a; Marinova-Todd et al., 2016; Sadowski et al., 2014). The
reason for this lays in a persistent and widespread belief that children with disabilities cannot and
should not be bilingual in part because they “would be overtaxed by learning two linguistic
systems” (Cheatham & Barnett, 2016; Paradis, 2007). This continued belief is not rooted in
science, but rather in anecdotal beliefs and may be more reflective of the realities of testing than
of student capacity. Research shows that teachers and other education professionals have been
identified as supporting bilingual education for children with disabilities; however, this does not
result in increased access (Marinova-Todd et al., 2016). Given the pressures that high-stakes
testing places on teachers and schools, it is possible that educators believe that multilingual
learning is too taxing for EBLADs because they are confounding performance on standardized
testing with intellectual capacity (Abedi & Faltis, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2015; Hursh, 2013;
Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007; Lane & Leventhal, 2015; Thurlow & Kopriva, 2015).
This essentially defines success on how well the student can meet the standard and approximate
normal.
For mothers, the disconnect between the home language (for Latinx families that language is often Spanish) and the school language (English) is one of the primary ways in which they feel limited in their capacity to support their children academically (C. S. Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Ijalba (2015b) notes that mothers have linguistic needs that are also tied to their cultural needs. Whereas cultural needs get their fare share of attention, linguistic needs are often relegated to the recommendations’ sections. A parent who does not feel capable of helping their child complete their homework is not going to feel confident addressing an English-speaking staff in order to advocate for the academic and social development needs of their child. Although many suggest the use of translators as a way to create entry for mothers, Aceves (2014) points out that translation services are not systematically offered. When they are offered, they are often unreliable and subject to bias, which further hinders parental participation (Aceves, 2014). Additionally, the use of interpreters and translators alone have not been shown to increase parental engagement during IEP or other pertinent meetings (Aceves, 2014; Cohen, 2013; Ijalba, 2015b; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). The current literature is inconsistent in its presentation of language as a stand-alone issue. Whereas some leave out language completely, others include language in reference to cultural beliefs (i.e. bien educado [well educated], añañar [spoil]), but most studies overwhelmingly frame language not as a cultural difference that both parties must traverse, but rather as a hurdle that schools must overcome in order to ensure parental engagement (Rodriguez et al., 2013; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). The linguistic ideology behind this perspective values English above all other languages and faults the mothers for their inability to speak English rather than schools for their inability to communicate in the mothers’ home language(s). As such, a parent’s lack of
English is a deficit that must be remedied by the schools by providing translators and translated materials (Rodriguez et al., 2013). Others present a parent’s inability to communicate in English as a burden upon the schools that they are required/mandated to mitigate (Montelongo, 2015). The most explicit framing of mothers who are speakers of languages other than English as deficient came from Wolfe & Durán (2013) who stated that “‘language barrier’ refers to situations in which limited English proficiency hinders effective communication” (p. 9). By presenting a language barrier as a parent problem/failing rather than a systemic one (ie “‘Language barrier’ refers to situations in which speakers do not share a common language which hinders effective communication”) Wolfe & Durán (2013, p.9) inherently place mothers in a negative light, which puts them at fault for hindering effective communication. For many, the most immediate way to resolve this tension is to provide mothers with interpreters.

While interpreters are presented as the most effective and efficient way to open communication between the school and the home, this suggestion does not take into account that mothers may not feel comfortable discussing their child through an interpreter if the person is not a trusted person (Cohen, 2013; Ijalba, 2015b; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Additionally, school-based interpreters tend to be bilingual staff or teachers who are not typically trained as interpreters and may not be as informed about the needs of the particular child, so rather than translate word for word they may offer a summary (Reiman, Beck, Coppola, & Engiles, 2010). Alternatively, someone who translates word for word may not convey the gravity or intensity of the situation - and may not advocate for the parent as needed (Reiman et al., 2010). Many mothers do not have access to an interpreter and those who do report feelings of dissatisfaction, particularly because they feel they experience unequal treatment with preference given to the professionals rather than the mothers (Reiman et al., 2010; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Lastly, the majority of references
to translators, interpreters and translated materials are overwhelmingly one sided, focusing on what the school could give the mothers, rather than what the school could gather from the mothers (Montelongo, 2015; Rodriguez et al., 2013; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). This focus on school-to-parent communication emphasizes the need to make information accessible for the sake of the school meeting compliance, rather than creating a collaborative space in which both parties can discuss the student’s needs, the family’s goals, and how both the school and the family can support each other.

A great deal of the literature devoted to mothers of EBLADs is not written for them or with them, but rather about them. As a result, these mothers are often the victims of the same deficit-based lens with which their children are viewed. Although researchers aim to change the minds of teachers and other stakeholders so that they view mothers as a resource, the continued use of deficit-based language (i.e. lack of..., in need..., requiring..., etc.) continues to subversively uphold the same values they are attempting to counter. For example, in one article the term “accommodate” was used to address the ways schools could support the families. The literature does a good job of presenting ways that schools can ensure that information reaches the families. However, by not suggesting that schools ask mothers about their own needs and the needs of their children, the literature paints mothers as empty vessels needing to be filled without taking account of the many resources they have to offer.

Language, Bilingualism and MoEBLADs: Overview of Findings

This chapter is divided into three sections:

The first, “Bilingualism for an uncertain future,” will present how these mothers view language and bilingualism. It also discusses the mothers’ reasons for supporting bilingualism: reinforcing their cultural identity, offering future economic opportunities, developing and
maintaining relationships with transnational siblings, as well as linguistically preparing them for the possibility of deportation.

The second section, “The False Dichotomy…,” will discuss how mothers’ interactions with school professionals inform their own understanding of their child’s linguistic capacity in relation to the disability. As we will see, mothers have been taught by the professionals that it is impossible for their children to be disabled and bilingual, and yet, in their experience, their children’s bilingualism is normal. And yet, as we will see, although the mothers believe deeply in the value of Spanish and bilingualism for their children, they accept monolingual placements for their children.

Finally, “Language learning at home” presents the mothers’ attempts of bypassing the schools’ monolingual limitations by offering home language instruction within the home and Spanish literacy through religious education. This last section will also address the efforts made, and the barriers they have encountered, by mothers trying to learn English.

The Role of Language and Bilingualism for MoEBLADs

Bilingualism within these families is understood in complex ways: on the one hand, it is a tool that helps their children prepare for the future; but on the other, it is a barrier to their children’s disability remediation. One of the ways in which the mothers deal with this contradiction is by letting the schools focus on remedying the disability, while making language learning the focus of the home.

Bilingualism for the (uncertain) Future

For the mothers in this study, bilingualism serves multiple functions. In the long run, bilingualism is a tool that helps them reinforce their children’s Latinx heritage but it is also a
way to grant their children access to better jobs. In the more immediate and tenuous future, bilingualism allows their children to develop concrete relationships with their siblings living abroad and it also prepares them for life in their ancestral home in case of the mothers’ deportation.

For the mothers, where a person was born determined which language belonged to them; other languages were just add-ons. For example, they were born in Mexico so Spanish is their language while English belongs to their children, at least to those that were born in the United States.

“Mi idioma” – Country of birth = Linguistic identity

Multiple mothers framed Spanish as “mi idioma” [my language], and English as “el idioma de ellos” [their language]. This was true for María and Carmela.

María: [El español] es su lengua materna, le digo. Y el inglés, porque el inglés aquí es su idioma de ellos.

If I can teach him my language, and preserve my language, I think it's going to be a benefit for him. [...] So, I always try, for them to conserve my language.

Carmela: Si yo puedo enseñarle mi idioma, y conservar mi idioma, creo que va a ser un beneficio para él.[...] Entonces, yo siempre trato de que ellos conserven mi idioma.

Although they all express an interest in bilingualism, it is also clear that for the mothers, their children’s English is more important than their Spanish. For María, Spanish is “lengua materna” [their mother tongue] but not in the sense that it is their “native language” but rather that it is their mother’s tongue.
Similarly, the mothers see English as the language of the country in which their children were born, and the language of the society in which they live. Sara, Carlota and Carmela express this thus:

Sara: es su idioma, de él, o sea, él nació—[aquí].

[it's his language, his, that is, he was born—[here].]

Carlota: […] era más importante el inglés. ¿Cómo le voy a decir a un doctor: "Tengo dolor de cabeza"?

[[…] English was more important. How can I tell a doctor: "I have a headache"]

Carmela: Son ciudadanos americanos, tienen que saber el inglés.

[They are American citizens, they have to know English.]

For them, the fact that their child “nació” [was born] here and that “son ciudadanos Americanos” [they are American citizens] means that English acquisition is and must be the primary focus. And yet, the mothers feel that Spanish is also important for their children for different reasons. One of the primary, and oft cited, reasons related to the perception that being bilingual affords one increased access to a more secure financial future through better career opportunities.

“Oportunidad” – Bilingualism for financial security

Regardless of the child’s disability label, all of the mothers that participated in this study expressed a clear interest in developing their child’s bilingualism. Across the group, the primary value placed on bilingualism often referred to a future need. Besides being clear that their child’s Spanish is important for them, as Carmela says, “Spanish/English bilingualism is an important “beneficio” [benefit], “una oportunidad” [an opportunity]. It is the word “oportunidad” that they repeat most. The mothers see their children’s bilingualism as an important opportunity to get a
job in the future or for a future profession, as Carmela and Rosario express:

Carmela: Pienso que es importante para mí, es importante conservar nuestro idioma. Y, también pienso que es importante aquí, en este país, hablar más de un idioma. […] Por ejemplo, para conseguir un trabajo. Creo yo, que una persona que habla más de un idioma, tiene un poco más de oportunidad. Y si habla dos, o tres idiomas, pues mejor. […] En mi área hay esa oportunidad, y yo trato de aprovecharla. […] Entonces, yo aprovecho las oportunidades que hay acá para que ellos aprendan el idioma.

[I think it's important for me, it's important to preserve our language. And, I also think that it is important here, in this country, to speak more than one language. […] For example, to get a job. I think that a person who speaks more than one language has a little more opportunity. And if he speaks two, or three languages, even better. […] In my area there is that opportunity, and I try to take advantage of it. […] So, I take advantage of the opportunities that are here for them to learn the language.]

Rosario: Sí. Sí es importante [que ella sea bilingual]. […] Porque en un futuro le va a servir mucho. […] En el futuro, por ejemplo, ya se está mirando que hay más oportunidades, en los trabajos casi se necesitan los dos idiomas o más idiomas, entonces para ella es mucho mejor. […] En alguna carrera que ella quiera tomar, siempre es mejor que hable los dos idiomas.

[Yes. Yes, it is important [that she is bilingual] […] Because in the future it will be very useful. […] In the future, for example, you can already see that there are more opportunities, in jobs you almost need two languages or more languages, so for her it is much better. […] In any career that she wants to take on, it is always better to speak both languages.]

This discourse around bilingualism for more opportunity is laced throughout the mainstream discourse around bilingual education, so it is not surprising to see it arise among the mothers of EBLADs. But bilingualism is not just important for economic and future opportunities, it is important because of the transnational lives these families live. Like most immigrant families, the families in this study maintained relationships with family members who remained in the mother’s country of origin. Unlike, previous research, the mothers in this study indicated that these family members are not only of older generations but increasingly consisted of brothers and sisters that were never bought to the US, as well as a select few whom had
voluntarily returned to Mexico. As such, bilingualism was a necessary tool in the interpersonal success of the child.

“Mi hermano, ¿le contestó?” – Communicating with binational siblings

The connections that the mothers have to their country of origin appear as motivators for Spanish development. For some mothers that connection is cultural or ancestral, but for Paty, it was one of living in the present. Paty was raising two children in Mexico at the same time that she was raising two children in the US. Paty’s younger children have never met the two older ones and they have only had a relationship through text. She explains:

Sí. Sí. [Tanya], como ella puede escribir el español, le textea a él, a uno de ellos. O a los dos les puede textear. Luego dice, “Mamá, te mandó mensaje”. “¿Quién?” “Mi hermano, ¿le contestó?”, “Okay, contéstale”. Y le dice, “Hola, soy [Tanya]. Mamá está ocupada”. Y ya, ahí le va escribiendo. [Dan], a veces le tiene que decir a [Tanya] porque él no puede textearle en español… Entonces, a veces le textea en inglés, pero [el hermano en México] le dice, “No te entiendo, no te entiendo”. “Soy [Dan], soy [Dan]”. Y le dice el otro, “Pero es que no te entiendo”.

[Yes. Yes. [Tanya], since she can write Spanish, she texts to him, to one of them. Or she can text them both. Then she says, "Mom, he sent you a message." "Who?", "My brother, do I answer?", "Okay, answer him." And she says, "Hi, its [Tanya]. Mom is busy." And like that she starts writing them. [Dan], sometimes he has to tell [Tanya] because he can not text in Spanish... Then, sometimes he texts in English, but he [the brother in Mexico] says, "I do not understand you, I do not understand you". "Its [Dan], Its [Dan]." And the other says, "But it’s that I do not understand you."]

In this family Spanish is a necessary tool of communication particularly for the set of siblings who had never physically met. Because Dan is enrolled in an English only class, unlike his sister Tanya who “puede escribir español” [can write in Spanish] because she is in a bilingual program, his ability to communicate with his siblings is greatly hindered by his inability to read and “textearle en español” [text them in Spanish]. Rather than getting to know each other, these text conversations result in moments of frustration where one brother is silenced by his inability to write in Spanish while the other is left saying “no te entiendo, no te
entiendo” [I do not understand you, I do not understand you].

Nancy lived a similar reality and noted that she has to serve as linguistic intermediary for her binational children:

Su hermana está en México, y entonces él me dice, "Mami, le voy a mandar un mensaje a mi hermana". Le digo, "Sí, papi, pero mándaselo en español". "No", dice, "Yo se lo mando en inglés porque ella me ha dicho". Le digo, "Pero yo quiero que tú aprendas a escribir en español". "Ah, bueno, pero me ayudas", me dice. Y le digo, "Sí, sí, yo te ayudo". Y ya le voy deletreando. Eso es no más--, es en los mensajes con su hermana o su tía.

[His sister is in Mexico, and then he says, "Mom, I'm going to send a message to my sister." I say, "Yes, honey, but send it in Spanish." "No," he says, "I send it to her in English because she told me." I tell him, "But I want you to learn to write in Spanish." "Ah, well, then you help me," he tells me. And I say, "Yes, yes, I will help you." And I will spell it for him. That's it--., it's in the messages with his sister or his aunt.]

In these families bilingualism is important for intergenerational communication; so that children can talk to their grandparents or “tía[s]” [aunts], but these families show that bilingualism is also a necessary part of intragenerational communication, so that children can talk to their “hermano[s]” [brothers] and “hermana[s]” [sisters]. While it was unexpected to learn of mothers who were raising children in two nations, this reality was true for at least two other mothers in this study. Yet this still did not create a pressing need for these mothers to have their children in bilingual education programs where they would also be taught in Spanish. Much more important was the very real fear of deportation, as the next section shows.

Being bilingual not only helped these children develop and maintain relationships with their siblings, it also prepared them for the possibility of life in their mother’s country of origin. Through their development as bilingual and biliterate people EBLADs were given the tools they need to ensure that they would have a smoother transition in a Spanish dominant country and school system.

“Me puedan deportar” – Bilingualism in case of deportation
Although it was not a criterion for this study, at least nine of the ten mothers were undocumented residents in the United States. The tenth, whose status was unclear, had experienced the deportation of the father of her children. The enrollment for this study occurred in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election, and these interviews took place soon after. Given the anti-immigrant sentiment and rhetoric that was produced by the Trump campaign, it was no surprise that the fear of deportation was heavy on the minds of these mothers. Two mothers alluded to an uncertain future in the U.S. for their children and themselves. They have no assurances about where they are going to be in the future, “mañana no lo sé” [tomorrow I don’t know]. As Nancy states, they are aware that their children might one day live in a country where only “puro español” [pure Spanish] is spoken:

Porque yo, ¿cómo le puedo decir? Porque yo estoy aquí ahora, ¿verdad? Mañana, no lo sé. Y si un día, yo pudiera ir con ellos a mi país, para que ellos entiendan, porque allí no está nada escrito en inglés. Ahí, puro español.

[Because I, how can I tell you? Because I’m here now, right? Tomorrow, I do not know. And if one day, I could go with them to my country, so that they understand, because there is nothing written in English. There, pure Spanish.]

However, it is not language that they fear; these mothers fear an uncertain future, not knowing, “yo no sé,” whether they will indeed be with their EBLAD children in the future. As María explains in the following excerpt, one can understand how concerning this uncertainty can be:

Siento preocupación porque él va creciendo, y yo no sé qué pueda pasar el día de mañana con él, y saber que no pueda estar con él, como que pienso mucho en eso. Pero tengo que ir viviendo al día a día con él. No quiero traumarme en el futuro, de que qué va a pasar con él si yo no estoy con él. Es difícil, pero solo Dios sabe por qué me mandó ese niño especial… Porque no sé qué pueda pasar el día de mañana. Si me puedan deportar, si me pueda pasar algo y no poder estar con él.

[I am worried because he is growing, and I do not know what could happen tomorrow with him, and knowing that I may not be with him, I think a lot about that. But I have to live day to day with him. I do not want to be traumatized by the future, [thinking about]
what will happen to him if I am not with him. It’s difficult, but God only knows why he sent me that special child… Because I do not know what could happen tomorrow. If they can deport me, if something happens to me and I can’t be with him.

Paty makes the “foreignness” very explicit for her son. She tells him, “Tú no eres de acá” [you are not from here], and tells him that if she were deported he would have to go with her.

She does this so that he understands that even though “eres nacido acá” [you were born here] he can also be affected by deportation and so he needs to “aprender el español” [learn Spanish].

[risas] Y por eso le digo a él, "Tú debes de por eso aprender el español. Porque tú no eres de acá, de acá. Sí, eres nacido acá. Pero tus padres son mexicanos. Y si hubiera en el momento, no sé--", le digo a veces, "si nos deportaran, lógico. Eres mi hijo. Te tengo que llevar. Y si ya no regreso, no te puedo dejar acá solo. [...] Tú tienes que aprender el español porque del país que yo vengo, no se habla el inglés. Las escuelas no te dan el inglés. Entonces, habla Spanish". Es como lo entendió.

[laughs] And that’s why I say to him, "You must, therefore learn Spanish. Because you're not from here, from here." Yes, you're born here. But your parents are Mexicans. And if there was a moment, I do not know--, I say sometimes, "if they deported us, logical, you are my son. I have to take you. And if I don’t come back, I can’t leave you here alone. [...] You have to learn Spanish because in the country I come from they don’t speak English. The schools don’t teach you English. So, speak Spanish." That’s how he understood it.

Paty clarifies that she loves her children, and she would never leave them here with family. For her, family isn’t going to “tratar[los] igual, como, como madre” [treat [them] the same as, as a mother]. So she tells them that they should learn English because it will be needed and it is their language, but they must learn Spanish in case they deport her and they have to go with her. She argues with me that she has no one to leave them here with:

¿Maestra con quién los dejaría acá? Tengo familia. ¿Usted cree que mi familia los va a tratar igual, como uno, como madre? No todas tenemos ese amor. […] A ver, por eso les digo, “aprovechen, aprovechen aprendan el inglés como el español, aprendan el inglés porque les va a hacer falta, porque es su idioma de ustedes, y el español por si algún día me deportan y se tengan que ir conmigo, que no le pido eso a Dios, pero por si las dudas, hay que prevenir de todos hijos", "Tienes razón mamá". […] Por eso a veces yo siento que sí, es bueno que ellos aprendan los dos idiomas, que le digo a veces, "Y no se les olvide que no son americanos, que también son mexicanos".
[Teacher, who would I leave them with here? I have family but do you think that my family will treat them the same as, as a mother? We do not all have that love. [...] Let's see, that's why I tell them, “take advantage, take advantage of learning English like Spanish, learn English because you're going to need it, because it's your language, and Spanish, in case one day I'm deported and you have to go with me. I do not ask God for that, but just in case, you have to prepare for everything children." You're right mom."[...] That's why sometimes I feel like it's good for them to learn the two languages, which I say sometimes, "And do not forget that you are not Americans, that you are also Mexicans."]

While the mothers primarily discussed English for future jobs and opportunities, Spanish is framed as a means to survive. These mothers recognize that if they were to be deported, their children would go with them. Without speaking Spanish they would have a difficult time adjusting to their life in Mexico or elsewhere. Even though these mothers believe that both languages have value – the commodification of each language is dependent on a very tenuous future. Although the mothers feel strongly that their children should be bilingual, they accept the fact that their children are placed in monolingual classrooms. The next section addresses the reasons as to why this might be so.

**The False Dichotomy: Remedy the Disability or Develop Bilingualism/Biliteracy**

Although all of the mothers in this study expressed an interest in bilingualism, and in bilingual education for their children, only two of the children (Justin and María Teresa) were enrolled in a bilingual program at the time of the study. When asked to address this contradiction, the mothers would often reveal a dichotomous perspective in which a bilingual education could not be provided alongside or in conjunction with special education services. The section below addresses how difficulties in language, as evaluated in school, plays an important part of how the mothers view their children’s disabilities as well as influence their decisions to keep their children out of bilingual programs and in some cases remove them from bilingual programs.
Ana reveals how because of her disability, María Teresa “tiene dificultades” [has difficulties] learning English. For Ana, “lo principal, de aquí, es el inglés” and so it is important that María Teresa at least learn English well:

Lo principal, de aquí, pues es el inglés. Y como ella tiene dificultades para aprenderlo, entonces, solo la voy a dejar en lo de inglés.

[The main thing, from here, well it’s English. And since she has difficulties to learn it, then, I’m just going to leave her in English.]

In this brief statement, Ana reveals her rationale for wanting to move María Teresa from the bilingual class she is now to a monolingual English class.

Nancy, whose son is in a monolingual English class, feels that only after her son does well “por lo menos el IEP” [on at least the IEP], would she consider signing him up for a bilingual program:

La verdad lo he pensado [inscribirlo en un programa bilingüe], pero para mí siento que tiene muchísimos programas […]. Pero ojalá, Dios quiera, lo supere por lo menos el IEP, entonces, ya hablaría yo [con la escuela].

[I really thought about [enrolling him in a bilingual program], but for me I feel that he has so many programs […]. But I hopefully, God willing, he will exceed at least the IEP, then, I would speak [with the school].]

The mothers did not seem to recognize the inherent contradiction in this dichotomy. Whereas all of the mothers identified their child as Spanish-speaking, they still seemed to believe that their child could not be formally educated in a bilingual setting as a result of their “descapacidad” [disability] or “problemas” [problems]. Some of this may be due to the fact that “problemas de lenguaje” [speech issues] were the mother’s primary indication of a problem.

María acknowledges her son’s difficulties with language, with words, with pronunciation and ascribes these issues to his autism:
Porque **por su discapacidad**, de él que tiene **autismo**, tiene también **problemas de lenguaje**. **No puede hablar ni pronunciar bien las palabras**. Y le digo, a veces yo tengo que corregirlo en español. En inglés, tal vez lo corregirán en la escuela. Pero en cuestión de español yo trato de corregirlo en español. A veces **no puede pronunciar una palabra**. Yo trato, trato, trato de que vuelva a repetirlo, repetirlo, repetirlo **hasta que pueda decirlo bien**.

[Yes, yes. Because of his disability, he has autism, he also has language problems. He can not speak or pronounce words well. And I tell you, sometimes I have to correct him in Spanish. In English, maybe they correct it at school. But in a matter of Spanish I try to corre-- Sometimes he can not pronounce a word. I try, I try, I try to get him to repeat it again, repeat it, repeat it until he can say it right.]

María states that her son has a difficult time expressing himself: “no puede hablar ni pronunciar bien las palabras” **[He can not speak or pronounce words well]**. She focuses mostly on what Justin can’t do and her need to “corregirlo en español” **[correct him in Spanish]**.

However, during all of the observations that took place at their home, she and Justin communicated solely in Spanish and did not present any issues. In addition, in her first interview, María stated that Justin felt most comfortable using Spanish when engaging in oral communication.

**Why is it then that mothers accept monolingual placements in schools?** The answer lies in what mothers reveal as what school professionals told them: “ellas me dijeron.”

**“Ellas me dijieron…”— Monolingual ideologies among school professionals**

In the following excerpt, Paty reveals why the mothers may feel that it is impossible for their EBLADs to be educated bilingually. It turns out that it is the educators in school who disseminate this idea “que se **confunden** los niños” **[that children get confused]**. And yet, Paty herself feels that even though “uno les habla español” **[one speaks Spanish]** at home, her children did not have a problem acquiring English at school. As Paty indicates, it seems that these mothers are savvier about bilingualism than the school professionals:
Cuando estaba creo que en tercer grado, pregunté [sobre inscribirlo en una clase bilingüe] y ellas me dijeron que no podían porque a él lo iban a confundir. Dice que se confunden los niños. Porque realmente, a veces sí, el inglés que es el idioma de ellos les cuesta. Ahora, con otro idioma.

[When he was there, I think that in the third grade, I asked [about placing him in a bilingual class] and they told me they could not because it was going to confuse him. They say that the children get confused. Because really, sometimes yes, the English, which is their language, is hard for them. Now, you add another language.]

And when I asked whether she agreed with the school professionals’ decision, Paty says:

Pues, yo siento que no, yo diría que no porque pues, como padres, pues uno les habla español. Y eso ya sería por parte de la escuela, el inglés. Porque, bueno, al menos yo eso sentí en la niña, que no fue problema. Porque ella, o quizás dependió de la mente de ella. Como ella es diferente a él.

[Well, I feel like I do not, I would say no because, as parents, well one speaks Spanish to them. And that would already be on the part of the school, English. Because, well, at least I felt that in the girl, it was not a problem. Because she, or maybe it depended on her mind. Since she is different from him.]

Paty states that she does not agree with the schools’ message that bilingualism would be confusing and she cites her child’s actual linguistic practices as evidence. However, at the end she compares her “typically developing” daughter who is in a bilingual program, with her “disabled” child, and so rationalizes her son’s monolingual placement: “como ella es diferente a él” [Since she is different from him].

The fact that Paty was told by her child’s school that bilingualism was too confusing was not unique to her. Multiple mothers shared similar stories. This was Elodia’s experience:

Sí [ellos han ofrecido la opción de clase bilingüe], pero para él es muy difícil. [...] Porque es difícil que aprenda los dos idiomas, tanto para escribirlo, al leerlo … para ellos es más fácil que aprenda sólo un idioma.

[Yes [they have offered the option of bilingual class], but for him it is very difficult. [...] Because it is difficult to learn both languages, both to write it, to read it … for them it is easier to learn only one language.]
Carlota shares Elodia’s view that a child with disabilities has difficulties learning two languages:

¿[T]e imaginas?, está aprendiendo a hablar. Y **si tú le metes dos idiomas es más difícil**, ¿no? Es mejor que hable solamente un idioma. Y ya hasta que empecé a estructurarse en su forma de hablar, ya meterle el otro idioma. Pero pobre niño, los niños que tienen esa discapacidad y hablan dos idiomas, yo creo que es mucho peor, ¿no?

*Can you imagine? He's learning to speak. And if you give him two languages it's more difficult, right? It is better to speak only one language. And until he begins to structure his way of speaking, then you can add the other language. But poor child, children who have that disability and speak two languages, I think it's much worse, right?*

Carlota, who previously said that her son spoke “better” than his typically developing peers now tries to convince herself that being bilingual would be “difícil” [*difficult*].

Unfortunately, teachers and schools are a major factor in the distribution of misinformation regarding bilingualism and disability. Teachers have also told Ana that it is better for her daughter to learn only in English. Teachers tell her it is “para el bien de ella” [*for her own good*], repeating the assertion that it is very complicated to learn two languages at the same time:

**Yo creo que solo lo dejaría en inglés. Bueno, para el bien de ella. Para que lo aprenda, pero para el bien de ella.** Pero pues por un lado, no. No sabría-- ¿cómo le diré?, no sabría calificarla yo, si lo está hablando bien. […]**Los maestros dicen que es mejor para ella.** Para que solo en un--, solo en inglés se enfoque. **Y no se le haga tan complicado aprender** al mismo tiempo los dos idiomas.

*[I think I would only leave her in English. Well, for her own good. To learn it, but for her own good. But on the one hand, no. I would not know ..., how can I tell you? I would not know how to evaluate her, if she is speaking well. […] Teachers say it's better for her. So that only in one--, she focuses only in English. And it will not be so complicated to learn both languages at the same time.]*

Ana is able to follow this recommendation in good conscience because she believes that the teachers are the experts and as such “tratan de orientar a uno como papás lo más que pueden” [*try to guide one as parents as much as they can*]. When I asked Ana about how María Teresa’s
transition from a bilingual setting to a monolingual setting will impact her ability to support her
daughter academically, she once again cites the teachers’ recommendation:

Bueno, la recomendación fue de los maestros, que es mejor que estuviera en una
clase—, en una clase de inglés, solo de inglés. Los niños que tienen problemitas con el
aprendizaje de español a inglés, es mejor dejarlos en una sola clase. Bueno, por un
lado estaría bien, porque pues aprendería mejor el inglés. Pero por otro lado, en casa,
pues yo no sabría—, ¿cómo le diré?, si ella no está aprendiendo bien. O en el español,
pues lo hablaríamos el español en la casa, pues lo podría calificar. Pero el inglés, pues no.
O por la--., ejemplo, ella me haría hablar más inglés, pero yo no le entendería.

[Well, the recommendation was from the teachers, that it’s better that she be in a class--,
in an English class, just English. Children who have problems with learning from
Spanish to English, it is better to leave them in a single class. Well, on one hand it would
be good, because then she would learn English better. But on the other hand, at home,
because I would not know ..., how can I tell you ?, if she is not learning well. Or in
Spanish, well because we would speak Spanish at home, so I could assess it. But English,
well no. Or for the--., example, she would speak to me more English, but I would not
understand her.]

Mothers like Ana feel totally incapable of assessing their children’s progress in English,
whereas they can do so in Spanish. Thus, they feel that they have to trust the teachers with
recommendations about English. However, this trust comes at a cost. In this same excerpt, Ana
explains the ways in which mothers are impacted when their children are moved to monolingual
settings: “en casa, pues yo no sabría […] si ella no está aprendiendo bien” [at home, I would not
know […] if she is not learning well] and “ella me hablaría más inglés, pero yo no le entendería”
[she would speak more English, but I would not understand]. When children are placed in
monolingual English settings mothers rightfully worry that they will lose their ability to assess
their child’s learning and even their ability to communicate with their children. Still, Ana will
support the school’s decision to move her daughter to a monolingual English class the following
school year because it is in the best interest of her child.

Ana and many of the other mothers are often so concerned with their children’s welfare
and advancement that they are willing to do everything that they can in order to ensure that they
make progress, even when that means promoting a linguistic policy that excludes them from their child’s academic development. This shows the mothers’ interest in their children’s well-being and school success. For mamy, the only way to subvert this exclusion is by becoming language teachers in their own homes, as the next section indicates.

**Language Learning at Home**

While the mothers side with the teachers with regards to language learning at school, they don’t completely give up the hopes that their children will be bilingual. Instead, they find ways to support their children’s home language development outside of school. They take on the role of language teachers themselves, they enroll their children in Spanish language catechism and they make efforts to learn English themselves, both as a way to expand their own linguistic repertoires and to model multilingual language learning.

“Yo le enseño”—Home language education at home

One way that mother’s support their children’s bilingual development outside of school is by engaging them in direct Spanish instruction in the home as Carlota previously indicated and asserts here, once again: “en casa, yo le enseño a leer, a escribir [en español]” [at home, I teach him to read, to write [in Spanish]]. Both Paty and Ana repeat that they are teaching their children Spanish at home. Paty says: “**Está aprendiendo el español, parte por aquí de la casa, y por la hermana. Pero él por parte de la escuela, no.**” [He's learning Spanish, in part here at home, and through his sister. But on the part of the school, no]. And Ana repeats that even though the home might not be able to teach her child to read and write Spanish, it definitely helps her learn Spanish: “Pues el español tal vez no lo pueda escribir o tanto, pero **sí lo podrá**
aprender lo que pueda en la casa.”  

Besides the home, mothers, interested in their children’s development of Spanish, and especially literacy development, see the Catholic church and catechism instruction as a viable place where their children are learning to read and write Spanish. This is the subject of the next section.

“El catecismo en español” – Teaching Spanish through God

Additionally, even though these mothers’ desires to educate their children bilingually have been subverted at school, many of the mothers ensured their children would learn to be biliterate by enrolling them in Spanish catechism in the local Catholic church. Rosa’s statement is indicative of their thinking:

Como aquí viene los domingos también el catecismo en español, entonces, ahí también. Ya va aprendiendo más. Y con la hermana, pues. [...] sí[, yo eligí que le dieran catecismo en español].[...] Para ayudarle en las tareas. Porque yo en inglés, no sé absolutamente nada, entonces, yo no podría ayudarlo.

[As since he comes here Sunday also the catechism in Spanish, then, there too. He is already learning more. And with the sister, well […] yes [, I chose that be given a catechism in Spanish] […] To help him in on the homework. Because I in English, I know absolutely nothing, then, I could not help him].

The mothers want to make sure that their children develop their Spanish. Thus, they teach them at home and find other opportunities for them to learn. Catechism classes provide them with such opportunities. But mothers are also engaged in trying to learn English so that they can help their children.

“Uno tiene que aprender el idioma” – Mothers’ efforts to learn English

While Rosa states that “en inglés, no sé absolutamente nada” [in English, I know absolutely nothing], this debilitating monolingualism was not due to lack of desire or effort on
the part of the mothers. The mothers were aware, even “antes de venir” [before coming], that “en este país el inglés” [in this country English] is critical. Ana says:

Porque pues el español lo hablo pero yo estoy aquí en este país el inglés, entiendo algunas palabras pero no diremos --.[...] por mi parte me hace falta mucho el inglés para enseñarles a mis niños y para entenderlos, si está bien en la tarea. Es muy importante saberlo, el idioma. [...] Estoy aprendiendo apenas, a hablarlo un poco.

[Because I speak Spanish but I am here in this country English, I understand some words but we will not say - [...] for my part I need a lot of English to teach my children and to understand them, if they’re doing well in their homework. It is very important to know, the language. [...] I’m just learning, to talk a little.]

Paty is learning basic English through cassettes that her boss gave her:

[Antes de venir a los Estados Unidos] yo decía, "uno tiene que aprender el idioma", pero me decía mi esposo, "pero también ahí hay muchas personas que hablan español. [...]\[Ya aquí, mi jefa me dijo"Te voy a comprar unos cassettes en inglés para que aprendas", Le digo "bueno". Y sí, los compró, y aprendí, o sea, pero lo básico, lo que yo sentí que puedo para mi trabajo.]

[Before coming to the United States] I said, "you have to learn the language," but my husband used to tell me, "but there are also many people who speak Spanish. [...] [Once here, my boss said] "I’m going to buy you some cassettes in English so you can learn." I say "good." And yes, she bought them, and I learned, well, but the basics, what I felt I could for my job.

For María, the lack of English is embarrassing, and she was terrified that people would not understand her:

Yo sentía miedo de no poder que la gente me entendiera o comunicarme con las personas. Ese era mi miedo cuando llegué a este país, y lo sigue siendo porque pues no [risas], no hablo el inglés.

[I was afraid of not being able to understand or communicate with people. That was my fear when I arrived in this country, and it still is because I do not [laughs], I do not speak English.]

The mothers’ efforts to learn English have often been met with serious challenges. The first challenge has been finding the means with which to pay for English classes, as María states:
Hay escuelas, pero uno tiene que pagar la escuela y mi esposo no creo que me daría dinero para pagar la escuela, [...] Pero, si yo estuviera en una escuela, no hay como interrupciones, sería todo el año, eso me ayudaría mucho para poderlo aprender [ingles].

[There are schools, but one has to pay for school and my husband I don’t think he would give me money to pay for school, [...] But], if I were in a school, there are no interruptions, it would be all year, that would help me a lot so that I could learn [English].]

Even with limited financial resources, the mothers have sought out free or low cost opportunities to learn English by listening to “cassettes en ingles” [English tapes], and by attending ESL classes in their children’s “escuelita” [school] and at the local “iglesia” [church].

Ana goes to “la escuelita.” She says:

Estoy tratando de aprender el inglés, pero ahí, más o menos.[...] Voy a la escuelita, ahí lo que la maestra enseña es lo básico, para una conversación, preguntas o una plática. Una plática corta.

[I'm trying to learn English, but there, more or less. [...] I go to the school, there what the teacher teaches is the basics, for a conversation, questions or a chat. A brief chat.]

Paty goes to the church:


[Yes. Well, I've tried to learn. A year ago, here at the church of [REDACTED], they gave an English course, well a year. But since my husband did not work at night, I took it. And yes, there I felt that I could do sometimes - as they say, the verbs. The teacher was Chinese. Very good teacher. [...] It was Tuesday and Thursday. Those two days. But it was three hours. I did like it a lot.]

And María seeks out free courses, even though English is “extenso” and she can’t really learn it well:

Cuando hay cursos gratis es cuando yo aprovecho, pero, le digo --no es, como que el tiempo es muy corto y no puedo aprender, es mucho, el inglés es extenso y no puedo aprenderlo bien.
[When there are free courses, it's when I take advantage, but, I say - it's not like, the time is too short and I can not learn, it's a lot, English is extensive and I can not learn it well.]

The most common issue was that the free courses were offered at inconvenient times. For Ana, classes were offered at a time when she couldn’t leave her son alone:

El año pasado hubo clases [de ingles] también, pero yo no podía ir porque el niño no había con quien dejarlo.

[Last year there were [English] classes too, but I could not go because I had no one to leave the little boy with.] Paty narrates how she was learning a lot in classes, but the more advanced class was intensive and offered at a time when her husband worked:

Yo sentía que si podía aprender ahí. Bueno, estaba aprendiendo muchas cosas. Pero este año, después me dijeron que acabó y que si quería seguir y yo le dije que sí. Entonces, cuando empezó la clase, me hablaron, pero mi esposo ya trabajaba. Y son tres horas. Entrábamos a las seis y salíamos a las nueve.

[I felt that I could learn there. Well, I was learning many things. But this year, they told me that it was over and that if I wanted to continue and I said yes. Then, when the class started, they talked to me, but my husband was already working. And it's three hours. We would get in at six and leave at nine.]

Classes were either offered during the day when some mothers worked or had to tend to young children or in the evenings when they needed to care for their families. Even if a mother “sabía que [ella] podría aprender” [knew that [she] could learn] in these programs, finding “con quien dejarlo” was enough to keep them from going, as Paty says:

Porque no puedo dejar los niños tres horas. No nos admiten con niños en la escuela. […] porque dicen que distraen. A veces como nosotras, como mamás no nos podemos concentrar. Porque ustedes están mirando al hijo que no toque, que no haga esto.

[Because I cannot leave the children for three hours. They do not admit us with children in school. [...] because they say they distract. Sometimes like us, like moms we cannot concentrate. Because you are watching your child to not touch, to not do this.]
Paty’s class was made up of 25 women and four or five men. She was told by a male teacher not to bring children to the class because when the children come, the parents are distracted and unable to concentrate.

Still even when time was not an issue, good quality English instruction was hard to come by. As a stay at home mom to school age children, María had the ability to attend English classes during the day. However, the courses that were available only “enseñan lo básico” [teach the basics]:

Sí, he ido a clases en la escuela de mi niño, pero sólo son por dos meses y eso no, o sea, tal vez te enseñen lo básico como los números, el abecedario y eso. Pero así como para entablar una conversación, no. […] Porque sólo el curso duran dos meses, entonces es muy poco tiempo para poder aprender muchas cosas.

[Yes, I have been to classes in my child's school, but they are only for two months and that is not, that is, maybe they teach you the basics like numbers, the alphabet and that. But well enough to start a conversation, no. […] Because the course only lasts two months, then it is very little time to learn many things.]

Similarly, when I met Carlota she was in her second year of enrollment at a weekly English as a Second Language class in the local community center. However, classes were irregular and were often cancelled due to low participation levels. She was often the only to show up to class and the volunteer teachers—as she described, two blonde, monolingual English, stay at home moms– would simply cancel the class rather than “waste” the lesson.

Unfortunately, many people, including their children, continue to believe that these mothers are monolingual by choice: “creerán que yo no quiero aprender el idioma” [they may think that I don’t want to learn the language] rather than by circumstance. María expresses how she really would like to learn English to help her children. Her inability to speak English is a source of great frustration for her:
Me siento mal porque **creerán que yo no quiero aprender el idioma, pero a mí me gustaría aprender el idioma**. Porque así también puedo ayudar a mis hijos, con las tareas. Sobre todo, con la lectura y con escritura.

*I feel bad because they will believe that I do not want to learn the language, but I would like to learn the language. Because I can also help my children with homework. Above all, with reading and writing.*

Paty’s son, Dan, blamed her for not speaking English and for not being able to help him with his homework. This made her very uncomfortable:

*[Dan me decía] "Tú tienes la culpa, porque yo no sé por qué tú no hablas el inglés. Tienes muchos años porque tú no eres una baby. Tienes muchos años mami y tú no sabes hablar el inglés". [...] Porque dice que yo no pudiera hablar el inglés. El que yo no lo pueda ayudar en la tarea, porque como viene en inglés [...] Él me reprochaba. Y después yo me sentía más incómoda, más-- muy fuera de aquí.*

*[Dan was saying to me] "You are to blame, because I do not know why you do not speak English, you are many years old because you are not a baby, you are very old mom and you can not speak English." [...] Because he says that I could not speak English. That I can not help him on the homework, because it comes in English [...] He shamed me. And then I felt more uncomfortable, more-- very out of place.*

It is possible that the mothers’ own limitations in English contribute to their desire for their children to acquire English before Spanish – or better than Spanish. It is a way for them to spare their children of the frustrations and social paralysis: “me siento tan incómoda, tan inútil”  

*I feel so uncomfortable, so useless,* that they have experienced as a result of not being able to fully communicate in English.

The children intrinsically perceive and understand that Spanish monolingualism presents a limitation in the mothers’ lives. They try to remedy this by offering their mothers English lessons at home. This experience of children as English teachers is discussed in the next section.
“Es así en inglés ¿okay?” – Reciprocal learning

While these mothers struggle to find appropriate learning environments outside of their homes, they are resourceful and so they find ways to make language learning at home reciprocal. Here Nancy reveals, that in her family teaching goes both ways. She teaches her son things when they are in the kitchen, or in the store. But sometimes “en vez de yo enseñarle, ellos me enseñan” [instead of I teaching them, they teach me].

Bueno, todo depende, ¿verdad? de qué cosas. Si es en la cocina, ya le digo, le pido algo, pero si él no sabe, voy y le enseño. Si es en la tienda, muchas veces, en vez de yo enseñarle, ellos me enseñan, porque hay cosas que están en inglés y yo no las entiendo. Y, “¿Qué es esto?”, o, “Estoy buscando esto”. Y como es que--,”No lo encuentro”. Si no lo conozco, en vez de yo ayudarles, me ayuda él.

[Well, everything depends, right? On what things. If it’s in the kitchen, I tell him, I ask him for something, but if he does not know, I go and show him. If it is in the store, many times, instead of teaching them, they teach me, because there are things that are in English and I do not understand them. And, "What is this?", Or, "I'm looking for this." And how is that--, "I cannot find it". If I do not know it, instead of helping them, he helps me.]

Limited English is a great hindrance for these mothers, thus, the fact that their children speak English, even if they are “disabled,” is of great help to them. In those instances, the children are not disabled; the mothers are disabled. The role of teacher and student are reversed. The fact that the mothers can identify ways, in which they learn from children, supports the mothers’ perceptions of disability as socially constructed. Not only does Nancy identify that her child is capable of learning, he is capable of learning in Spanish: “en la cocina…voy y le enseño” [in the kitchen ... I go and I show him]. Likewise, he is also capable of teaching her “me ayuda él” [he helps me]; flexing his bilingual muscle.

Paty reveals how her son has become her English teacher:

A veces diciéndole que: "Mira, esto se llama así". Yo no sé, a veces le digo: "¿Cómo es en inglés?", le digo: "Anótamelo", a veces ahí en esa pizarra. Luego me dice: "Mira, mamá, en español tú dices que se llama así, y es así en inglés, ¿okay?", y es una
forma. No sé, que a veces siento que sea para los dos, tanto él como yo, que yo sepa cómo se dice esa cosa en inglés y él cómo se diga en español.

[Sometimes telling him: "Look, this is called that." I do not know, sometimes I say: "How is it in English?", I say: "Write it down", sometimes there on that blackboard. Then he says: "Look, mom, in Spanish you say it's called this, and it's like this in English, okay?", And it's a way. I do not know, that sometimes I feel it is for both of us, both he and I, that I know how to say that thing in English and he [knows] how it is said in Spanish.]

Here Paty shows that the children also understand that this as a reciprocal relationship.

The mothers teach the children when they “dice que se llama así” [say it’s called this] in Spanish, and the children teach the mothers when they say that “es así en ingles” [it’s like this in English].

**Conclusion**

In this section the mothers shared their understanding of how bilingualism functions in the world and in their children. The mothers value bilingualism. But they are much more concerned with ensuring their children’s academic success in the now which is only in English than securing their futures, particularly when the future, especially their ability to live in the US is ambiguous. Part of this is influenced by their perception of disability as something that can be remedied or remediated, but it is also heavily influenced by the information they receive from teachers and other educational professionals. The mothers’ inability to grasp English leaves them in a position where they have to trust what the teachers are saying even when the teachers are misinformed. This misinformation is often so convincing that the mothers themselves often miss the fact that their children are already bilingual based on the linguistic practices they exhibit at home and at school. This is a perfect example of the ways in which these mothers continue to make choices that are in the best interest of their children, even when they are not in their own best interest. The next chapter, six, will discuss other choices that mothers make in order to support their children and the ways in which these choices negatively and positively affect their own lives.
Chapter VI: Mothering: “Primero Están Mis Hijos”

Introduction

While there are many ways in which a MoE BLAD’s capacity to engage in her child’s academic development are stunted by a child’s disability labels and monolingual placement, these mothers still make great efforts to support their children’s learning. However, these efforts are not often recognized because they do not fit into the dominant culture’s definition of academic involvement. This chapter will review the ways in which academic involvement is defined within the literature as well as the ways in which MoEBLADs engage in their children’s education, the barriers they encounter, the motivations that drive them forward, and the ways in which these acts contribute to their identity as mothers.

Relevant Literature: The Mothers of EBLADs

In an effort to understand the experiences of the mothers in this study this section will explore the ways in which the literature on family involvement in schools often disregards mothers’ personal relationships to their children.

The Parents of EBLADs - Assigned Roles and Expectations

Best practices on how to support the academic needs of EBLADs remain up for debate, however, the one tenet that remains universally unchallenged is that the greatest source of support for these children are their parents. Parental involvement\(^7\) has been shown to increase social and academic achievement for all children (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Tran, 2014) including children LAD (Burke, 2013; de Apodaca, Gentling, Steinhaus, & Rosenberg, 2015; Spann, Kohler, & Soenksen, 2003; Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe, Weldon, & Schrandt, 2009). Whereas the definition of involvement for the parents of a “typically developing” child can vary

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\(^7\) Also referred to as parental engagement
from systematic and purposeful participation in academic life to simply being present and having high expectations, for parents of children labeled as disabled involvement goes beyond expectations, conversations and teacher choice (K. Robinson & Harris, 2014; Vandergrift & Greene, 1992). Participation for these parents requires a great deal of education about one’s rights and the rights of one’s children. The need for parental involvement is so crucial to the success of children labeled as disabled that IDEA makes it a mandated and legal obligation.

Under IDEA, parents are granted rights that guarantee participation in five aspects of a child’s educational career:

- Parents have the right to participate in meetings related to the evaluation, identification, and educational placement of their child.
- Parents have the right to participate in meetings related to the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to their child.
- Parents are entitled to be members of any group that decides whether their child is a “child with a disability” and meets eligibility criteria for special education and related services.
- Parents are entitled to be members of the team that develops, reviews, and revises the individualized education program (IEP) for their child. If neither parent can attend the IEP meeting, the school must use other methods to ensure their participation, including individual or conference calls.
- Parents are entitled to be members of any group that makes placement decisions for their child. If neither parent can attend the meeting where placement is decided, the school must use other methods to ensure their participation, including individual or conference calls, or video conferencing.

(National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2013)

These rights are designed to ensure that parents have a voice at every stage of their child’s education. However, for parents of emergent bilinguals labeled as disabled the level of parental involvement they exhibit can be impacted by factors relating to their gender, race, socioeconomic status, immigration status, limited English language proficiency and limited educational background (“Parental Involvement in Schools,” 2013). These “low levels” of participation under the mainstream definition of parental involvement have resulted in some research about the parents of EBLADs. The bulk of literature written about the parents of
EBLADs (PoEBLADs) is framed around the experiences of mothers (Ijalba, 2015b; Kim, 2013; Lee & Park, 2016; Reay, 1998; Stanley, 2013; West, Noden, Edge, & David, 1998), with a particular focus on participation during the individual education plan meetings (Engler, 2013; Fish, 2008; Hedeen, Peter, Moses, & Engiles, 2013; Losinski, Katsiyannis, White, & Wiseman, 2016; Montelongo, 2015; B. Orozco, 2014; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Javitz, & Valdes, 2012). As a result, the literature highlights the ways in which culturally and linguistically diverse mothers are unprepared to participate in the special education process.

Although the PoEBLADs are often presented in relation to their socioeconomic status and their linguistic abilities, culture is also discussed in the literature. Culture is used to describe the PoEBLAD’s views of dis/ability and their modes of interacting. For Latinxs, culture, by way of beliefs and rituals, has a major impact on the choices they make for themselves and for their children. For example, the way that many Latinx parents process their children’s dis/ability is through a cultural lens that leads them to believe that their child’s dis/ability was/is the result of an external, non-biological force such as mal de ojo [evil eye] or sustos [fright] (Algood, Harris, & Hong, 2013; Blacher, Begum, Marcoulides, & Baker, 2013; Ijalba, 2015b; Skinner, Rodriguez, Bailey, & Jr, 1999). Additionally, the strong dependence on community and family, which relates back to cultural values such as familismo/familiarismo and personalismo, plays a major role in the way that parents interact with their children, the school and its representatives (Cohen, 2013; Ijalba, 2015b). Culture also influences the hopes and concerns that Latinx parents have for their children labeled as disabled as well as who they share these intimate thoughts with (L. Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013; Ijalba, 2015b; Jasis & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2012; Jiménez-Castellanos, Ochoa, & Olivos, 2016).
The many facets of involvement

Involvement looks different to different stakeholders. However, one of the most universal ideals held by schools and researchers with regards to involvement and MoEBLADs is that their participation is a requirement. As previously mentioned, IDEA grants parents the right to be active participants in their children’s special education experiences. Although these rights are guaranteed, it is important to note that participation is ultimately, the parent’s choice. While some may perceive this section of IDEA as the presentation of a mandate, the fact is that IDEA simply guarantees each parent a seat at the table, should they choose to use it. Moreover, it is at each parent’s discretion whether or not to participate and to what degree (National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, 2013). This ambiguity combined with variations in cultural values result in diverse presentations of involvement. Additionally, many MoEBLADs do not feel they have the social and cultural capital necessary to participate in the ways that IDEA suggests and that schools expect.

As we have seen in the last two chapters, MoEBLADs consider themselves active participants in the academic lives of their children. This presents a need to think outside of the standard definition of involvement. We need to consider the many ways in which mothers support their children and go above and beyond in ways that are not always visible because they happen outside of school, but also in ways that are distinctive from the mainstream cultural understanding (Gaetano, 2007; B. Orozco, 2014; G. L. Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; C. S. Ryan et al., 2010; Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). According to Montelongo (2015), when compared to other families, MoEBLADs are involved in their children’s education at the same rate, but in different ways. According to Zarate (2007),

Latin[x] mothers equate involvement in their child’s education with involvement in their lives: participation in their children’s lives ensures that their formal schooling is
complemented with educación taught in the home. Mothers believed that monitoring their children’s lives and providing moral guidance resulted in good classroom behavior, which in turn allowed for greater academic learning opportunities. Awareness of their children’s lives also led to increased trust and communication with students, and it allowed for timely intervention if a child deviated in his or her behavior. Finally, mothers felt that it was their end of an unspoken agreement with the school to holistically educate the child. (p. 9)

This designation of home learning versus school learning is supported by the assertion that mothers view the school as experts in teaching and learning, thus trusting them to make decisions regarding the best educational options for their children (Cohen, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2013). MoEBLADs are very concerned with ensuring that their children are as well behaved as their typically developing counterpart (Arcia, Reyes-Blanes, & Vazquez-Montilla, 2000). This may relate to the fact that in most Central and South American countries children and people with disabilities are overwhelmingly institutionalized, separating them from their families and communities (Cohen, 2013). Thus if a child labeled as disabled is included in general education classrooms, they must follow the same behavioral expectations as all children. MoEBLADs also think of their involvement with their children as providing a safe home, protecting them from harmful individuals, and taking them to doctors in order to “cure” them of their disabilities (Ijalba, 2015b). Latinx mothers are very much aware of the fact that active participation in the lives of their children results in academic gains, and many of them express a desire to be more involved in schools (Aceves, 2014; Gaetano, 2007; Montelongo, 2015; B. Orozco, 2014; G. L. Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2008; Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

Aside from cultural understandings of their roles as involved mothers, there are many reasons why mothers limit their participation to the lives of their children outside of school. Among them are issues of capital, lack of confidence, mistrust, poor linguistic support and differing cultural views. Many MoEBLADs exhibit decreased involvement because they feel that
the schools are not very welcoming, do not value their voices, do not regard them as equal partners and/or do not value their culturally bound perspectives (Aceves, 2014; Lalvani, 2015; Montelongo, 2015; Ramirez, 2003; Rodriguez et al., 2013; C. S. Ryan et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2008). Mothers also feel as if their needs are not sufficiently met so that they can be active participants. This refers to a lack of translators and interpreters, lack of advocacy or rights education, lack of transparency during the IEP and special education process, and schools failing to provide concrete strategies (Aceves, 2014; Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Additionally, mothers also point to the cultural disconnect that exists between the schools’ representatives and themselves, which results in a lack of understanding of the goals mothers have for their children (Wolfe & Durán, 2013).

Given the myriad of factors presented, it is understandable that scholars focus so heavily on increasing parent participation by asking schools to offer additional services such as trainings that aim to increase parental knowledge/awareness of their rights in hopes of increasing parental agency. Yet this suggestion directly counters the claim that mothers have decreased participation because they lack social capital (particularly time) (Rodriguez et al., 2013). Additionally, these trainings do not mitigate the biggest factor that mothers identify as hindering their ability to participate actively within the schools: language.

According to mothers, the lack of a shared language between the home and school is one of the primary ways by which schools silence them. Mothers feel that even with the use of translators and interpreters their voices are not actively in the room, but rather are filtered through the interpreters/translators lens or personal agenda (Wolfe & Durán, 2013). This agenda often aims to keep them in the role of listener rather than participant (Wolfe & Durán, 2013). Mothers identify language, both in formal and informal spaces, as “an insurmountable barrier to
participation” (Zarate, 2007, p. 9). Yet the way that the current literature speaks about and around language does little to help mothers remedy this daunting burden.

**Mothering EBLADs: Overview of findings**

The *testimonios* of the mothers in this study serve as a counter-narrative to what the literature portrays as lack of parental involvement. This chapter presents my findings of how the mothers in the study viewed and enacted their mothering role. In general, they followed one principle: “primero están mis hijos” [my children come first]. The chapter is organized into five sub-sections:

I start with sharing some of the observations of the three Testimonialistas — Ana, María and Paty — at home in the section labeled “At home with the Testimonialistas.” In so doing, I offer my own *testimonio* where I describe their homes and their interactions with their children.

The next section, “Involvement of the Mothers…,” shows how mothers view and enact their engagement supporting their children’s academic and linguistic development. The mothers describe the types of support they offer their children, and the tools and resources they use, both in the home, and out of the home. This section also shows how the mothers’ view their engagement.

In “Challenges faced by MoEBLADs” the mothers identify the issues that heavily impact their roles as (in)dependent women. Mothers describe their struggles with other children, their partners, and they share their feelings of raising their EBLADs alone, without support. MoEBLADs often deny their own autonomy, and in many cases happiness, in an effort to ensure that their children are thriving.

Despite the mothers’ feelings of loneliness, the next section, “The Mother-Child Relationship,” reveals the strong mother–child relationships within these families, and the joy
that their children bring. But mothers also share how school-based policies impact the relationship between mother and child.

I end this chapter with a section titled, “Recollection….” Here I offer a glimpse into how the three Testimonialistas find support and comfort in being engaged in the process of recollection. I share how important the recollection and collective dialogue helped them feel a sense of camaraderie and deep friendship, even if only for a day.

I start by describing the mothers’ strong sense of “primero están mis hijos” [my children are first], the first principle of mothering.

**Mothering: “Primero Están Mis Hijos”**

For these women, being a mother is the central role in their lives and so their children always come first. This is evident in the ways they interact with their children, the concerns that they shield their children from while allowing themselves to be consumed by them. We also get a glance at how their relationships with their children nourish and encourage them to keep moving forward. As previously mentioned, mothering is an exhausting task. The first section will showcase my testimonio of some of the activities recorded during the home observations with the Testimonialistas. The physical manifestation of mothering can be seen in the ways that mothers spend time with their children and in the ways they communicate with them.

**At Home with the Testimonialistas**

Another one of Carini’s stances that is deeply embedded in the work of descriptive inquiry is that if we truly want to develop a complete image of a child, we must observe them in a variety of spaces. As part of their participation in this study, the three Testimonialistas granted me access to their home. There, I was able to witness their interactions with their children, the
ways in which they communicate and the roles other family members play. What follows is a brief description of each of the three mothers’ homes, and their interactions with their children through my eyes.

Ana

Ana and María Teresa (MT) live above a storefront on the top floor of a fourth floor walk up. To the left of their buildings entrance is a Mexican bakery that specializes in ornate, multi-tiered cakes. To the right is a Salvadoran restaurant, which is known for its traditional and delicious pupusas as well as its rowdy patrons. The stairs to their apartment are very narrow and made narrower still by the bicycles and kids toys that line it. This space seems to serve as secondary storage for the families that live here. Ana’s apartment is the only one on her floor.

When you open the front door you are faced with the living room:

The space is very pink – [lacey] pink curtains line the walls [and windows]; a pink Disney princess blanket lines the couch/futon. There is a small altar in between the windows. The room is sparsely furnished. There is a futon, a folding table and three folding chairs. There is also a hutch that contains different figurines – cake toppers, coffee cups, and disposable plates. There are two heart shaped helium balloons floating in the ceiling and a small happy face and a pink hair bow balloon (Ana, Observation #1).

María Teresa and Ana live here with David, the younger child, and Ana’s husband. He was working during my visits so we never met. This was a three-room apartment with a small kitchen off of the living room and a bathroom in the living room. Beyond the living room there appeared to be two bedrooms: one for the family, and one that was previously rented out to a roommate/tenant.

I visited Ana in late winter/early spring. During the first visit, she was helping María Teresa with her math homework:

- Ana guides María Teresa through the math HW – suggest that she use her fingers to add: “las manos en frente yo te enseñe como – suma.”
  A: Cinco mas cinco
MT: diez
A: Más cuatro?
MT Counts on fingers: “Catorce”
A: Suma tú sola, ya sabe - con los dedos.

- María Teresa counts on her fingers as mom points to each number sentence.  

(Ana, Observation #1)

Ana not only provided María Teresa with a strategy: “con los dedos” *with your fingers*, she also modeled with her own hands and manipulated María Teresa’s hands whenever necessary:

María Teresa works silently at times and mom looks on, waiting for her to write something down or ask a question. – There is a lot of modeling and prompting – she contorts María Teresa’s fingers to match the number by which María Teresa will be adding on. (i.e., Pon tus siete *put up your seven*– sets up seven fingers using both of María Teresa’s hands- Ahora cuenta de ocho *now count up from eight*]. María Teresa counts up from 8 designating a number to each finger until she reaches the end of her hand, which indicates she has reached an answer (Ana, Observation #1).

This continued for almost an hour until nearly half of the worksheet was completed (Figure 5). Ana was incredibly encouraging as they worked often proclaiming: “Ya te faltan poquitos para la primera línea” *just a few more left in the first column*.

![Figure 5: Ana holds up María Teresa’s Math Homework Worksheet](image)

However, the time was not solely focused on work, in between math problems the family would take snack breaks together:
[María Teresa] walks over to get cups “ma ¿tú quieres?” [mama do you want?] Mom shakes her head. [María Teresa] grabs only two cups from the hutch.

They take another family break to have snack, chat and drink juice.

During my second visit the family was working on Paper Mache Easter baskets:

- [María Teresa] is helping mom by bringing materials in from the kitchen to the small table – which has been set up next to the couch.
- [María Teresa] brings out plastic to-go cylindrical containers. (like the soup kind and the big sherbet ice cream kind).
- [María Teresa] asks her mom if she is going to make one as well.
- The kids then sit at the table waiting for mom.
- “Ya casi está listo, espérenme”
- [María Teresa] and David chat [in Spanish] about the size of the bowls discussing which one is bigger.

[...]

- They then discuss what kind of animal theme David’s basket will have. He decides on a frog theme.
- Mom comes in from the kitchen and [María Teresa] shares with her David’s decision regarding animal themes.

There were many moments like this where the siblings interacted in Spanish while mom tended to something. As a matter fact, the first English utterance that I recorded during one of my visits came from Ana. She said “please” when asking María Teresa to do something.

Overall, this home was a very quiet, light and airy space. The children spoke softly and moved about as if they were figure skaters gliding across an icy floor. In many ways, it resembled Ana, whose personality could also be described as quiet, light and airy.

**María**

My first home observation with María and Justin did not actually begin at home but rather at school:

I met [María] at school; there we picked up Justin and then Jaden [the younger son]. [María] introduced me to each child individually. When she introduced me to Justin she told him: “Esta es la maestra de la cual te estuve contando, ¿te acuerdas? Ella vendrá a casa con nosotros hoy.” [This is the teacher I told you about, remember? She’s coming home with us today.] Justin then introduced himself [to me] using his whole name. A few minutes later we walked towards their home. While on the walk I fell back behind the
group, Justin positioned himself next to me and signaled for me to hold his hand. I presented him with my open hand, he took it and interlaced his fingers between mine. We walked this way for a few minutes. He told me about what he planned to do at home: he was going to play games, he was going to draw and read. A few minutes later he drops my hand. Moments later he returns and intertwines his fingers in mine. I explain to him that we can talk during the walk but that once I get to the house when I open my computer I wont be able to talk to him – he nods in understanding and proceeds to ask me what’s in my backpack. After a few minutes of walking hand in hand I start to get cold. I ask him if he’s cold and wants to put his hand in his pocket. He releases my hand and places his in his pocket (María, Observation #1).

From the very beginning Justin exhibits the very caring and loving nature that his mother talked about during our interviews. She also showed the ways in which she accommodates his need for consistency by reminding him of who I was and what I was doing: “Esta es la maestra de la cual te estuve contando, ¿te acuerdas? Ella vendrá a casa con nosotros hoy.” [This is the teacher I told you about, remember? She’s coming home with us today]. This introduction not only helped him feel more at ease but also facilitated my entry into the space.

![FIGURE 6. Justin holds my hand as we walk to his house](image)

Maria and Justin live a few blocks away from the school in a small building with fewer than eight units. Unlike the other Testimonialistas, María does not live in the Spanish speaking part of the neighborhood; she lives in the area that has been donned “Brooklyn’s Chinatown.”
Once in the home I got a glimpse into why María feels so overwhelmed; unlike Ana’s space, which felt very serene, María’s home felt very active. There was a lot of furniture and each room served as a multipurpose room: the living room was also a bedroom, the kitchen was also the dining room and the parents bedroom was also the children’s.

There is no common area in the home, what would be a living room is being used as a common room and bedroom – there are two beds towards one side of the room (a large one and a twin) on the opposite wall there is a fish tank, a dresser/TV stand with a TV on top. There are pictures of children hung up above the beds. There are also two armoires. There is a bouquet of flowers on the “TV stand;” there is a medium sized (about 10 inches tall) figurine next to the flowers. The furthest bedroom in the back – street facing – has a large bed and a set of bunk beds presumably where the kids sleep (María, Observation #1).

María and Justin live here with Jayden, the younger brother, Maria’s father, María’s husband and, when she’s in town, her mother. During my observations, María’s mother was visiting from Mexico, so I had the opportunity to not only meet her but also talk to her. I did not meet any of the men in the family; I gathered that the reason for this had to do with work.

Nonetheless, with just the women at home, there was plenty to do. In the span of two hours, the children played games, drew pictures, read books, ate supper and prepared for their tutoring sessions.

Justin proclaims that they are done and that they can clean up. Mom asks them to put it away slowly – Jaden picks it up whole.

While putting it away they talk about the importance of teamwork.

When they are done putting the dino[saur] puzzle away they begin taking apart and putting away the fire truck puzzle

Ju: Quiere otro juego [I want another game]

M: ¿Qué quieres jugar […] [What do you want to play]?

Ju: pintar o leer [painting or reading].

M: quieres pintar [you want to paint].
(María, Observation #1)

María uses every opportunity available to teach her sons. In one instance, she discusses the importance of teamwork with them, in the next she is working on vocabulary.

The kids gather their materials. Justin sets up on the TV stand (next to me). Jaden has decided to work alone in the bedroom.

M: ¿Qué es eso? [What's this?]
Ju: Un caboose [a caboose]
M: Un bus o un tren? [a bus or a train?]
Ju: Caboose [caboose]
M: ¿Qué es eso, caboose? [what's that caboose?]
Ju: No sé [I don't know]
M: Entonces cómo […] laughs [then how…]
Ju: Caboose es lo que viene al fin del tren. [Caboose is what comes at the end of the train.]

(María, Observation #1)

At first, María gets confused by Justin’s use of the word “caboose” part of this confusion may relate to the fact that the boys had been exclusively speaking in Spanish to their mother. However, rather than correcting him, she attempts to get Justin to explain what a caboose is. This is not true in Spanish, when Justin makes a mistake in Spanish María is very quick to correct him:

Ju: Trajelo, trajelo
M: Tráelo
Ju: Tráelo  (María, Observation #1)

She does this repeatedly during their time together. During my first observation she also corrected his pronunciation of the word “favor” and during the second she corrected his use of the words “arcoiris [rainbow] and “pescado [fish].” María was the one mother who engaged most actively in direct instructions of her children. She taught through play, she used vocabulary
flashcards and YouTube videos as her teaching materials. However, this was not viewed as sufficient support for María. At the end of our first observation, mom was getting Justin ready to meet with his math tutor. While she tried to give adequate attention to her other son, María was still very focused on making sure that Justin’s needs were met, perhaps because she perceives him as being the most needy.

Paty

Like María, Paty also lives in a home that she shares with family members beyond the nuclear family. The apartment, located a half a block from the main commercial strip, is on the first floor of a small rental building (fewer than 12 units). Paty, her husband and their two children (Dan, the child in the study, and Tanya, an older daughter) share one bedroom in the three-bedroom apartment. She has two brothers who each occupy another bedroom.

Common area in the home. There are three bedrooms and two bathrooms – the kids and their parents inhabit one, there are uncles in the other two. The family uses one bathroom exclusively for them and the uncles the other. The common area is located offset from the entrance in between the two bathrooms. It is sparsely furnished with a simple table with six chairs, a toy storage basket, a bookcase, a refrigerator and two additional chairs. There are also two bicycles one of which is electric that dad uses for work and is charging. The kitchen is off to the side – on the right of the entrance. (Paty, observation #1).

One of Paty’s greatest sources of pride was that the apartment had two bathrooms, so her family did not need to share with her brothers whom she identified as being considerably messier. Nonetheless, she – as the “woman of the house” was responsible for all of the cleaning.

Although the living room is a communal space, it is obvious that this is a space used mostly for and by the children. Dan arrives home from school before his mother. He waits for her in the living room with his sister Tanya, while their father sleeps in the bedroom. There is not
much talk between the children and their father. This is starkly different from how they interact with their mother and how she interacts with them:

From the moment [Paty] opens the door there is non-stop dialogue. The first set of questions are about school then about homework:

Paty: Hello [Dan] how are you?
D: malo [bad]
P: ¿Y por qué? [and why]?
D: Porque tengo mucha tarea [because I have a lot of homework].

They debate in Spanish whether he will read or do his homework first
Dan walks over to backpack “mira toda la tarea que tengo” [look at everything I have to do].

P: ¿La puedes hacer solo? [can you do it alone?]
D: yeah
D: dos chapters de math [two math chapters]
D: dos questions de reading. Un difficult libro [two questions, for reading. A difficult book]
P: un libro dificultoso [a difficult book]
D: yeah
P: ¿en español? [in Spanish?]
D: “English”

Mom repeats the word “dificultoso”
Dan shows mom his homework written in his notebook but struggles to read it – mom tries to repeat after him (Paty, Observation #1).

From this exchange, one can see that even for the mothers who work outside of the home, the primary focus is the children. Although she is tired from a long day at work; she identifies herself a housekeeper and her job is very physical, she does not find rest at home. Instead, she begins to ask her child/ren about homework, ensuring that they are set up with their work before she can begin to take on any of the household tasks that await her: laundry, cooking, cleaning.

This exchange is also significant because it indicates the ways in which English and Spanish interact in the home. English is used primarily by Dan to discuss his homework, but Paty is the first person to speak in English when she says, “Hello [Dan] how are you?” Yet he replies in
Spanish, “Malo” [bad]. Paty’s household was the one household in which English and Spanish interacted the most, a great deal of this was reflective of the outside world, work and school, coming into the home:

Mom receives a text message and asks [Dan] to read it and respond. He translates, mom replies. [Tanya] translates the message mom has requested for [Dan] to write. The message seems related to work – [can you work Saturday or Sunday?]
It takes [Dan] a while to write the reply – mom suggest that the sister write it (~minute 5:30) [Dan] walks away, finishes the text – then returns to read it out loud to mom: “I’ve got to do something.” [Tanya] takes phone – to correct [Dan]’s text. [Dan] talks to [Tanya] in English – then turns to mom to explain the issue [whether or not the word is necessary in the message or if it can just be replaced with an apostrophe or period – He speaks to mom in English]. [Tanya] reads the messages to mom in English for approval – sent – mom tells them to add “sorry.”

All three engage in a conversation about school supplies – the kids mention needing more pens – the dialogue is in Spanish with the exception of the word “pens” (Paty, Observation #1).

Collaborative communication was very common in this home. Dan and Tanya would help their mother communicate with her employer/s in English, while Paty and Tanya would help Dan communicate in Spanish. Additionally, all three would use their entire linguistic repertoire to help with homework. The best ways to describe the language practices in this household is through translanguaging. Paty and the children made regular use of all of their linguistic resources in order to effectively communicate with each other and with the outside world:

[Dan] and [Tanya] talk to each other about math in English. But as soon as mom joins in they shift to Spanish/English:

D: Tu eres bueno en writing, pero yo soy bueno en math. Yo tengo muchos As Bs en math [you are good in writing but I am good at math. I have a lot of As Bs].

(Paty, Observation #1)
This was also true when they would talk about the readings. Dan would read a text in English, which mom would also try to read and then would ask questions. However, at times her engagement frustrated Dan to the point that he exclaims “Ya mami, ya no quiero más. Es too much” [enough mom, I don’t want any more, it is too much].

Dan seems frustrated.

D: Ya mami, ya no más [enough mom, no more]. Mom keeps pushing on.

P: ¿Qué es esto [what is this]?

D: Resources, un land [resources, a land]

P: ¿Qué es? [what is it]

D: Un land [a land]

P: En Spanish [in Spanish]

D: Un land. [A land]

D: Ya mami, ya no quiero más. Es too much [enough mom, I don’t want any more, it is too much]

P: Que ni que too much, órale. [what, not too much, let’s go]

P: ¿Qué es esto [what is this]?

D: Mississippi

P: ¿Qué es Mississippi [What is Mississippi]?

D: Mississippi es un countdown [Mississippi is a countdown].

(Paty, Observation #2)

Paty indicates the ways in which mothers are engaged with the children at home. So much so that at times they seem to push their children beyond comfort in order to ensure that they are advancing academically.

The other major noticing that I had while at Paty’s house was the lack of involvement on the part of the father. While Ana and María’s partners were not present when I observed in their homes,
Paty’s husband was often home, not just for the observations but also for the interviews. However, he was often sleeping or preparing to go to work:

[Dan] moves to the floor while [Tanya] works at the table with her mom. Dad is sleeping in the adjacent bedroom (Paty, Observation #1).

Whether the lack of involvement is due to lack of interest or lack of opportunity is hard to tell. However, Paty and the other mothers did allude to the fact that for many of the men their primary role is as provider, while the mothers’ is as nurturer, even if they worked. Compared to any other participant, I spent the most time in Paty’s home. This was mostly because Paty chose to be interviewed at her home rather than the local church. As a result, I got to see her interact with her children more than the other mothers. I also got to know both of her children more. The children also came to see me as a regular part of their household. I say this because whenever I came I was offered meals and snacks. I was included in Tanya’s birthday celebration, and I was introduced to the family pet:

Figure 7. Dan and Tanya introduce me to Bella, the family hamster

I was pregnant at the time of these interviews and observations, which also drew in the children’s interest. Ultimately, my relationship to this family was greatly influenced by my
access to their home. As a result, Paty’s experience and family dynamic has in many ways become a part of my institutional memory. This is primarily due to the fact that my spending so much time in this home allowed me to witness a good deal of evidence that corroborates Paty’s testimonios.

While the bulk of the data shared in this dissertation is reflective of the narratives gathered during the study, the observations are an invaluable tool because they provide a context not only for the mother’s testimonies, but also for their desire to give a testimonio. Their homes are not places where they can find solace or relief. It is the site of their greatest and most taxing work. In many ways, the interview space (both the physical space and the metaphysical space) was a space that belonged to them more than any other space in which they interacted. In order to fully understand the effort that mothers make to support their children, it was important to get a glimpse into the place where most of their mothering takes place. Additionally, this context also serves as supportive evidence of the ways that mothers support their children’s academic development.

**Involvement of the Mothers with their Children’s Academic Development**

The literature frames the MoEBLADs as disengaged. However, that is not at all reflective of their actual mothering practices. On the contrary, these mothers are extremely engaged, although not in traditional ways or in ways that are reflective of the schools’ definition of parental academic engagement. While there are many ways in which a MoEBLAD’s capacity to engage in her a child’s academic development are stunted by a child’s dis/ability labels and monolingual placement, these mothers still make great efforts to support their children’s learning within the home. There were two major ways that mothers exhibited engagement: 1) teaching their children and supporting them in their learning, and 2) outsourcing support for their children,
whether it is engaging their other children, paying for a tutor, or using technology.

“Trato, en lo que puedo…” – Mothers as teachers

The mothers constantly reveal their support. In their discourse the words “apoyar” [to support], “ayudar” [to help] and “enseñar” [to teach] are common. María and Rosario reveal the type of support they give their children: they explain things, and help them with everything especially with homework. Rosario also takes her daughter to the library.

Sí, cuando-- trato, en lo que puedo, ayudar en la tarea. Bueno, cuando no trabajaba, la llevaba yo a la librería.

[Yes, when-- I try, in what I can, to help with the homework. Well, when I did not work, I would take her to the [library].]

Paty rewards her son’s efforts “cuando él está bien, en las calificaciones” [when he’s doing well, in his grades] by taking him to “la tienda de libros” [the bookstore] on the weekends.

Sí. Yo le-- a él, ahora decir, cuando él está bien, en sus calificaciones, “Mamá, tengo ganas de este libro”. “Okay, este fin de semana nos vamos a la tienda de los libros, y escojan sus libros. […] Sí, a veces yo les digo a ellos, “Tienen derecho a dos libros. Un libro que yo piense que sea conveniente, y un libro que ustedes---, sea para ustedes”.

Porque a veces él, no más le gustan puros dibujitos.

[Yes. I told him, lets say, when he's doing well, in his grades, "Mom, I'm looking forward to this book." "Okay, this weekend we're going to the book store, and you can pick your books. […] Yes, sometimes I say to them, "You have the right to two books. A book that I think is convenient, and a book that you---, that's for you. " Because sometimes he only likes [books with] just little drawings.]

The monumental task in which the mothers are engaged in is revealed by María who recounts that she had to teach her child how to bathe. And she is proud of her success— now “él solo se baña” [he bathes by himself].

Yo siempre estoy apoyándolo en todo. Trato de que él lea más, ponga más interés en sus lecturas, le hago preguntas sobre las lecturas, para que él también vaya como […] En cuestión de las escuelas, trato de apoyarlo lo más que yo puedo. Explicándole las
cosas, la tarea y eso. En cuestión de la casa, si me costó trabajo a enseñarle cómo bañarse. Porque yo antes lo bañaba. Ahora ya él solo se baña.

[I’m always supporting him in everything. I try to make him read more, put more interest in his readings, I ask him questions about the readings, so that he too goes like [...] In the matter of schools, I try to support him as much as I can. Explaining things, the homework and that. In regards to the house, yeah it was hard work teaching him how to bathe. Because I used to bathe him before. Now he bathes by himself.]

The mothers indicate the non-traditional ways in which they support their children’s academic development: they buy them books, take them to the library, teach them basic life skills like bathing and grocery shopping. However, they understood that the support their child needed often extended beyond what they could offer. In the next section one can see the ways in which mothers ameliorated these situations by engaging their other children.

“Mi hija me ayuda” – Mothering by proxy

While the mothers want to help, they also acknowledge that because the majority of their children’s’ schoolwork is in English they “no puedo ayudarle” [cannot help [them]]. In the next quote, Rosa highlights another way in which mothers support their children’s academic development: turning to their other children. These children’s support of their parents often correlates to their age; younger children help with at home translations particularly of homework and correspondence. Rosa’s ten-year old helps translate the homework:

[La tarea] se me hace bien difícil. A veces, no puedo ayudarle. Yo algo entiendo, pero a veces, no puedo ayudarlo. Y él dice, “Mami ayúdame”. “Pero, no entiendo. ¿Cómo hago?”. Entonces, yo a veces a mi hija, la de 10 años, le pido ayuda que--[ella traduzca]

[[The homework] is very difficult for me. Sometimes, I cannot help him. I understand something, but sometimes, I cannot help him. And he says, "Mommy help me." "But I do not understand. What can I do?" So, sometimes I ask my daughter, the 10-year-old, for help - she [translates]]
Sara’s daughter helps her child do the homework:


[I do not [help] much [...] Because I do not understand [because they are all in English.] [...] Yes, my daughter is the one who helps [with homework] the most. Yes, because I--. even if I wanted to, I do not understand much. Very little.]

and Carmela’s son helps with all of it:

Y cuando no puedo en algo, les pedimos ayuda a sus hermanos. Solamente cuando realmente no puedo, o salgo tarde del trabajo, bueno, dejo que alguien más lo ayude, pero por lo regular, trato de estar yo ahí con él.

[And when I can not do something, we ask their brothers for help. Only when I really can not, or I'm late from work, well, I let someone else help, but usually, I try to be there with him.]

Older children are sometimes tasked with attending IEP meetings and offering translations in that setting, in addition to the home. Sara, for example, brings her other daughter with her:

Mi hija va conmigo [...] No. No. [No hay un intérprete oficial de la escuela.] Sí [es mi derecho], pero a veces como que no hay nadie disponible, por cualquier cosa. [...] Pero parece que no es lo mismo, ¿verdad?, como si fueran nosotros mismos.

[My daughter goes with me [...] No. No. [There is not an official interpreter from the school.] Yes [it is my right], but sometimes like no one is available, for anything. [...] But it seems that it is not the same, right? as if it were ourselves.]

Here Sara explains how she relies on her daughter to go with her to official school meetings because she’d rather be prepared since “a veces como no hay nadie disponible” [sometimes no one is available] to translate at the school.

Not only are mothers pushed out of their children’s lives at home “por que no lo entiendo” [because I do not understand [the English homework]] but also at school because they (and the schools their children attend) lack the resources necessary to facilitate their participation. Sara
recognizes that having her daughter there as a translator “no es lo mismo […] como si fueran nosotros mismos” [not the same […] as if it were [her]] doing the listening and talking.

Nonetheless, this is just another way that mother’s make use of all of their resources in order to stay active and engaged in their EBLADs education. Still, mothers did not place the entire onus on their other children, they also sought out external support by way of afterschool programs and hiring tutors as is presented in the next section.

“Yo busco a una persona” – Seeking external support

In addition to turning to their other children, many of the mothers relied on outside help in order to ensure their child was academically successful. Ana enrolls her daughter in an after school program, PAZ:

Bueno, a mí me preocupa [que ella este de bajo nivel] y me pongo a pensar, pues yo también ya no la puedo ayudar mucho, porque yo no tengo suficiente estudio, y pues más el inglés pues se necesita aquí, y pues yo no lo sé; yo la ayudo en la que yo puedo. Por eso la dejé en la tarde de PAZ44 para que ahí por lo menos le ayuden algo en la tarea, el inglés. Y ya si no lo termina, el español yo le enseño en casa.

[Well, I'm worried [that she's of low level] and I start to think, because I can not help her too much, because I do not have sufficient education, and because more English is needed here, and well I don’t know it; I help her where I can. That's why I left her in the PAZ in the afternoon so that at least they would help her wsome on the homework, the English. And if she does not finish it, I teach her the Spanish at home.]

And many of the mothers, desperate to give their children extra help, even pay for tutors, as María and Paty express:

María: En Matemáticas, yo he buscado una persona para que le de tutorías, aparte fuera de la escuela, porque tampoco no me gusta dejarlo en [inglés] Afterschool. Entonces, yo busqué a una persona que le de tutorías una hora, y veo que mi niño, así, con las tutorías, mi niño va avanzando… . Yo pago por eso.

[In Mathematics, I have looked for a person to tutor him, apart from school, because I also do not like to leave him in Afterschool. So, I looked for a person to
tutor him for an hour, and I see that my child, well, with the tutorials, my child is moving forward... I pay for that.

Paty: Okay. A [Dan] como yo no le entiendo el inglés, yo busco a una persona que viene a ayudarlo. Viene una muchacha, le ayuda con la tarea, le explica con las cosas que él no puede y le pone trabajos, "Debes de hacerlo así, así y así". [...]La conocí por mi vecina de allá arriba, que también la ayuda a su niña con las tareas [...], Entonces, ella me dijo, "Yo tengo una muchacha", porque yo le platicué. Le digo, "Es que hay cosas que a veces no puedo", me dice, "Oh, yo conozco a una muchacha. Y está bien, porque ella sigue estudiando, es el idioma de ellos", le digo, "Ahora si me la pasa o me la presta", "Sí", y así es como yo conocí a esa muchacha.[...] No [es gratis], yo pago $15 la hora.

[Okay. For [Dan] since I do not understand English, I look for a person who comes to help him. A girl comes along, helps him with homework, explains things to him that he cannot do and gives him practice, "You must do it like that, like that". [...] I met her by my neighbor up there, who also helped her daughter with her homework, [...] she told me, "I have a girl," because I talked to her. I told her, "There are things that sometimes I cannot do," She says, "Oh, I know a girl, and it's fine, because she is still studying, it's their language," I say, "Now you have to share her or lend her to me," "Yes, "and that's how I met that girl. [...] No [it's not free], I pay $15 an hour.]

These supports do not go unnoticed. Paty’s son, Dan, for example, recognizes the support her mother gives him when she brings a tutor or another person to help him with his homework.

He also realizes that she does this because it is “something really important for me,” even if “she has to waste our money.”

Sometimes, trying to help me, she calls people to help me. [...] Like my cousin, and a lady that goes-- a girl that goes to-- a teenager that goes to college. [They help] by just telling me [in] easy words I can understand. [My mom calls them] Because sometimes she thinks, or sometimes she knows, that I actually have something [to do] and she calls them to help me. [...] Yes, [when she can't help me, she finds somebody else to help me] because last time we stayed up all night until finishing my math questions. [...] [When my mom calls other people to help me it makes me feel] a little—it says she's nice because she's doing something, even though she has to waste our money, and that's something really important for me.

Not only are these mothers using very limited financial resources in order to ensure that their children are getting the support that they need, they are also sacrificing time with their
children because each minute that a child spends with a tutor or in afterschool is a minute that
that child is robbed of connecting with their mother and vice-versa.

While seeking external support for their children was common, the mothers also found
ways to maintain their role as their children’s academic supporter. Mothers did this by bridging
the linguistic divide through the use of technological platforms such as Google translate.

“El traductor del teléfono” – Using Technology

Many mothers were able to maintain a presence in their child’s academic endeavors,
while still meeting their needs: using technology to help them bridge the language gap that was
created by school. None of these families had Internet at home, but they all had phones so they
would translate the child’s homework with their phones, do the homework with their child, and
then translate it back to English for their child to be able to submit. This was a time-consuming
task, and yet, they engaged with it regularly.

Carmela, Ana and Carlota discuss how important Google Translate has become. As the
mothers sit down to help their children with homework, they use their phones to find out the
pronunciation and meanings of words. For Carmela, the cell phone helps her find out how words
in the homework are pronounced, something she previously had to do with dictionaries:

Sí [yo siento que participo], porque--¿cómo dicen ellos?, la discapacidad que tiene, yo
trato de hacer la tarea con él, de sentarme con él a escuchar para ver cómo está leyendo, y
aunque yo no sé inglés, yo lo escucho para ver si él está leyendo. A veces buscamos en
el diccionario cómo se pronuncia una palabra. Ahora que todo se puede buscar en el
teléfono, en el Internet. De esa manera, yo lo ayudo.

[Yes [I feel that I participate], because--how do they say?, the disability that he has, I
try to do the homework with him, to sit down with him to listen to see how he is reading,
and although I do not know English, I listen to him to see if he is reading. Sometimes we
look in the dictionary for a word to be pronounced. Now that everything can be searched
on the phone, on the Internet. That way, I help him.]
Ana uses her cellphone to find out the meaning of words in the homework, and she regularly uses it to find words both in English and in Spanish:

Porque ahorita con el español y el inglés, hay cositas que se me hacen un poco difíciles enseñárselas. O estarlo escribiendo en el teléfono buscando, qué significa para yo orientarla.

[Because right now with Spanish and English, there are things that make it a bit difficult for me to teach them. Or I’m writing on the phone looking, what does it mean, for me to guide her.]

Ana’s experience is especially troubling because María Teresa was enrolled in a bilingual inclusion class, yet most of her homework assignments were in English.

This was also true for María whose son Justin was enrolled in a transitional bilingual education class. During one of early interviews, María noted that even though Justin is supposed to be in a bilingual class all of the homework was assigned in English:

_Todas las tareas son en inglés_, matemáticas, lectura, escritura, todo es en inglés.

_[All assignments are in English, math, reading, writing, everything is in English.]

Even when a child is enrolled in a bilingual program, the mothers are confronted with English only work. María also made it a point to share that she’s not the only one; other moms have to do this too:

_Y no solo soy la única, somos todas las mamás_. Jessenia [her friend], le pasa lo mismo también. Y peor que ahora son dos niños, _estar mucho tiempo sentados traduciendo tarea_ de uno o tarea del otro.

_[And I'm not the only one, it’s all us moms. Jessenia [her friend], the same thing happens to her too. And worse that now there are two children, sitting for a long time translating one's homework or the other one's homework.]

It is not only for homework that mothers use the Internet capacities on their phone, but for living with their children. The gap between the English language practices of their children and the Spanish of the mothers sometimes makes communication difficult. For example, Carlota
explains how when her child wants to say or explain something to her that is in English, he uses three resources: pointing and gesturing, his siblings, but also Google.

Sí, y si no, el me señala. Me señala, o busca en Google para ver qué es la respuesta, o pide ayuda con sus hermanos.

[Yes, and if not, he points things out to me. He points at me, or searches on Google to see what the answer is, or asks for help with his brothers.]

Google has become a most important resource for these mothers to communicate with their children.

Working with their children in these ways, both for homework and for living, takes a large investment in terms of time. But despite the investment in time, mothers are willing to make the sacrifice, as María explains:

[C]uando trataba de hacer tareas con él, primero medio me tardaba como dos, tres horas con él haciendo tareas, y él se desesperaba, porque era mucho tiempo yo lo que yo lo tenía sentado ahí haciendo tareas. Porque yo tenía primero que traducir toda la tarea, para poder explicarle lo que iba a hacer. [Usaba] el traductor del teléfono.

[[W] hen I tried to do homework with him… first it took me as long as two, three hours with him doing homework, and he would get anxious, because it was a long time for me to have him sitting there doing homework. Because I had to translate the whole task first, in order to explain what he was going to do. [U]sing the phone’s translator.]

The mothers are savvy about technology programs that are available on their phones and that their children could use to read and learn. For example, María tells us about one such program:

Ahorita hay un programa que se llama Raz-Kids, ese lo lee primero en el teléfono y ya después él lo tiene que leer. Y algunas palabras que él todavía no comprende. Y luego, "Mami, ¿cómo dice aquí?". Tengo que regresarme a ver cómo es la palabra correcta para poder pronunciarla, porque no es lo mismo que yo se la diga como yo la entiendo, a que cómo es la palabra, porque lo confundo más.

[[R]ight now there is a program called Raz-Kids, I read it first on the phone and then he has to read it. And some words that he still does not understand. And then, "Mommy, how do you say here?" I have to go back to see what the correct word is like to be able to
pronounce it, because it is not the same for me to say it as I understand it, what the word is like, because I confuse him more.]

These mothers have found non-traditional ways to support their children. The Internet, through cell phones, has become an important resource for them. Yet, even after making huge physical and financial investments, these mothers still questioned their role and/or expressed a belief that they were not very engaged. This failure to see their engagement is the subject of the next section.

“No que digamos mucho” – Mothers assess their engagement

More often than not, the mothers in this study had internalized the school’s definition of engagement, and as such they perceive engagement as participating in activities that take place at the school. In response to a question from me, Elodia describes how she perceives her engagement as “no mucho,” and for “poco tiempo,” even though, as we have seen, these mothers devote a great deal of time to their children at home.

No mucho.[…]Es que como yo trabajo, nada más cuando yo llego, les dedico un poco de tiempo.[El trabajar limita las maneras que lo puedo apoyar] en lo de la escuela. Participar con ellos.[Estar físicamente en la escuela] Sí. En [casa en] las tardes, sí. Yo les ayudo con su tarea y a leer.

[Not much […] It's just that since I work, when I arrive, I dedicate a little time to them [Working limits the ways I can support him] in the school. Participate with them [Being physically at school] Yes. At [home in] the afternoons, yes. I help them with their homework and to read.]

Likewise, Nancy responds with a “no mucho,” even though she proceeds to explain how it is that she is engaged with her child’s schoolwork:

No que digamos mucho, ¿verdad?, pero trato.[…]Bueno, solamente diciéndole, “Haz la tarea”. A veces, él me dice, “Mami, yo no lo entiendo”. Le digo, “Pero, ¿cómo dice en español para yo decirte?”. Lo único que sí, como yo le dije, “Yo voy a mirar si yo puedo ayudarte, solo en Matemáticas. Porque ya si es leer, y entenderlo, todo está en inglés, ahí te toca a ti, yo no”, le digo, “Pero hazlo”. Sí. Motivándolo a hacer la tarea. […] Porque digamos, yo no me relaciono mucho. No me relaciono, así que digamos--,
que dicen, "Vengan para ser voluntarios de [inglés] PTA o algo así". Eso es en lo único que no me relaciono. Pero en el trabajo de los niños, sí.

[I guess you can say not much, right?, but I try [...] Well, just saying, "Do the homework". Sometimes, he tells me, "Mommy, I do not understand." I say, "But how does it say in Spanish for me to tell you?" The only thing I did, as I said, "I'm going to look if I can help you, only in Mathematics. Because if it is reading, and understanding, everything is in English, then it's your turn, I cannot," I say, "But do it." Yes. Motivating him to do the homework. [...] Because let's say, I do not interact much. I do not interact, so let's say--, like they say, "Come to volunteer for PTA or something like that." That's the only thing I do not relate to. But in the children's work, yes.]

Both Elodia and Nancy present themselves as disengaged. It is only after being pressed that they identify ways in which they support their child’s learning. Nancy also alludes to the fact that the school only calls upon her to participate in Parent Teacher Association [PTA] meetings and on site activities, which further contributes to the mothers’ understanding of academic participation being based on what takes place at school only. This instinct to discount one’s efforts is not unique to them. Paty also questioned her engagement even after explicitly describing how she sought out and hired a tutor for her child as a way to meet her child’s needs:

No. Yo la verdad a [Dan] desde que entró a la escuela nunca lo he mandado al afterschool [sic]. Porque como ahorita le toca a las escuelas lejos, entonces no puedo ir a traerlo.[...] Nos han recomendado. [Dan] califica para after-school. Pero luego le digo: "Hijo, ¿y si te pongo?", "No, mamá", dice él, él dice que no. Pero a veces digo: "Bueno, creo que sí le hace falta, porque necesita ayuda", ¿verdad?. Pero a veces digo: "En el tiempo del verano uno sale tarde, vamos a tren, nos venimos caminando, cualquier cosa". Pero como ahorita en el invierno, mucha nieve, mucho frío [...] a veces yo les explico: "No puede venir [Dan] porque la verdad yo vivo lejos. Hasta allá, hasta acá"[...] Entonces a veces digo: "No". A veces yo por eso les digo a los maestros: "Dígame qué es lo que necesita". Por decir, como ahorita que usted me dicen que ayuda, por eso luego me dicen: "Es que [Dan] necesitaría ayuda en esto", "Okay", dice: "Es recomendable el after-school", "La verdad no puedo. Pero digame y yo le busco la persona quien le ayude". [...] Entonces por eso yo busco a esa persona a modo de que él no se atrasa. Yo siento que es una forma de recompensarle eso. Pero a veces digo yo: "No sé si esté bien o esté mal".

[No. I the truth is [Dan] since he entered the school I have never sent him to afterschool. Because now since his school is far away, so I can not go and bring him. [...] They have recommended us. [Dan] qualifies for after-school. But then I say: "Son, what if I put you?", "No, mom," he says, he says no. But sometimes I say: "Well, I think he does need
it, because he needs help", right? But sometimes I say: "In the summer time one leaves late, we go to train, we come walking, anything". But like now in the winter, a lot of snow, a lot of cold [...] sometimes I explain to them: " [Dan] cannot come because the truth is that I live far away, go there, go here" [...] So sometimes I say: " No". Sometimes that's why I tell teachers: "Tell me what he needs." To say, like right now you tell me what help, that's why they say to me: "It's that [Dan] would need help in this", "Okay", he says: "After-school is recommended", "I really can not. But tell me and I'll find the person who will help him." [...]. So that's why I look for that person so that he does not fall behind. I feel that it is a way of making up for it. But sometimes I say: "I do not know if it's right or wrong."]

Some of this disconnect originates from the mothers feeling like they have to engage in the ways that the schools say they should engage: “Vengan a ser voluntarios del PTA” [come volunteer for PTA] or “[Dan] califica para after-school” [Dan qualifies for afterschool]. The mothers have legitimate and valid reasons as to why they don’t engage in those ways: “Yo vivo lejos” [I live far away] or “yo trabajo” [I work]. Yet, they feel an innate sense of failing: “dedico un poco de tiempo” [I dedicate a little time], “yo no me relaciono mucho” [I do not interact much], “no sé si esté bien o esté mal” [I do not know if it's right or wrong], and discount their participation. The mothers in this study exhibited many ways in which they supported their children’s academic development. What they did not instinctively volunteer was the fact that they were doing so while facing a myriad of challenges.

Challenges Faced by MoEBLADs

Throughout the interview process, the mothers would often hint at the ways in which they were constantly being pulled in multiple directions. Many of the findings presented in this subsection arose from the Participatory Rank Method interviews. During those interviews the three focal mothers were asked to list their responsibilities and any other concerns or pressing issues that they found taxing. In every case, the child with the disability was often last or missing from the list. The reason for this is that the mothers were managing much larger issues than their
child’s disability: they needed to support the needs of their other children – some of whom lived in other countries, had chronic health problems, were abusing drugs and alcohol, and were recovering from sexual assaults. Additionally, the mothers were also caring for their aging and ailing parents as well as serving for substitute mothers for their own siblings. Unfortunately, the mothers were unable to turn to their partners for support since many of them were engaged in abusive spousal relationships. All of these pressures combined with their social isolation resulted in the mothers feeling overwhelmed and incredibly lonely.

“Ellos me tienen aquí” – Raising children in two countries

When asked where Dan’s disability falls on her list of concerns, Paty indicates that “ahorita no es tan importante, por que él esta estable” [right now it's not that important, because he's stable]. She is much more concerned about her other child, Carlos Santo, who lives in Mexico and “está consumiendo drogas” [is using drugs]:

Pues ahorita, pues sí, es una preocupación de que él no se empeore. Y a la misma vez como que ahorita no es tan importante, porque él está estable. Sí, me preocupan sus estudios, como de Tanya también, no sé. Pero ahorita lo que a veces está en mi cabeza ahorita para mí es mi hijo Carlos Antonio, es eso lo que a veces me está preocupando ahorita más. Que [Dan y Tanya] me tienen aquí, claro, no las 24 horas porque yo también trabajo, pero ellos también van a la escuela. Pero todo el tiempo posible yo puedo estar con ellos, y sin embargo con mi hijo no, con los dos, porque solamente son por teléfono.

[Well, right now, it's a concern that he does not get worse. And at the same time, like right now, it's not that important, because he's stable. Yes, I'm worried about his studies, and [Tanya]'s too, I do not know. But now what is sometimes in my head right now for me is my son Carlos Antonio, that is what sometimes worries me more now. That [Dan and Tanya] have me here, of course, not 24 hours because I also work, but they also go to school. But I can be with them as long as possible, and yet with my son I can't, with both, because they are only on the phone.]

For Paty, Dan’s needs were not as pressing as the needs of her other two children whom she had left in Mexico at the ages of 3 and 5, and hasn’t seen in over a decade. Dan and Tanya have her
“todo el tiempo posible” [as long as possible] but her other two children only have her “por teléfono” [on the phone].

Thinking about her children in Mexico, worrying about them was the only way she could mother them from afar, and, in some ways, assuage her guilt for getting pregnant with both Dan and Tanya and subsequently leaving them for so long:

Yo y mi esposo habíamos planeado que dos años. Le digo "¿Cómo en qué tiempo hacemos la casa?" Dice "Si tú llegas y trabajas y yo trabajo, en dos años ya hícimos la casa". Y yo estuve de acuerdo, dije "Sí". Y sí, llegamos a los tres meses empecé a trabajar, él casi luego empezó a trabajar […]y sí, empezamos a trabajar él empezó a construir, él estuvo construyendo, al año yo salgo embarazada o antes del año salgo embarazada de [Dan].

[Me and my husband had planned that [it would be for] two years. I said to him "In about how long do we build the house?" He says "If you arrive and work and I work, in two years we will have already made the house". And I agreed, I said "Yes." And yes, we arrived, after three months I started to work, he later started working […]and yes, we started to work, he started to build, he was building, a year later I get pregnant or before the year, I was pregnant with [Dan].]

Paty had never intended to be apart from her older children indefinitely. The original plan was to come to the US, work for “dos años” [two years] – just long enough to buy land and “construir” [build] a house, then go back. Her separation from her children was meant to be temporary, but then “salgo embarazada” [she got pregnant].

Cuando nació [Dan] de plano deje de trabajar un tiempo, entonces yo estaba con [Dan] y más desde ese momento cuando me dijeron de su problema, yo me sentía más, como que más tenía que estar con él.

[When [Dan] was born, I stopped working for a while, so I was with [Dan] and more from that moment when they told me about his problem, I felt more, like, I had to be with him even more.]

After learning of Dan’s “problema” [problem], Paty decides to stay home, sacrificing her earning potential to care for him and extending the amount of time that she would need to stay in the US.
[E]ntonces yo ya era un año, no trabajaba, estaba dedicada a [Dan]. Pero […] la construcción de allá y los gastos de acá y me decía [mi esposo], “es que no me alcanza.”

[Then it was already a year, I did not work, I was dedicated to [Dan]. But […] the construction there and the expenses here and [my husband] told me, “its just that I can’t cover it all.”]

Wanting to return to her children back in Mexico and faced with the reality of mounting expenses due to the ongoing cost of “construcción de allá” [construction over there] coupled with “los gastos de acá” [the expenses here], Paty returns to work. She pays her sister, who is pregnant with her first child, to take care of Dan, but a year or so later, she’s pregnant again.

Entonces fue como empecé nuevamente a trabajar, porque [mi hermana] en lo que estaba [embarazada], ella cuidaba a [Dan], o sea nos ayudábamos, y después este ella pues ya tuvo a su niño, no lo siguió viendo, yo estaba trabajando y luego al año, seis meses yo me embazo de Tanya, seguimos así trabajando, ella mi hermana me ayudaba, yo la ayudaba y así estábamos. Pero después llegó el momento que Tanya iba a nacer y pues deje de nuevo de trabajar, deje de trabajar y también, de Tanya un año no trabaje, no trabaje.

[So that’s how I started working again, because [my sister] while she was [pregnant], she took care of [Dan], that is, we helped each other, and after that she had her child, she did not keep caring for him. I was working and then, after a year… six months, I was pregnant with Tanya, we were still working, she helped me, I helped her, and that’s how we were. But then the time came that Tanya was going to be born and I stopped working again, stop working and I was also with Tanya for one year. I didn’t work, I didn’t work.]

Paty was so desperate to return to her children that she continued working through her fourth pregnancy, but “después llegó el momento de que Tanya iba a nacer” [then the time came that Tanya was going to be born] and she stopped working “de nuevo” [once again]. Paty’s sense of guilt is palpable as she cried while repeating the phrase “no trabajé” [I didn’t work].

This experience of raising children in two separate countries, intentionally or not, was also true for other mothers. Carlota, Nancy and Carmela found themselves in the same situation, raising children back in Mexico. Carlota sent her oldest child to Mexico when her marriage became abusive:
Sí, el mayor es de otra relación, que yo le había comentado que él no [vive] conmigo […] lo que yo hice fue agarrar al niño y mandarlo a mi país [para protegerlo].

[Yes, the oldest is from another relationship, I mentioned that he does not [live] with me […] what I did was grab the child and send him to my country [to protect him].]

Nancy’s oldest children stayed in Mexico at first, then came, and then returned to Mexico for university:

Sí, [los mayores,] dos años estuvieron en México [mientras yo estuve aquí] y después los mandé a traer. Estuvieron aquí conmigo hasta que la niña cumplió 18 años, y se regresó a estudiar. Ahora está estudiando en México.

[Yes, [the older ones,] two years were in Mexico [while I was here] and then I sent for them. They were here with me until the girl turned 18, and went back to school. Now she is studying in Mexico.]

Of Carmela’s five children, two were born in Mexico and three were born in the United States.

So the older two have not always been with her in the U.S., and one is still in Mexico:


[Two [children] were born in Mexico. And, three were born here in the United States [...] No. [They have] not always [lived with me]. The older ones have not lived with me all the time. […] One is [still] in Mexico.]

In the end, the mothers are more worried about those they left behind or sent away than the EBLADs who remain by their side.

This sense that their EBLAD child was stable was not only influenced by the needs of their children living abroad but also by their needs of their in-country children and other relatives. Many of these mothers served as the primary caretakers for their parents and other siblings. The added load brought on by these relationships is the focus of the next section.
In addition to caring for their children in Mexico, the mothers are also caring for other children in the U.S. some of who were also enduring major challenges. María worries about her younger son, Jayden, who suffers from asthma and is often hospitalized:

[Me preocupa la] enfermedad de Jayden, porque como él tiene asma me está faltando mucho a la escuela por lo mismo del asma. Entonces seguido se me está enfermando. Tiene también como dos semana que estuvo tres días internado en el hospital. Salió y todavía estuvo una semana con la tos. Parece que ya se había compuesto, y apenas el viernes volvió otra vez con la tos. Entonces ahorita está con tos. [...] El viernes no fue a la escuela porque tenía tos, estaba frío, entonces el frío es lo que le hace daño.

[[I worry about] Jayden's illness, because as he has asthma, he's missing a lot of school because of asthma. Then he's getting sick. Also like two weeks ago he was in the hospital for three days. He left and still had a cough for a week. It seems that he had already feeling like himself, and just on Friday he started coughing again. So right now he's coughing. [...] Friday he did not go to school because he had a cough, it was cold, so the cold is bad for him.]

Paty worries about her youngest daughter, Tanya, who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a family member:

Pero a veces siento que no sé, siento que como madre a veces fallo, y mucho. [Tanya] cuando cumplió los siete años, pasó por un malo. No fue algo--, pero sí la tocaron. El dolor más grande que yo misma lo--, no, no. Fue, fue mi familia, que a veces se--, le digo yo no sé si fuera más duro. Es que yo no pude hacer nada. Es que no, no sé. A veces me sigo arrepintiendo, a veces les digo, se lo dejan en manos de Dios. Porque él sabe lo que pasó. Y además fue mi sobrino que tiene él 14 años, tenía 14. Él la tocaba a mi hija. Cuando yo le dije a mi hermana, y mi cuñado dice…Mi hermana no, se agachó la cabeza y lloraba. Y mi cuñado me contestaba, y yo le decía que por qué su hijo hacía eso, que si no le llamaba la atención. Él me dio a entender que mi hija fue la que lo provocó. Y yo le dije, "¿Cómo va a hacer una niña de siete años a uno de 14?". Le dije, "Bueno, tengo para que mi hija no vuelva a venir acá. Y sí va a venir, o pueden ir ustedes a la casa", porque tampoco le puedo cerrar a mi hermana las puertas, le digo, ella va a ser recibida. “También tus hijos, lo único que voy a hacer es yo nada más tengo que cuidar a mi hija. Tengo que estar más al pendiente a ella".

[But sometimes I feel that, I do not know, I feel that as a mother I sometimes fail, and a lot. [Tanya] when she turned seven, she went through something bad. It was not something--, but they did touch her. The greatest pain, that I myself-- no, no. It was, it
was my family, that sometimes I ... I tell you I do not know if it is harder. It's just that I could not do anything. No, I do not know. Sometimes I keep repeating, sometimes I tell them, leave it in the hands of God. Because he knows what happened. And, it was also my nephew who is 14 years old, he was 14. He touched my daughter. When I told my sister, and my brother-in-law said ... My sister no, she bent her head and cried. And my brother-in-law answered me, and I told him why did his son do that, that if he did not call his attention. He gave me to understand that my daughter was the one who provoked him. And I said, "How is a seven-year-old girl going to do a 14-year-old boy?" I said, "Well, I have it so that my daughter will not come here again, and if she will come, or you can go to the house," because I cannot close my doors to my sister either, I tell her, she’s going to be received, “and also your children, the only thing I'm going to do is I just have to take care of my daughter, I have to be more aware of her.”

In this situation Paty must deal with the trauma that her daughter has been through, reconciling the fact that it was her nephew who “tocaba mi hija” [touched my daughter], that her daughter was blamed for the assault: “me dio a entender que fue mi hija fue la que lo provocó” [He gave me to understand that my daughter was the one who provoked him], while also trying to maintain a relationship with her sister.

Even when the issues or situations are not as extreme, mothers are constantly being pulled in multiple directions. During one of the observations, I witnessed how Ana had to stop helping María Teresa with her homework in order to enroll David in preschool:

- María Teresa returns to her homework and resets fingers without prompting – looks at mom, as mom looks over answer, she says “quince [fifteen]
- Mom gets a phone call – her neighbor is heading to a school to sign her son up for school in the event that he doesn't get into the local pre-k.
- After nearly 50 minutes, there are 3 problems remaining on the half of the page. [Ana] begins packing up, putting the homework into a neat pile on the table and cleaning up the snack. They must all go - there is no one else for the kids to stay with. Homework will have to wait until they return. Ana directs her kids to get ready. They continue eating snack at the table.
- Mom instructs María Teresa to get ready while she puts shoes on David (Ana, Observation #1).

Ana was in the middle of helping María Teresa with her math homework when they were interrupted by a phone call. This phone call, focused on the pre-kindergarten enrollment process,
shifted Ana’s attention from María Teresa to David, her three-year old. This is a small glimpse into the ways in which mothers are constantly negotiating each child’s needs.

However, it is not just their children that they must care for. María who shares her home with her father is also his default caretaker. While her mother is helpful when she is here, she holds a traveling visa so she “va y viene” [comes and goes]. At the time of the study, her mother was in New York so María was not tasked with her father’s care, but she knew it was just a matter of time before “se vaya mi mamá” [my mom leaves] and she would need to take over once again.

Ahorita lo que me preocupa es mi papá. Él es diabético, él vive con nosotros, pero ahora no tiene mucho, tendrá como tres, cuatro semanas más o menos que le salió una ampolla en la pierna, entonces se le está haciendo feo, ya fue al doctor, le dieron antibióticos, parece que ya estaba mejorando, pero volvió otra vez. Entonces por su diabetes tengo miedo de que se le vaya a infectar más y pueda tener operación o algo así. Eso es lo que me preocupa más ahora de él. Porque también como mi mamá tiene visa, va y viene. Ahorita que está mi mamá, pues es lo que lo está apoyando a él, pero cuando se vaya mi mamá, pues no sé qué va a pasar con él si él no se compone.

[Right now, what worries me is my dad. He is diabetic, he lives with us, but it hasn’t been that long, he will have like three, four weeks or so that he got an ampulla on his leg, and it is getting ugly. He went to the doctor, he was given antibiotics, it seemed like it was already improving, but it came back again. So because of his diabetes I am afraid that it will become more infected and he may need an operation or something like that. That's what worries me most about him right now. Because also since my mom has a visa, she comes and goes. Now that my mom is here, that's what is supporting him, but when my mom leaves, I do not know what will happen to him if he does not make up.]

Paty also has to look after her brothers with whom she shares her home:

Porque mis papás no están acá y cuando yo hablo, que soy la que hablo más seguido con mi mamá, me pregunta siempre por ellos, "¿Cómo está mi hijo este? y ¿Cómo está mi hija esta? ¿Cómo está?" Y [por] todos sus hijos preguntan.

[Because my parents are not here and when I speak, I am the one that talks most often with my mother, she always asks me about them, "How is my son doing?”, and “how is my daughter doing? “How are they?" She asks [about] all her children.]
Paty feels this sense of obligation to look after her siblings in part because her mother is the one who looks after her own children back in Mexico.

Unfortunately, the mothers are unable to receive support from their partners. In most cases, the spouse was another source of stress. The Testimonialistas all shared multiple ways in which their husbands abused them. These experiences are presented in the next section.

**Tomaba, insultaba, amenazaba, precionaba, lastimaba – Spousal abuse**

The women dealt with a variety of abuses from spouses. Some were direct, such as verbal abuse; others, however, were indirect, such as the neglect that was a byproduct of alcoholism.

María was not only dealing with needing to provide care for her aging father and her other child’s health. She was also dealing with the fact that her husband “toma mucho” [*drinks a lot*]; to the point that the children notice.

*Y ya de mi esposo es de que él toma mucho*, y ese es el problema que ahorita tenemos, de que él quiere estar con dos, tres cervezas todos los días, todos los días. *Y ya no puedo más* con él de decirle *que ya deje de tomar*. Porque ya Justin se da cuenta de las cosas, y luego él se molesta, él dice que ya *no quiere ver a su papi tomando*. Y ya Justin ya habló con él y le dijo, "*Papi, ya no más cervezas*", pero él dijo, "Sí, sí, ya no más cervezas", pero él sigue haciendo lo mismo.

*[And then with my husband it is that he drinks a lot, and that is the problem we now have, that he wants to have two, three beers every day, every day. And I can’t tell him to stop drinking any longer. Because Justin already realizes things, and then he gets upset, he says he does not want to see his daddy drinking anymore. And Justin already talked to him and said, "Daddy, no more beers", but he said, "Yes, yes, no more beers", but he just keeps doing the same.]*

Her oldest son, Justin, even proclaims that he “*no quiere ver a su papi tomando*” [*does not want to see his daddy drinking anymore*] and even says to him, “*Papi, ya no más cervezas*” [*daddy, no more beers*]. But this is to no avail.
Alcohol abuse was a common theme with the three Testimonialistas. In the lives of these women their partners’ alcohol abuse often led to their abuse. Carlota was afraid of her child’s father:

Por **miedo** de que **el papá me insultaba y me amenazaba**.  
*[Out of fear because the dad would insult me and threaten me.]*

María was pressured by her partner, “**tanta y tanta presión,**” because she could not get pregnant. She was repeatedly told she was a failure as a woman:

**Y él me presionaba mucho,** porque él quería tener un hijo, y yo no me podía embarazar. Pero yo pienso que fue el estrés el que no me podia yo embarazar, porque él siempre me decía, "No, que **tú no sirves para mujer,** no puedes darne un hijo", y ya **tanta y tanta presión** que yo sentí, que ya no podía yo más.  
*[And he pressured me a lot, because he wanted to have a son, and I could not get pregnant. But I think it was the stress that I could not get pregnant, because he always said to me, "No, you are a good for nothing woman, you cannot give me a son", and already so much and so much pressure that I felt, that I could not go on.*]

Paty not only feels abused by her children’s father, but she recounts his problems with alcoholism as he drank “**más, más.**” And she described how his behavior made her feel: “**lastimaban**” [injured], “**dolía**” [hurt].

Él cuando llegamos a este país **empezó a tomar más, más.** Había **días que no venía** dos días. Se iba con sus hermanos. Y yo siempre le hablaba por teléfono "¿Dónde estás?" a veces **ni me contestaba.** Entonces yo siempre le decía a Diosito, "Dios, endurece mi corazón. Haz que no sienta lo que yo siento ahora. Porque él no viene. Yo lo espero y él no viene". Quedé embarazada de [Dan] y seguía. Entonces pues ya no me sentí tan mal porque estaba [Dan]. Pero siempre yo le decía a Dios que endureciera mucho mi corazón, porque había palabras que me **lastimaban.** No me golpeaba, pero si **dolía cuando él me decía.**

*[When he arrived in this country, he started drinking more, more. There were days that he did not come for two days. He left with his brothers. And I always talked to him on the phone "Where are you?" sometimes he did not answer me. Then I always said to God, "God, harden my heart, make me not feel what I feel now, because he does not come, I wait for him and he does not come." I got pregnant with [Dan] and it continued. Well then I did not feel so bad because I had [Dan]. But I always told God to harden my heart, because there were words that hurt me. He did not hit me, but it hurt when he said those things to me.]*
In some cases, the mothers were trying to find ways to deal with spousal infidelity while maintaining the “happy marriage” façade for their children. Ana tells us that story:

Bueno, es que cuando yo vi esos mensajes, yo lo que hice esa noche, como estaban los niños, cuando el primer mensaje que yo lo vi, que pude ver la lista, estaba la niña ahí al lado mío, entonces como que algo tenía aquí y no podía, lo que hice fue irme a la cocina y tomar agua y [unintelligeable]. E

[Well, it's that when I saw those messages, what I did that night, since I was with the children, when I saw the first message, that I could see the list, the girl [my daughter] was there next to me, then like I had something here and could not, what I did was to go to the kitchen and drink water and [unintelligeable]. The girl [my daughter] was there with me. The next day when he came what I did was, he told me why I was like that. I told him that nothing was wrong with me, "I do not know what's wrong with you". And he says, "Is it because of the friends?" I say, "It's just that nothings wrong with me, I do not know about you, because you always say your friends, the messages, you're always there," and I told him why he had done that to me, what was it that was lacking in our home, if the phone gave him everything. And what I did then was hug him. And there we were talking like that, holding each other, but that's how it happened.]

When Ana learned of her husband’s affair she continued to act as if “no me pasaba nada” [nothing was wrong with me] because “estaba la niña ahí” [the girl [her daughter] was there].

Her role as a mother is so all-consuming that she even denies her own feelings as a woman and as a wife.

These mothers know that “esas son muchas preocupaciones” [these are too many worries] for one person. But like Paty says, they accept it as part and parcel of their motherhood: “es nuestro cargo, ¿verdad?, de ser mamases” [our load, right?, to be moms].

What makes this load heavier to carry and these struggles even more difficult to manage is the fact that these women are isolated from their families and their communities. Many of
these women identified feelings of solitude as a part of not only their immigrant experience, but also their experiences as mothers as is discussed in the next section.

**Sola, vacía, desesperada – Buried feelings**

As first generation immigrants, many of the women lacked local family: “sola, sin ayuda de nadie” [*alone, with help from no one*]. Even those who had family nearby led solitary lives: “cada quien por su lado” [*to each their own*].

María discusses how isolated she feels:

A veces me siento tan desesperada, cuando yo tengo un problema en la escuela, y no sé a quién recurrir. No sé en quién apoyarme, para que me asesore qué puedo hacer. A veces me siento sola.

*[Sometimes I feel so desperate, when I have a problem at school, and I do not know who to turn to. I do not know who to lean on, so they can advise me what I can do. Sometimes I feel alone.]*

Ana, who has a sister in New Jersey, reveals that the loneliness is not remedied simply by having family nearby:

[Mi hermana] vive en New Jersey. Casi no nos vemos. Y tengo otro hermano que tiene dos hijos, ya son de 15 años, pero no están, casi no nos vemos. O sea que cada quien aquí, cada quien por su lado.

*[My sister] lives in New Jersey. We almost never see each other. And I have another brother who has two children, they are already 15 years old, but they are not here, we almost do not see each other. That is, each person here, to each his own.*

Paty mentions how the loneliness makes her feel empty. She also acknowledges the fact that here, in the United States, she feels more alone that anything else.

A pesar de todo lo que yo hacía, dentro de mí, al menos yo sentía, dentro de mí, no sé si era del corazón, en la mente, me sentía sola, me sentía vacía, que quería llenarlo con algo, que no sabía ni qué era.[…] Yo estoy más sola acá que otra cosa.
In spite of everything I did, inside me, at least I felt, inside me, I do not know if it was of the heart, in the mind, I felt alone, I felt empty, I wanted to fill it with something, I did not know what it was ... [...] I am more alone here than anything else.

Lastly, Rosa indicates how social programs allow these women and their children to survive without the support of a community:

Entonces, al tiempo, cuando andaba así sola, sin ayuda de nadie, decidí coger una ayuda, asistencia pública, que lo llaman.

[Then, at the time, when I was alone, without anyone's help, I decided to get help, public assistance, they call it.]

Not having someone to “apoyarme [lean on] leads these women to feel extremely “sola” [alone], “vacía” [empty], and “desesperada” [desperate]. Given all of these stressors, including the fact that they are enduring the same struggles that other immigrants deal with – particularly around the fear that stemmed from the 2016 presidential election and their undocumented status – not a single mother had the capacity to focus solely on her qualifying child’s needs. They were not only responsible for mothering these children, but also their other children, their parents, and their spouses. Often this was done at the expense of their own self-care. All of these challenges have a serious impact on these women’s ability to effectively care for their children and their own mental health:

Paty feels like she is constantly failing as a mother:

Pero a veces siento que no sé, siento que como madre a veces fallo, y mucho.

[But sometimes I feel that I do not know, I feel that as a mother I sometimes fail, and a lot.]

María admits that she often feels so overwhelmed and pressured that she falls into a deep depressive state:

Como que a veces me entra depresión, a veces me siento tan presionada de todas las cosas que están pasando, todas las preocupaciones que tengo, ay, que a veces ya digo, "No quiero hacer nada, no quiero pensar en nada", y a veces como que me desanimo y
Como que entro en depresión. [...] Porque a veces [...] estoy con-- tensa, frustrada [...] Cuando no está mi mamá, yo siento que quiero explotar, y a veces lo único que hago es llorar, llorar, llorar y ya.

[Because sometimes I get depressed, sometimes I feel so depressed about all the things that are happening, all the worries I have, oh, that sometimes I say, "I do not want to do anything, I do not want to think about anything", and sometimes I get discouraged and like I go into depression. [...] Because sometimes I [...] am tense, frustrated [...] When my mom is not there, I feel that I want to explode, and sometimes all I do is cry, cry, cry and then.]

Through María’s story one is able to understand that these women are not mothers in a vacuum and that they have to meet the needs of multiple people. They experience incredible amounts of internal and external pressure with minimal support. As a result, they end up quietly suffering from “depression” [depression] to the point that they “quiero explotar” [want to explode] and are so overwhelmed that “lo único que hago es llorar, llorar, llorar y ya” [all I do is cry, cry, cry and that’s it]. Still, these mothers push forward and persevere because for them motherhood is not only their greatest source of joy, it is also at the core of their identity.

**The Mother-Child Relationship**

It is possible that the mothers did not readily volunteer information about the burdens they bear because for them motherhood is not a duty, it is a blessing. It was also in many cases their most valued title. Nonetheless, the mothers recognized that their relationships with their children were multifaceted – filled with mutual love and admiration, but also tensions, power struggles and countless sacrifices.

“Una mamá muy feliz” – The joy of motherhood

Mothers overwhelmingly feel “feliz” [happy] and “bien” [good]. They also consider their children “una bendición” [a blessing].
Ana feels incredibly happy about the fact that she was able to have a child, but also that that child was a daughter, something she had always wanted:

**Yo me sentí feliz,** porque yo siempre, desde un principio, antes que naciese ella yo siempre quise niña. El papá quería niño, pero pues yo digo, "Yo, lo que Dios me regale, mientras que nazca bien, no importa". Porque como yo estaba enferma de la tiroides, el doctor me dijo que por nada me podía embarazar hasta cierto tiempo, porque el bebé podría salir con defectos. [...] Sí, siempre, porque yo **siempre quise una niña, siempre.**

**Yo la quiero bastante.** Bueno, igual al niño. A los dos los quiero. Pero bueno, yo **siempre, siempre, siempre quise una niña.** Al principio, una niña.

Sara finds that her child is “una bendición” [*a blessing*]; she loves him not only because it is her duty as a mother but also because of who he is:

[Robert] *es una bendición.* [...] Porque todas las mamás queremos a los niños, son nuestros hijos. Es un niño muy cariñoso.

[ [Robert] is a blessing [...] Because all mothers love children, they are our children. He is a very affectionate child.]

Nancy also loves discusses her son’s personality when she expands on how happy she is to be his mother:

Soy una mamá muy feliz con él. Bien amoroso, cariñoso, él conmigo, me anda abrazando, me anda besando y todo. **Yo me siento bien.** Sí.

[I'm a very happy mom with him. Very loving, affectionate, him with me, hugging me, kissing me and everything. I feel good. Yes.]

When speaking about their children most of the mothers would use words that related to how affectionate, kind, loving and sweet their child was. They would make mentions of the difficulties of parenting their children, but overwhelmingly they spoke about their children using
positive descriptors such as “amoroso” [loving], “cariñoso” [affectionate], “bueno” [good], “ordenado” [orderly], and “sentimental” [sentimental].

Nancy made it a point to list all of the qualities she valued in her child and in particular the fact that he “es apegado” [is very attached] to her, which she mentions twice:

Él es un niño muy amoroso, bueno, tiene sus dificultades como todos[...], [risas]. Muy ordenado, sí, mas muy responsable. Pero, pues, conforme van de etapa en etapa, usted sabe que ya van haciendo sus diferencias. Pero, un niño muy bueno, muy amoroso, cariñoso, y le gusta estar pegado a mí. Que no le importa si el papá no está, pero la mamá siempre tiene que estar. Es que no es que no le importe el papá, pero, ciertamente, más es apegado a mí. [...] Soy una mamá feliz de él, pues, por este, porque no me puedo quejar, ¿verdad?

[He is a very loving child, well, he has his difficulties like everyone [...]. [laughs] Very neat, yes, but very responsible. But, as they go from stage to stage, you know that they are already making their differences. But, a very good child, very loving, affectionate, and likes to be attached to me. That he does not care if the dad is not there, but the mom always has to be. It's not that he does not care about dad, but, certainly, more is attached to me. [...] I am a happy mom of him, well, because of this, because I can not complain, right?]

When Maria shares the characteristics that make her child loveable she also includes the fact that he is this way with other people, which makes him endearing to not just her, but to everyone with whom he interacts socially. She elaborates on his loving nature as a way to juxtapose his behavior when “se pone en su crisis” [he has a crisis]:

Justin es un niño muy cariñoso. Muy amoroso. Pero cuando sí se pone en sus crisis, a veces me da tristeza de verlo así. [...] Cualquier persona se va a querer con él, porque él es muy cariñoso. [...] Y él se da a querer, porque él los abraza, a los señores también. Y con nosotros también. Él es cariñoso, pero cuando yo quiero abrazarlo, casi no se deja. [...] Pero en sí, casi no se deja abrazar. Y es lo que tiene él, que es muy cariñoso. Muy también sentimental. Le gusta convivir …

[Justin is a very affectionate child. Very loving. But when he does get in its crisis, sometimes I feel sad to see him like that. [...] Anyone is going to love him, because he is very affectionate. [...] And he gives himself to love, because he embraces them, to men too. And with us too. He is affectionate, but when I want to hug him, he hardly lets himself. [...] But, he almost does not allow himself to be embraced. And that is what he has, that he is very affectionate. Very also sentimental. He likes to share with other ...]
It is possible that María does this as a way to counter the school’s framing of Justin as an antisocial child – an assertion that María vehemently denies.

Like María, Ana also describes María Teresa as caring with others. In this way, she showcases that the way her child behaves with her is not the exception but the rule:

Es bien dulce, bien tierna, bien alegre, que todo el tiempo me anda diciendo, “Mamá, mamá, te quiero”, o así, con el papá, o con el niño.

[She is very sweet, very tender, very happy, that all the time she is saying to me, "Mom, mom, I love you", or so, with the father, or with the boy.]

Paty, on the other hand, is the only mother who makes any mention of a potential weakness amongst the list of Dan’s positive characteristic, although “sensitive” is not a negative characteristic either:

[Dan] es muy bueno, es tierno, pero a veces es muy sensible.

[[Dan] is very good, he is tender, but sometimes he is very sensitive.]

The mothers often talked a lot about how they felt loved by their children; given the unhealthy relationships with their spouses, it is very likely that these mother-child relationships were the most nurturing and caring relationship in their lives. The mothers often spoke of the ways in which their children “se siente orgulloso” [feels proud], appreciate, support and care for them. María beamed when she recounted how Justin had acknowledged the fact that “tú me cuidas mucho” [you take care of me a lot]:

"Mami, tú me cuidas mucho", le digo, "Sí, hijo, yo siempre te voy a cuidar".

["Mom, you take care of me a lot," I say, "Yes, son, I'm always going to take care of you."]

María also assures him, and in some ways me, that she will always take care of him.

One of Carlota’s greatest joys as a mother is the result of her son preferring her to anyone else:
El se siente orgulloso de que no a todos los niños su mamá los va a recoger. Por lo mismo de que trabajan. Y él se siente orgullosoísmo cuando va su mamá. Cuando va su papá, o cuando va su hermano no le gusta. Prefiere a su mamá […] Nos sentimos bien, si me siento bien en ese momento.

[He is proud that not all the children are picked up by their mother. For the same reason that they work. And he feels very proud when his mom goes. When his dad goes, or when his brother goes, he does not like it. He prefers his mother […] We feel good, yes I feel good at that moment.]

She is also moved by the fact that he feels proud that his mom still picks him up from school, a rare experience (and sentiment) for his peers. These feelings of mutual love and admiration are not only based on the mothers’ perceptions, but on the actual words of the children during their interviews. In the next section, the children are given an opportunity to share the way they feel about their mothers.

“Es mi mejor amiga” – EBLADs talk about their mothers.

Just like their mothers, the children also spoke warmly about their mothers and employed multiple superlatives to support their feelings. They use words like “nice” “helpful”, and “best” to describe them. Justin not only shares the fact that he thinks that his mother is “nice” and “helpful,” he supports this assertion with evidence:

She is nice. She is helpful. […]Because she can help make things that we need […] Like like papers, like books, like toys, like games --[…]Yes [my mom gets me all those things].[…]My mom is nice b]ecause she's because -- My mama says she is nice because she can be my best mother.[…] My mom help me to learn.[…] By working my homework.[…] Because if I don't [under]stand that, my mommy help me. If I got it, then I do it by myself.[…]You know, when we eat foot when we come back from school, what we'll eat, my mommy gets me food, food.[…] Because she always want to work to me.[…] Because if I don't [under]stand that, my mommy help me. If I got it, then I do it by myself.[…]If something [sic] that is mistake, mommy will help me erase, and we'll try again to write it[…] He can [sic] talk Spanish a little and mommy can think and write on the board. He can use the phone to write, and the [sic] white does then say what looks in the book.45
Already at a young age Justin acknowledges all the ways in which his mother supports him: she helps him with homework, she makes sure he understands what he is learning, and she prepares him food. He recognizes all of these acts as acts of love and caring.

María Teresa, on the other hand, spoke openly about the ways in which her mother showed her love and why “ella es [su] major amiga” [she is [her] best friend]: “me abraza” [hugs me], “me acaricia” [caresses me], “se sienta conmigo” [sits with me] and “me ayuda” [helps me].

Ella es una buena mamá. [...] Porque ella siempre me quiere. [...] Me abraza. [...] [Yo me siento bien. [...] Porque ella es mi mejor amiga. [Me hace sentir] Feliz. [...] Porque me acaricia. [Ella es una mama] Buena. [...] Porque ella siempre me ayuda en la tarea. [...] Tal vez ella se sienta contigo o me ayuda a leer.

[She is a good mom [...] Because she always loves me [...] She hugs me [...] [I feel] good [...] Because she is my best friend. [It makes me feel] Happy. [...] Because she caresses me. [She's a [good mom]. [...] Because she always helps me with the homework [...] Maybe she sits with me or helps me read.]

Meanwhile, Dan is not only aware of the sacrifices his mother makes, but also the reasons why. In addition to appreciating and recognizing his mother’s efforts, he, in turn, thinks of ways in which he can use his education to help her:

Because I feel like she's like the best mom and I'm lucky to have her. [She is the best mom] Because I know she just wants me to get a good future, she wants me to have a bright future, she also makes me go to school. And I should come to [Saturday] academy which is I chose by myself and I said, "yes". She wants me to have a good future because she hasn't go to school, she start to go, she stopped going to school on fifth grade, and I thought and say if I could go to middle school I could teach her stuff. [...] To help me learn] Sometimes she asks some questions and I understand the text. [...] Sometimes she tells me words, she asks me these words, if I understand them. So then I could put them in a pad, in my notebook and put in my vocabulary. And that's it.

While all three of the Testimonialistas' children were able to identify ways in which their mothers showed them love and supported their learning, they were also able to identify barriers to greater support. When asked “What things do you think make it hard for your mom to help
“you learn?” all three children identified English as the primary impediment. First, Dan makes it clear that it is not just his mother’s limited English but also his limited Spanish that creates problems in their household:

The language. […] Because the language, I only get a lot of words of English and it's harder for me to explain it. […] Because sometimes I can't explain it that well, and she wants me to say in more easy words but I can't because I don't really get her. [It's hard for my mom to help me], a little bit English she does speak, [and I speak only a little bit of Spanish] so it's a little harder for me.

While Justin states that his mother is still able to help him, he identifies the fact that the process is longer and more complicated when the homework assignments are in English. He is also able to identify the strategies his mom uses to mediate the language gap that exists between the home and the school: using the phone, Google, and English/Spanish glossaries to translate the work:

[I] can talk Spanish a little and mommy can think and write on the board. [She] can use the phone to write, and then write what it say, what goggle says, in the book.

Since María Teresa is in a bilingual class, she is able to identify the support that her mother is able to provide as being linguistically bound: “Las tareas que ella no puede hacer son las de inglés” [The homeworks that she cannot do are the ones in English].

Nomás ella me ayuda a hacer la tarea en la casa.[…] Las tareas que ella no puede hacer son las de inglés.[…] Porque ella no entiende inglés ahorita.[Eso me hace sentir] Triste. Quisiera [mas ayuda] para que yo haga toda la tarea.

[She only helps me to do the homework at home […] The homeworks that she can not do are the ones in English […] Because she does not understand English right now. [That makes me feel] Sad. I would like [more help] for me to do all the homework.]

All of the children and all of the mothers talked extensively about homework. This focus on homework represents the central role that homework plays in the mother-child relationship. Homework was the source of a great deal of stress for the mothers and frustration for the child. As a result, homework often created more distance between the mother and child than unity. This
is explored further in the following section.

“Las tareas” – Ostracized by Homework

As noted above, homework for the children was the primary indication that their mothers were not able to fully support their school-based education. “Tarea” was one of the most recurring topics discussed throughout the study. Homework was the greatest source of “dificultades” [difficulties] for mothers.

Nancy struggled with getting her son to complete tasks:

Solo, pues, en las tareas. Él conmigo [se molesta], porque--. O, yo con él, ¿cómo le puedo decir? En las tareas, luego yo--. O en los avisos. Algunas veces, no revisé lo de las hojas. No mandé--. que eso lo quería español. Entonces, ahí vienen las dificultades para mí, ¿verdad? Porque no le entiendo. Solo adonde le entiendo. Y ahí me voy imaginando lo que dice.

[Well, in the homework. He is [bothered] with me, because-- Or, me with him, how can I tell you? In the homework, then I-- Or in the notices. Sometimes, I did not check the sheets. I did not send--. I wanted that in Spanish. So, there come the difficulties for me, right? Because I do not understand. Only where I understand. And then I am imagining what it says.]

This left both Nancy and her son feeling frustrated. Nancy is frustrated because she is unable to understand the schools’ correspondence, and her son is frustrated because he doesn’t feel supported by her.

Rosa was unable to support her child when he asked for help, which left her feeling defeated:

Es porque--, en las tareas, ayudarles, ya cuando yo no puedo, entonces digo, “Lo siento, pero no voy a poder ese día”.

[It's because ..., in the homework, helping them, when I can not, then I say, "I'm sorry, but I'm not going to be able to do that day."]
Carmela, on the other hand, acknowledges her struggles with English and expands on the ways in which she tries to support her child even when she cannot actively engage in the task at hand:

Sí, porque--., ¿cómo dicen ellos?, la discapacidad que tiene, yo trato de hacer la tarea con él, de sentarme con él a escuchar para ver cómo está leyendo, y aunque yo no sé inglés, yo lo escucho para ver si él está leyendo.

[Yes, because ..., how do they say?, the disability that he has, I try to do the homework with him, to sit down with him to listen to see how he is reading, and although I do not know English, I listen to him to see if he is reading.]

Through Carmela’s example, we can see that even when language interferes with their ability to actively engage with their children in the homework, the mothers still stay connected by encouraging their children to do the work, by sitting with them and listening to them as they read. Still, language is power and even while in the lower grades EBLAD children are able to identify and assign more power to English than to Spanish. As we will see in the next section, this can lead to children assigning more power to one speaker over another, regardless of age or family title.

“Tú no sabes inglés” – Language as power

Already at a young age children are starting to understand the power dynamics that are associated with linguistic policies and with linguistic abilities. In some cases this also creates power imbalances between the mother and child.

In Dan’s experience, English makes him “feel” smarter but this hegemonic understanding of language constructs his mothers as less than:

[I feel a] little kind of intelligent than everybody in the family, only here, in the house. Because I'm the only one that really working hard to get a bright future.
We see this recounted in Nancy’s experience when her children laugh at her attempts to decode materials that are sent home in English:

Ellos se ríen conmigo, “Mami, pero tú no entiendes inglés, ¿cómo puedes decir que eso dice?”. Le digo, “Papi, yo entiendo dos o tres palabras, lo demás solo me lo imagino”. Y me dice el niño grande, “Mami, pero eso es lo que está diciendo”. Dice, “Y tú no sabes inglés, ¿cómo me estás explicando lo que dice aquí?”. Le digo, “Es que salteado sí lo entiendo, pero no lo entiendo todo”.[…] para ellos le encuentran chiste que cómo puedo decir que yo no sé inglés, y que luego ya estoy diciendo lo que dice. Le digo, “Pero no en todo me va a pasar eso, porque hay mucho que no entiendo”[…]. Le digo, “Papi, no creas que yo no más--, no creas que yo estoy jugando o mintiendo que yo no lo entiendo, pero sí yo entiendo dos o tres palabras así, entonces yo lo demás me imagino”. Y ellos se ríen, me dice, “Ay, mami, qué imaginación”.

[They laugh at me, "Mommy, but you do not understand English, how can you say what that says?" I say, "Honey, I understand two or three words, the rest I just imagine." And the older boy says to me, "Mommy, but that's what he's saying." He says, "And you do not know English, how are you explaining what it says here?" I tell him, "It's just that I understand pieces of it, but I do not understand everything" [...] for them they find it a joke that how can I say that I do not know English, and then I am already saying what it says. I say, "But that won’t happen for me with, because there is a lot that I do not understand" […]. I say, "Honey, do not think that I am just... do not think I’m playing or lying that I do not understand, but if I understand two or three words like that, then I imagine everything else." And they laugh, he says, "Oh, Mommy, what imagination."]

Several mothers shared stories or vignettes that highlighted the power struggles taking place in the home as a result of disparate language practices at home and at school. Given the emphasis that mothers place on schooling, it is not surprising that this high regard would transfer onto English since for many of these students the bulk of their educational experience is enacted in English. Ultimately, while these mothers make great efforts to stay engaged in their children’s academic development, they are unable to mitigate the deficits that are embedded in their Spanish monolingual practices as a byproduct of school-based English-mostly language practices.

Nonetheless, as schools continue to put into practice language policies that ultimately push out parents, the mothers continue to make sacrifices that they believe will result in high returns for their children even when these are not in the women’s own best interest. These
mothers are using limited resources in order to support their children. These mothers do not have a lot of money for themselves; they do not get a manicure, they do not purchase cups of coffee, and yet their children have $15 and $20 per hour tutors.

“No voy a sacrificar a mi hijo” – The children’s needs come first

Aside from limited resources, the most sacrificed commodity among MoEBLADs was time – time with their EBLAD child, time with their other children, time with family, time to run errands, time for self-care, etc. The time that they have available to them is used to support the needs of their children. This is substantiated throughout the different sections of this manuscript.

On Saturday mornings, they were doing laundry but they are also taking their children to Saturday enrichment and/or remedial programs, staying at the school and waiting for their children and then bringing them back home. All the while they are also caring for their other children.

Even though Darius’ disability needs required that he attend services, this did not absolve Carlota of her responsibilities to her other children.

[La evaluadora] tomó la decisión de que tuviéramos las terapias, que yo llevara al niño a sus terapias. Era muy fuerte todo eso, tenía que tomar trenes. Y no solo lo tenía yo a él, sí no, a los otros dos también. Tenía yo que atenderlos.

[[The evaluator] made the decision that we had the therapies, that I would take the child to his therapies. It was very taxing, I had to take trains. And not only I had him, but also, the other two also. I had to take care of them.]

Paty also shares how the need to shuttle a child to and from services was complicated by needing to care for an even younger child:

De cuando para él entró a la escuela, pues fue difícil porque yo tenía que cargar a [Tanya] en la canguerera. Porque fue en tiempos--, me acuerdo que cuando le hicieron la evaluación había mucho nieve por Chapel St., entonces metía a [Tanya] en la canguerera y [Dan] la agarraba de la mano porque ni con la carriola podía uno pasar la nieve. Entonces
a veces salía del subway o cogía un taxi para que me llevara cuatro o cinco calles para que le hicieran la evaluación. Yo le decía a mi esposo: "Yo tengo que buscar de una manera u otra forma". **Tampoco puedo dejar a mi hijo, como tampoco dejarla a ella.**

*From when he went to school, it was difficult because I had to carry [Tanya] in the carrier. Because it was in times-- I remember that when they did the evaluation there was a lot of snow on Chapel St., then I put [Tanya] in the carrier and grabbed [Dan’s] hand because even with the stroller one could not pass the snow. Then sometimes I got out of the subway or took a taxi to take me four or five streets to do the evaluation. I said to my husband: "I have to look one way or another way". Neither can I leave my son, nor can I leave her."

Paty not only had to deal with managing two children, she also had to do so in the winter using public transportation. All of which amounted to increased levels of stress.

Maria was one of the few mothers who explicitly discussed the ways in which caring for her child with a disability had directly impacted her own ability to participate in social engagements:

A veces, a mí me pasa lo mismo, porque yo no puedo ir a una fiesta, **yo no puedo ir a un lugar**, al cine, porque mi niño no soporta estar allí. Y yo, le digo, **yo a veces me siento aislada de la gente** por lo mismo, **por mi hijo**, pero tampoco yo **no voy a sacrificar a mi hijo**, porque yo quiera estar en un lugar, que yo quisiera estar.

Sometimes, the same thing happens to me, because I can not go to a party, I can not go to a place, to the cinema, because my child can not stand being there. And I, I say, I sometimes feel isolated from people for the same reason, because of my son, but I am going to sacrifice my son, because I want to be in a place, that I would like to be.

But the mothers weren’t just unable to partake in social activities. They also were unable to partake in any self-care.

Many of the mothers spoke about how time consuming it was to have an EBLAD child – the countless “reunions” [*meetings*], regular “citas médicas” [*doctors appointments*], todos los servicios [*the services*] – yet they always found the time to tend to the needs of their child and those of their other children, spouses and parents. On the other hand, when it came to their own needs for self-care, they were noticeably restrained. While none of the Testimonialistas' children
had missed a single doctors’ appointment in the last year, none of the Testimonialistas had found
the time (or money) to visit with an OB/GYN. As a matter of fact, none of the mothers had
visited any doctor since the birth of their youngest child; for one mother that meant that it had
been three years since her last doctor’s visit, for another it meant nine. However, the greatest
sacrifice that these women have made and continue to make is to remain in less than ideal living
situations, as Ana explains here:

Ana would never leave her children, so when confronted with the possibility of losing them if
she were to leave her husband; she decided to remain with her cheating spouse.

Similarly, the other Testimonialistas were very clear about the fact that they not only
stayed in unhealthy marriages but also in the United States because it was in the best interest of
their children. All three women shared that personally life would be better for them in Mexico,
where they could return to their families and communities and where they knew the culture and
had maximum linguistic access. However, since most of the mothers came from families and
communities with limited means and rural locations, a better life in Mexico was not possible for the EBLAD child. For many of these children, limited resources and rural communities would have resulted in inadequate schooling experiences and no special education services.

Whereas one may be inclined to read about these sacrifices deeming them extreme and really burdensome, it is important to view them in context. It is critical to understand that for these women being a mother is a major source of pride. As such, everything that they do, every minute that is spent, every dollar that is set aside, emboldens their capacity to be a mother. Ultimately, they are willing to withstand so many difficult situations because it is in the best interest of their children. These women not only make sacrifices to uphold their maternal identity, they also gain strength from them:

Pues sí, dice uno, "De mover el cielo". Pues sí, sí por mi hijo, sí muevo lo que tenga que mover. Porque no, no me gustaría--. […] Pues no [tengo acceso a] todos los recursos, pero a veces uno, por los hijos, o por ayudarlos, por el bienestar de ellos, uno pelea por ellos. Porque le digo que, cuando empezó este cambio de escuelas, yo decía, "Creo que lo voy a dejar, creo que voy a tomar eso de volver a regresarla a esa escuela". Pero yo decía, "Pero, ¿por qué? ¿Por qué lo voy a dejar a mi hijo, si es algo que yo no veo que está bien en él? Yo tengo que pelear, debo de ser fuerte para él, para que él sea también fuerte". […] Sí [habiendo tenido éxito en el pasado con Dan], sí me hace sentirme más segura de mi misma, que puedo hacerlo. Que a veces es un poquito difícil, pero sí se puede. Yo no sé si sea esa su pregunta. [risas] Sí se puede.

[Well yes, like the saying goes, "To move the sky." Yes, yes for my son, I do move what I have to move. Because no, I would not like - […] Well, I do not [have access to] all the resources, but sometimes one, for the children, or for helping them, for their welfare, one fights for them. Because I say that when this school change began, I would say, "I think I'm going to leave it, I think I'm going to go back to that school again." But I said, "But, why, why am I going to leave my son there, if it is something that I do not see that is right for him? I have to fight, I must be strong for him, so that he can be strong too." […] Yes [having been successful in the past with Dan], it does make me feel more confident about myself, that I can do it. That sometimes is a bit difficult, but you can. I do not know if that is your question. [laughs] Yes you can.]

In this testimony Paty shares a primal truth for each mother in this study— that she is willing to move heaven and earth to make sure that her children are safe, healthy and well.
These mothers are not disengaged and their experiences are not reflective of women who are unable to advocate for themselves or their children. Rather, these experiences prove how engaged and how strong they really are. Ultimately, they do not make these sacrifices because they are weak or powerless, but rather they make these sacrifices because they are strong. They are strong because their children need them to be. They are strong because they are mothers.

This shared sense of motherly duty not only came through in the analysis of the individual interviews, but also in the collaborative discussions that took place during the recollections. The outcomes of those conversations are shared in the next, and final, section, which focuses on the recollections.

Recollections: Finding Community, If Only for One Day

As part of this study the mothers were asked to gather in my home for a final interview session. Unlike the individual meetings, this included all three Testimonialistas and there would only be one question to start. The focusing question for this session was:

Think back to times when you felt connected to your child’s learning and schooling experience, yet were also unclear as to how to support them. This can be a moment in which you ultimately felt successful, ineffective, frustrated, confused or overwhelmed.

Surprisingly, none of the mothers really spoke to this question; instead, they reflected on the things that get in the way of their support of their children’s academic careers. They talked about language, but they also talked about their own education levels. But the longest and strongest topic from the recollections that day tied together the suffering and stress that these mothers were enduring. Once again, a room of women who had never met before, took the anonymity, of sorts, as an opportunity for release.

Paty talked about Carlos Santo’s drug abuse; María expounded on her husband’s alcoholism; and Ana recounted her husband’s affair. As each woman talked the others nodded
not just in support, but also in agreement: they had been there, they knew this pain. After they were all done sharing, they began to talk openly about the similarities in their experiences: Maria revealed that her husband had also had an online affair, so had Paty’s. Ana and María talked about how frustrated they felt by their Spanish monolingualism; Paty shared how frustrating it was to have access to classes but lack availability. But they also talked about how much they loved their children, how much joy they found in motherhood – even if it was all consuming and exhausting. They went on like this for three hours.

That afternoon, we gathered for nearly five hours. While sharing a meal, we shared our testimonios. We laughed. We cried. We came together and found comfort in each other, if only for one day.

**Conclusion**

Mothers view a mother’s role as being the first teacher. As such, they teach their children, support them, help them, and provide for them. However, disability labels take many aspects of this role away from MoEBLADs because it presents a myriad of unknowns. It shifts all of the "power" from them to the teachers, doctors, service providers; the experts - "los que le dieron la etiqueta" [*the ones who assigned the label*], leaving the mothers feeling "impotente" [*powerless*].

As a result, the mothers do not know what to do –how to help, support, teach their children, and so, they step away from the academic realm (the place where the disability “lives”) and find other ways to still be the child’s mother: doubling down on sacrifices, doubling down on external support. All of this is a form of mothering by proxy: teaching them about God, teaching them self-care, and fostering caring relationships with their other children.
In addition, the one area where they still feel in charge is in Spanish. Spanish is the one part of their child’s life where they are still the authority and not the school: "español es la lengua maternal” [Spanish is the mother tongue], "el inglés es el lenguaje de este país” [English is the language of this country], "yo le enseño español” [I will teach him Spanish], "yo le puedo enseñar” [I can teach him], "yo le ayudo” [I can help]. When students are placed in are in bilingual programs, the mothers feel empowered because they feel they can support their children, assess what they know and what they are being taught in school. However, when schools remove children from bilingual settings and place them in monolingual settings, they take away some of the mother’s power and authority. Yet these mothers find their roles as mothers to be so central to their identity and to their child’s advancement that they recoup some of this power by engaging in other parts of their children’s lives.
Chapter VII: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

In keeping with the intersectional nature of this study, the subject matter and the participants, the following chapter will review major themes from the findings, while addressing the underlying theories that the data brings up. Additionally, this chapter will also discuss the relationship between this study, educational policy, teacher education, and future research. First, the findings will be reviewed in relation to the existing literature and theories. Next, the implications for policy and teacher education will be presented. Subsequently, potential research projects will be outlined. Lastly, the dissertation ends with a few closing thoughts about the role of educational research and researchers in current society.

Summary of the Findings

The findings chapters were designed in such a way that they answered the two research questions that guided this project:

1. What are the mothering experiences of Spanish-speaking Latinx mothers of emergent bilingual children labeled dis/abled?
2. What values, perspectives and ideologies do mothers hold about bilingualism and dis/abilities and how are those reflected in their lives at home and at school?

Even after dedicating attention to the mothers’ own words, there is much that remains unsaid and unexplored not only in this manuscript but also in the lives of these women. As such, it is difficult to provide complete answers to these questions. However, what can be said is that the experiences of mothers raising EBLADs are fraught with challenges, but equally defined by tenacity, love and commitment. These women experience many hardships, yet they do not allow those to define them or to limit their children or their capacity to mother. Similarly, their values, perspectives and ideologies are as complicated, intertwined and at times contradictory, as are the
concepts of dis/abilities and bilingualism. Yet, these mothers make great efforts to sort through their feelings, their ideas and the information that is thrust upon them by schools in order to facilitate successful learning for their children.

**Putting theory into practice**

In chapter two I outlined the four theories that shaped this study: intersectionality, language access as a human right, dis/ability as social construction, and testimonios as tools of empowerment. While these theories were integral to the design and analysis of this study, it is my hope that through the findings chapters it has become evident that the perspectives of mothers of EBLADs have to be at the center in order to understand EBLADs.

Intersectionality allows stakeholders to view mothers as the complex human beings that they are – taking into account not only the different systems of oppression with which they interact, but also the different people/entities to whom they are beholden. This lens also allows for a deeper understanding of the range of social experiences that students have both inside and outside of the school. In many ways being the child of an intersectional mother is an identity marker in and of itself because a mothers’ experiences greatly influences the way in which they raise their child. Access to bilingual education is a human right, which should be given not only to those students who are deemed as befitting or able to acquire the benefits that come with being bilingual. Access to bilingual learning environments should be granted to all emergent bilingual students in order for them to be able to maintain healthy, supportive and loving relationships with their mothers and transnational siblings.

Additionally, access to bilingual education in the current age of mass deportation is critical to students being able to maintain their independence, as well as access to an education in the event that their families are forcibly removed from their communities in the United States.
By placing students in monolingual settings, schools are not aptly preparing students for their present or their future given that neither of these is bound to English dominant nations. Instead, these children, their presents and their futures, are inalienably tied to their Spanish-speaking mothers.

An approach to special education through a dis/ability studies in education framework allows for educators and schools to implement special education services in a way that is compatible with the mothers’ understandings of special education and dis/ability labels as temporary. Alternatively, there should be more transparent conversations with parents that address the actual educational experiences and trajectories of students who are labeled as dis/abled as being more permanent than not. The mothers in this study made it very clear that they view increased services as an effort to remedy the dis/ability faster, yet this is not necessarily reflective of the intentions or values of the school. However, by adopting a dis/ability as social construction model, schools would need to consider the student and family’s social experiences when developing individual education plans. Many of the mothers’ views regarding dis/ability as human variety were influenced by their experiences with diversity in ability in their country of origin. As such, this model is also supportive of a family’s transnational experiences. Additionally, by adopting a special education model that is grounded in dis/ability as social construction, schools can be better equipped to meet the needs of EBLADs in least restrictive environments.

Viewing a woman’s narrative as an intentional and political act could transform parent and school relationships from one in which school representatives are privileged and mothers seen as needy into one in which both parties are viewed as valuable and active participants and contributors. By creating space in which mothers are allowed to share their experiences, their
needs and their strengths, schools have the capacity to redistribute and repurpose their resources in such a way that they are providing the child and family the supports that they themselves identify as needing and wanting. This increases the probability for successful educational and social emotional outcomes.

**Communal learning through collective inquiry**

In chapter three, the methods that were used in this study were presented. The findings from these methodologies highlight the potential for community building that is created when educational researchers incorporate pedagogical practices and methodologies from other fields into their inquiry work with parents. This is particularly true for the use of recollections, descriptive observations, and participatory rank methodology. These methods allowed for the complexity of the mothers lives to come to the forefront. The participants were able to share that they value bilingualism for their children, the manners in which bilingualism will benefit their kids in the future, along with the ways that dis/ability labels increase their children’s access to services while also increasing the strains on the mothers. Additionally, narrative questions allowed the mothers to steer the conversations/interviews in directions that were not anticipated. As such, they revealed the ways in which linguistic and cognitive labels impact the lives of other family members, the ways in which the mothers feel isolated from their communities as a result of the labels, and the emotional and individual sacrifices that the mothers make in the interests of their EBLAD children.

The recollections were critical to this study because not only did they allow the mothers to share more of their experiences without interruption, they allowed them control over what they shared as well as expanding their audience to include other mothers like them. While the women had all been tasked with sharing a memory in which they had a difficult time supporting
their child’s learning, their stories were not reflective of educational barriers – nor barriers related to the child’s linguistic placement or dis/ability label. Instead the mothers shared about the ways in which their lives are already strained and the ways in which their own monolingualism, their marriages and their struggles with their other children make it difficult for them to be more engaged. While many of the stories shared during the recollection session had been introduced in the one-to-one interviews, the recollections allowed the women to hear their experiences alongside each other, to notice the ways in which they were not alone, in which their stressors were not a reflection of an innate failure, but rather of a shared experience and ultimately a strength. The fact that the participants shared such intimate stories with each other, in their first meeting, is indicative of the need these women have for community, for open discourse and for support. In addition to continuing to make space for recollections in research as a way to create space for participant voices and community, it would also be incredibly beneficial to use recollections with parents in schools. Recollections could be used during parent-teacher association meetings; they could be used at the beginning of parent trainings, etc. With regards to the needs of EBLAD families, recollections could be used during individual education plan meetings and during triennials – here the prompt could center on sharing a memory of the child as a way to build a collective awareness of each individual’s experience with that child. This practice could greatly increase parental participation during these meetings; it would also allow the mothers some control over how their child is discussed, and it would give the school representatives a glimpse of the mother-child relationship and the child’s life outside of school.

There was a time when home visits were conducted as a part of a child’s educational record. Multiple studies have shown the benefits that can arise from teachers engaging in home visits (Auerbach, 2009; Mann, 2014; J. A. Meyer & Mann, 2006; Weiss, 1993). However, in the
late 1990s, one prominent study stated that “[t]here is no evidence that providing case management by means of home visits is an effective way to improve social, educational, or health outcomes for adults or children” (St. Pierre & Layzer, 1999). This study focused primarily on the role of home visits on the outcomes of children and families from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Findings like this have contributed to the drastic reduction of home visits within public schools, particularly in urban environments. Nonetheless, the St. Pierre and Layzer study did not address the impact of home visits on parental engagement or community building. Whereas home visits associated with comprehensive child development programs were found to have low impact in relation to their high costs, perhaps it is time to revisit the role that home visits can play in the lives of minoritized families. One way to reduce costs is to engage in teacher-directed home visits that focus primarily on observation rather than service delivery. In addition to being cost-effective, descriptive observations allow for more complete understanding of the child’s social and linguistic practices. However, it is important that these observations be descriptive observations intended to understand and document what is, rather than to qualify it. All of the mothers in this study offered their home as a research site and/or interview location. Many invited me into their home for the very first interview and most others after one or two interviews. Even those who did not initially offer up their home were welcoming once they were presented with the purpose of the observations and the role I, as the researcher, would play. It was made explicitly clear that the observations were to serve as an additional data set with which to understand the child, the family dynamic and the family’s linguistic practices. The mothers were also given access to all notes and recordings that were made during and/or as a result of the observations. This level of transparency established trust and allowed the participants to understand why the observations were important. As such, it would be useful for schools to first
train their educators in descriptive observations and then make home observations a central component of the parent-school relationship. Likewise, parents can be invited into the classroom to observe their child in order to build mutual levels of exposure, trust and vulnerability. In addition, by giving the mothers an opportunity to watch their children in school they can develop a greater understanding of their child’s linguistic practices as well as the ways in which their dis/ability impacts their school-based learning.

Finally, participatory rank method (PRM) could be used in similar ways to strengthen parent-school relationships. In this study, PRM revealed the urgency and/or lack thereof that a mother feels about their child’s bilingualism and/or dis/ability by putting these needs alongside the other needs that the mothers were managing. During the PRM, the three Testimonialistas disclosed the factors that impact their ability to be more active in their children’s education. This exercise exposed the varying stressors that mothers must manage as well as the financial, physical and emotional tolls these took on them. As previously mentioned, PRM is a method that is typically used in public health research; given the impact that education has on these families and that public (physical and mental) health matters have on educational outcomes, it is wise to incorporate more field-based methods into educational research. PRM could also serve as a tool for schools. Through the use of PRM, schools would be better equipped to meet the actual needs of the parents in their schools, which would be reflected in the services and workshops they provide, thus not only increasing participation but also outcomes.

During the recollections all of the mothers expressed an interest in mental health supports as well as child-rearing workshops from their schools in lieu of workshops focused on teaching the latest math strategies or those explaining reading levels. This revelation is particularly important when one takes into account the disparate linguistic practices between the school and
the home. What use is an academically focused parent workshop if the child is only bringing home English materials thus eliminating the mother’s capacity to support her child? These mothers have shown themselves to be incredibly industrious and have found creative ways to support their children academically and linguistically. Unlike a survey, PRMs use of conversation and reflection allows for the speaker to discuss their needs as they relate to their life rather than the needs that relate to the listener (surveyor). Engaging in PRM with parents would allow schools to identify the non-traditional ways in which parents are supporting their children’s development and the ways in which schools can facilitate greater parental involvement both at home and at school.

**Correcting the literature**

Many emerging scholars write about the need to reframe pre-existing scholarships, but the truth is that existing literature does not need to be reframed; it needs to be corrected. The findings of this study support previous studies, which revealed parental engagement strategies within Latinx communities that vary from, but are no less critical than, traditional methods of engagement. However, this study also highlights the ways in which mothers attempt to support their children in the traditional ways. A great deal of the existing literature focuses on redefining engagement to include tasks such as encouraging the child to go to school and teaching good manners. While those remain valuable forms of engagement, this study indicates that MoEBLADs have also adopted very traditional modes of academic engagement such as reading with their children, helping them with homework, taking them to the library, and finding tutors. Additionally, the mothers in this study are emblematic of the great lengths to which mothers go in order to support their children’s academic growth in more traditional ways. It is important for future scholarship to acknowledge these acts, given that they have the capacity to counter biased
anecdotal evidence that is often cited by school representatives in order to disparage and discount parental participation. Even while being highly engaged and making considerable financial and timely investments, these mothers often viewed themselves as disengaged because they have internalized the school’s definition of engagement as participating in acts that take place at school. Scholarship has not just the capacity but ultimately the responsibility to validate all forms of academic engagement inside and outside of schools. It is of critical importance that research be inclusive of all experiences rather than continuing to support hegemonic systems of power and perception.

This study confirms that regardless of school-based English monolingual language policies and programming, EBLADs are bilingual children. As such, more research needs to be dedicated to the actual linguistic practices of EBLADs. As previously stated, a great deal of the literature surrounding this population focuses heavily on English language development rather than bilingualism/biliteracy support and development. Additionally, by focusing primarily on the economic and cognitive benefits of bilingualism, bilingual education researchers are contributing to the cooption of bilingual education as a gifted and talented program that excludes socioeconomically, culturally, linguistically and neurodiverse learners. The kind of research presented in this study is needed in order to counter and ultimately destroy, unfounded beliefs of bilingualism as confusing for children labeled as dis/abled. In order to push this conversation on true inclusion forward we must begin to make greater use of the term neurodiversity. Neurodiversity, unlike disability or special education is not a term rooted in medical ideology but rather a term that is grounded on scientific research. As such neurodiversity is a term that describes the fact that thinking differently is within the definition of normal – it represents human variation. Thinking differently is not just a reflection of cultural diversity. The struggles
that these students encounter are not just cultural misunderstandings. As a matter of fact, this idea of “cultural misunderstandings” that can be a dangerous idea to introduce because it can quickly and easily lead to the idea of cultural deficiency. These erroneous beliefs about the linguistic and neurological needs of EBLADs are inadvertently upheld by bilingual education researchers’ ongoing disregard for neurodiversity and special education researchers’ continued dismissiveness of multilingualism. EBLADs’ capacity to communicate in Spanish at home and in English at school is indicative of the ways in which bilingualism is not a limitation for students labeled as dis/abled. Once again, research has to take the lead in eradicating inaccurate statements that are based in perception rather than actual data. There remains a need to address the exclusion of neurodiverse students from bilingual education programs. Additionally, the bilingual education community needs to examine the ways in which its pursuits of self-preservation contribute to the othering and exclusion of EBLAD students and their families, not only from bilingual learning spaces but from bilingual education discourse as a whole. Similarly, the special education community needs to consider the ways in which monolingual placements, be they inclusive or not, contribute to the ongoing isolation of EBLAD children within their homes and of their mothers within their schools. It is important to consider how the linguistic decisions that are made for children lead to segregation within families, but also to the segregation of families within schools.

The final way in which current literature needs to be corrected is in the way it frames culturally and linguistically diverse parents. Similarly to the ways in which they are framed in discourse surrounding parental engagement, PoEBLADs are often discussed within special education and dis/abilities advocacy literature as absent and/or disengaged. This is often blamed on issues of class, race and language. However, there is little to no discussion of the ways in
which schools contribute to parents being uninformed as well as misinformed. This study presented the ways in which MoEBLADs viewed and valued teachers’ perceptions as superior due to their positionality. While a great deal of the literature surrounding a parent’s role in the special education process focuses heavily on their advocacy practices, very little of it discusses the ways in which educational disparities between parents and teachers contribute to unequal power dynamics. MoEBLADs in this study were often unaware of their rights as parents; additionally whenever they tried to advocate for their child they were often met with walls of resistance. Because these mothers have limited resources, their capacity to fight back is greatly restricted. If the expectation is on parents to be more engaged, then future research must explore the ways in which schools facilitate and/or hinder engagement. For example, what message is communicated to a parent when they are never given an IEP in their preferred language? What about when there are no independent translators made available for IEP meetings? How is a parent’s capacity to advocate for their child impacted by only being given the parental rights guide in English or only in written form, and often without explanation or discussion? Do parents genuinely view teacher statements during IEP meetings as suggestions? Lastly, does a 45-minute IEP meeting during which multiple educators need to speak foster feelings of equal partnership with parents? For far too long, scholarship has placed the burden of participation on the mothers without analyzing the ways in which schools hinder access. As such, future research needs to be conducted in order to properly contextualize existing levels of maternal advocacy within spaces in which power is not equally distributed, often times intentionally.

**Intersectional educational policies**

While policies exist to address the learning needs of students labeled as disabled separate from the learning needs of emergent bilinguals, there remains a major demand for educational
policies that address the needs of EBLADs and their families. Singular policies have the potential to create great harm because they do not fully address the needs of the learner, often relegating them to one “specialty” over another. Additionally, these singular policies do not fully consider the needs of the family. While dis/ability-centered policies like IDEA are heavily focused on parent and student rights, these issues are discussed exclusively in English, with information often disseminated only in English as well. On the other hand, other policies, like New York State’s Commissioner’s Regulations Part 154, that address the linguistic needs of emergent bilinguals and acknowledge the existence of a home language, are primarily accessible by teachers and only use the terms “disabled” and “disability” when speaking about the evaluation process. Again, the focus of these policies are not how to best serve the needs of EBLAD students as much as it is how to make sure EB are not inappropriately referred and evaluated. Once under the care of special education providers, these students’ multilingual needs are whitewashed and the focus on English acquisition intensifies.

However, this study has highlighted the ways in which educational and social emotional issues around language and dis/ability are intimately connected. Whereas the mothers were all much more concerned with remedying the dis/ability before developing their child’s bilingualism, one could argue that the development of the bilingualism and biliteracy is in many ways an equally pressing need. If a student has a dis/ability but they are only getting services in English rather than in both English and home language, than the child’s opportunities to practice the skills learned in those settings is limited to the school, as is the child’s academic support network. However, by incorporating the child’s home language into the services, the child’s learning environment broadens and the opportunities for their parents to support their academic development at home increase. Current educational policies only address the partial needs of
these students. These issues can be remedied by amending existing separatist policies in order to be more inclusive of all minoritized students and/or by enacting new policies specifically developed for this population. The most important task is to ensure that EBLAD students are being properly serviced and that parents are adequately informed and included. In order to do this, holistic policies that address their unique needs and build on their cultural, communal and linguistic strengths must be established.

**Implications for Teacher Education**

Though a great deal of the changes needed within education are grounded in policies and the practices that take place at schools, there are also several ways in which teacher education programs can change in order to improve the social and academic outcomes for EBLADs and their families. Below is a list of suggestions that can serve as a starting point:

1. **Demystifying language learning and multilingual education for students labeled as dis/abled**

   There is still a lot of misinformation regarding students labeled as dis/abled’s capacity and ability to learn multiple languages. This misinformation is based on outdated data that is not reflective of students’ actual linguistic practices. In order to ensure that students labeled as dis/abled have equal access to bilingual learning spaces, pre-service and in-service teachers in bilingual and special education programs should be presented with the current research which indicates cognitive and social-emotional gains for students labeled as disabled who are educated bilingually. This is of particular importance for educators who seek to be inclusive. If we aim to create truly inclusive classrooms, schools and societies, then we must also make sure that all students have access to multilingual education and/or bilingual learning spaces. This is particularly
important for students who are emergent bilinguals. These students are already bilingual, regardless of the school’s classification. As such, teacher candidates need to be educated about the linguistic human rights of all students with the same fervor as they are educated about other civil rights, including but not limited to dis/ability rights and racial equity.

2. Develop strategies that allow families who speak languages other than English to support their EBLAD learners

Teacher preparation programs that prepare teachers to work with multilingual learners – whether that be in monolingual settings or not – need to help teacher candidates develop strategies that will allow non-English speaking families to participate in the learning of their children. These strategies must extend beyond holidays and cultural celebrations into collaborative practices that can be sustained throughout the academic year. Additionally, teachers need to be prepared to make more concrete and clear use of the existing relationship between home and school as well as ways in which to change these relationships if they are not constructive and mutually beneficial. Some in-school strategies could include inviting mothers to be classroom parents – during this time they can engage in a how to read a story or give a community tour in the home language.

At home strategies can include sending books home in the home language that the parent can read to the child, providing parents with home language guides for academic tasks, sending home bilingual newsletters that let mothers know what the class is currently working on and examples of how the mothers can support this work that are not linguistically bound. It would behoove teacher-training programs that teach about lesson
plan and curricula development to incorporate a parent connection section to their teaching models and teacher expectations.

3. Consider home language practices when developing curriculum and units of study

Unless it is specifically geared towards bilingual certification, most teacher preparation programs focused on the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students lean heavily towards English teaching methods. As such, the home language practices are not given as much consideration as is English language teaching. In many cases the so called language gap is used as a way to validate this omission of the home language (Angrist, Chin, & Godoy, 2008; Hirsch & Moats, 2001; Rich, 2013). However, this focus on English not only excludes EBLADs from bilingual learning programs, it also critically impacts the ways in which home languages are valued by children and their families. Beyond supporting bilingualism and biliteracy, considering home language practices can support student social and emotional development. By incorporating the home language into lessons and units of study, teachers communicate value for the home language to their students. As such, the child is encouraged to value the home language. The home language shifts from a language barrier to a source of pride and potential growth. Current presentations of English as central can result in a loss of linguistic and cultural identity for the child and in a disruption of the parent-child relationship by placing speakers of languages other than English as inferior, including parents.

In order to avoid contributing to this, teacher education programs should teach all teachers to consider the language practices of each student in the home and encourage teachers to find ways to incorporate the home language into the classroom in ways that are culturally responsive and socially sustainable.
4. Extend special education teacher preparation beyond ESL – i.e. Translanguaging

One way to support the inclusion of home languages in school is by expanding teacher language training beyond English only teaching. While sitting in professional development trainings one often hears someone proclaiming that all teachers are language teachers. While this is absolutely true, it is important to consider the unspoken yet implicit and impactful assertions that this statement makes about language. Whenever a teacher makes this claim the language they are talking about is English. However, that is not the only language that students speak. These students are not living in English-only worlds and so their education must not be solely focused on English only. In order to address the linguistic needs of EBLADs, it is necessary for special education teachers to think about the student’s linguistic practices in the same way that they consider learning styles/modalities. In order to do this, teacher candidates must be taught strategies that will help them support their students’ bilingualism and biliteracy even if they are not necessarily bilingual and biliterate. Just as special education teacher candidates are taught to incorporate teaching methods such as universal design for learning (UDL) in order to make their lessons accessible to all learners, they should also be trained on multilingual theories such as translanguaging. Just like UDL, translanguaging aims to meet the needs of all learners while viewing their current linguistic practices as points of strength rather than weakness. Translanguaging should not be considered a modification or accommodation, but rather a theoretical stance and an intentional pedagogical approach that creates space for students to learn and express themselves using all of the linguistic and multimodal resources at their disposal, rather than simply a named language like English or Spanish that is a sociocultural construction.
Additionally, the university can influence how students view culturally and linguistically diverse people by exposing students to multilingual texts and expanding the cannon to include more writers of color. The needs and strengths of individuals with varying home language practices should be integrated into all teaching courses through the use of intersectional texts, literature with people of color as the central characters, and studies that center the experiences of individuals of diverse backgrounds. This will allow teacher candidates to have a greater understanding of these populations’ lived experiences, which could lead to more socially just teaching practices.

5. Reframing the way we talk about (and to) parents

Teachers often make a lot of assumptions about special education parents, their goals and their intentions. This is particularly true regarding parental rights. Many teachers believe that parents are acutely aware of their rights about due process and about being able to be advocates to their children. However, that is not necessarily always true. Often times parents of EBLADs are viewed as either disengaged when they behave in passive ways or confrontational when they act assertively. It is important for teachers to understand and be aware of the assumptions that they make about the ways in which parents act and the decisions that parents make. These are often influenced by a teacher’s positionality in the world.

It is also important to understand that when we perceive parents in these diametrically opposed ways (as either meek or overbearing), we are privileging White, middle-class standards and reinforcing the status quo of structural inequality. In many ways, society expects teachers to behave as gatekeepers to the status quo; as a result, we further alienate parents, disadvantage students, and make our tasks as educators much
more laborious. As such, it is critically important that pre-service and in-service teaching candidates engage in social justice curricula that force them to unpack their own perceptions and understandings of minoritized people and minoritizing systems, as well as their expected and actual roles within these systems.

Additionally, teaching candidates should be taught more concrete ways to engage and connect with parents as well as ways to build effective partnerships. Beyond this, they must be informed about the ways in which parents should be talked to and talked about in order to disrupt unequal distributions of power and collaboration between the home and the school, both in the eyes of the child and in the eyes of society. As such, teacher education programs should ensure that they do not solely present PoEBLADs through deficit narratives that focus solely on their needs while disregarding their contributions.

**Recommendations for further study**

Beyond the previously mentioned areas of research that need to be expanded, there are two very clear directions that arise from this study and as such serve as extensions of this work. While this study made a very intentional choice to focus on mothers rather than teachers, future projects should explore teachers’ values, perspectives and ideologies regarding bilingualism for children with dis/abilities. One thing that came through in this study is the fact that MoEBLADs are heavily influenced by what teachers and school representatives communicate – oftentimes privileging what they are told above what their own lived experiences show. A study about teachers’ ideologies would serve as an additional way to understand the ways in which teachers either knowingly or unknowingly influence MoEBLADs’ understandings regarding bilingualism and their child’s dis/ability (labels).
Subsequent to this, and in order to effect real systemic change, it is important to engage in bilingual education and special education policy analysis. Some preliminary policy analysis of Shared Pathways to Success and the Commissioner's Regulations Part 154, which are city and state level policies that manage special education and bilingual education respectively, indicates that these fields are only addressed together when referring to evaluation. It is important to understand the ways in which bilingual education and special education guidelines discuss dis/ability and bilingualism because these documents heavily influence the way that teachers and administrators engage with minoritized populations. As such it is imperative to ask: what messages are conveyed to stakeholders about bilingualism and about the dis/ability needs of EBLADs? What message do these policies convey to parents? And how do monostatic policies that address singular needs of intersectional individuals help and/or harm the people they aim to serve?

Regardless of the direction in which future scholarship moves, be that engaging with different stakeholders or unpacking the documents that outline educational practice, the one aspect that must remain is the centering of the experiences and voices of the mothers of EBLADs. Otherwise, future research will continue to reproduce the systems of inequality that devalue the voices, thoughts and opinions of minoritized families.

Conclusion

The day after the 2016 election, I, as woman of color, a mother and an immigrant, was consumed by sadness. My grief was so powerful that I considered skipping recruitment for the rest of the week since I could not imagine asking immigrant women to participate in my study when their inclusion in this nation had been so visibly rejected. But at some point in the morning my anguish was eclipsed by a great sense of urgency. Since that moment, I have been even more
committed to this work. I knew that the participation of these women was needed now more than ever. Perhaps, the women felt this sense of urgency too; I recruited more participants in the days and weeks following the election than I had in the months before. These women refused to be cast aside, to have their contributions diminished or erased. They needed to be heard, to have their experiences recorded and shared.

In his 2017 Brown lecture, Dr. Alfredo Artiles said that “our research contributions are integrally tied to our moral commitments.” These words perfectly encapsulate what moved me that dark November morning and what continues to push me forward. And so I turn to those of you reading this and say that it is critically important that we foreground the voices of mothers within minoritized communities and their experiences in all academic scholarship but especially that which aims to influence education. If we truly want to create a lasting impact on the lives of children, then we must ask ourselves why the voices of these mothers in these communities haven't already been given more of a focus. When we work with and for families whose voices go unheard, it is our responsibility to amplify them and/or to bring their stories to the table. When we are serving communities that don't have the power or capacity to speak for themselves, it's our responsibility to do so. One key way to do that is through research.

Given the current state of our nation and of public education, we must also remember the words of Jean Anyon who, long before Artiles, said that the political is personal and the personal is political. This study has been both personal and political to me and to the women who participated in it. It and we are also full of radical possibilities.
The term ELL is used within the United States to identify students who speak languages other than English. While my preferred term is emergent bilingual because it is reflective of an individual’s full linguistic repertoire, the term “English language learners” may appear when a text is quoted or cited.

The term value is used to discuss the ideas, factors and features that an individual identifies as important to them. These values are then used to guide their decision making with regards to the way in which they lead their life.

The term perspective refers to the lenses through which individuals understand the world around them.

The term Latinx is used as a way of “embracing the intersection between cultural identity and gender” by shifting from a masculine identifier, Latino, to a term that is inclusive of those who live within and outside the gender binary (Licea as quoted by Reichard, 2015, slide 6).

The term LAD is used in lieu of the stand alone “dis/abled” or the qualifier “with dis/abilities” in order to acknowledge the fact that dis/abilities are not inherent of an individual but rather the product of categorizations enacted by external evaluators such as educators, psychologist and medical professionals. As such, the term LAD also brings forth the understanding that “all dis/ability categories, whether physical, cognitive, or sensory, are […] subjective” (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013). Great effort has been taken to ensure that the language used here and throughout is inclusive. However, terms referring to “students with disabilities” or “disabled students” may appear when a text is quoted or cited.

Self-contained: A special education classroom setting where students with dis/abilities learn alongside other students with dis/abilities exclusively. This setting is also reflective of a smaller student to teacher ratio than that which is found in traditional general education and inclusive education classrooms.

Community schools are public schools that serve students based on their geographical location or “zone” rather than students who are accepted based on applications, test scores or lotteries.

These are settings where students with dis/abilities learn alongside their non-disabled peers for most, if not all, of the school day. Also known as “inclusive classrooms,” “integrated co-teaching classes,” “integrated classes” and ICT.

The instructional practice of educating students labeled as dis/abled alongside their non-dis/abled peers.

Mothering: According to Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994), mothering is “a historically and culturally variable relationship ‘in which one individual nurtures and cares for another.’ Mothering occurs within specific social contexts that vary in terms of
material and cultural resources and constraints. How mothering is conceived, organized and carried out is not simply determined by these conditions, however. Mothering is constructed through men’s and women’s actions within specific historical circumstances” (p.3).

As such “mothering” within this manuscript is taken to mean the self-identifiable ways in which Latinx women engage in the process of raising, caring for and nurturing their children.

11 Ideology is a fixed set of beliefs, attitudes and opinions that underline ones understanding of abstract concepts such as dis/ability and bilingualism (Brooker, 2003). For example, ideology is reflected in the way one views dis/ability, either through the medical model which views physical and mental difference as a deviation from the norm or through a dis/abilities studies perspective which views dis/ability as the social construction of human variety as deficit rather than an inherent difference.

12 Least restrictive environment: a clause within IDEA that states that “To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabili ties, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (Castle, 2004, Sec. 300.114). In essence, the least restrictive environment refers to the learning environment that is most similar to that which is inhabited by typically developing children as opposed to an environment which would result in the isolation and segregation of a student labeled as dis/abled from their typically developing peers (often called the most restrictive environment).

13 Most restrictive environment: a setting within a school or community that would result in an increased level of segregation between a student labeled as dis/abled and their typically developing peers. While this term is colloquially used with regularity as the inverse of “least restrictive environment” it does not appear formally in IDEA.

14 While Crenshaw is credited with naming the term and popularizing it in modern scholarship, many scholars acknowledge that the ideas from which she derives her theory hark as far back as the 1800s as evidenced by the critical stance that Sojourner Truth put forth in her speech “Aint I a Woman” and as recently as the 1960s and 70s as evidenced by the work of bell hooks and Angela Davis (Bates, 2017; Bowleg, 2012; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

15 This is not an attempt to engage in “Oppression Olympics” but rather an attempt to show the added ways that (and spaces in which) Spanish-speaking, monolingual Latinx women are disadvantaged (Yuval-Davis, 2012).

16 The term “dis/abled by proxy” is used here in order to describe a phenomenon by which the non-dis/abled members of a family with a member who is identified/labeled as dis/abled experiences treatment that somehow equates the individual’s dis/ability as a family dis/ability;
this is particularly true for parents and siblings. See Barber, 2014; Mobley, 2015; Nicholls, 2008.

17 #BlackLivesMatter often focuses on the victimization of black men at the hands of law enforcement while #EqualPayForEqualWork primarily focused on gender with White women often serving as the face of the movement. In the case of #BlackLivesMatter, Crenshaw has argued that focusing on men reinforces patriarchal standards of power within United States society thus ignoring the fact that women of color also die at the hands of police disproportionately while #EqualPayForEqualWork ignores the fact that the pay gap is even greater for women of color (Swann, 2015). In response to the lack of intersectionality within #BlackLivesMatter, Black feminists created the hashtag #SayHerName as a way to make the experiences of women with regards to police brutality more visible (The African American Policy Forum, n.d.). For more see “The dangers of a Single Story” by Adichie, 2009.

Intersectionality continues to dominate a large part of mainstream feminist discourse (Bloom, 2015; Rogers, 2015; Sathish, 2015). This is most evident in recent (social and traditional) media coverage surrounding the development and enactment of the Women’s March on Washington. These discussions centered on issues of exclusion and alienation that arise when women of all walks of life demanded a seat at the table. Some choose to see this discourse as necessary, while others opted not to participate in the march because doing so would amount to a betrayal of their feelings that the march was much more focused on the needs of able-bodied, White, cis-gendered women than on all women and for many White women these conversations felt like the oppression Olympics and as such counterproductive to progress. For examples of this see Anti-Defamation League, 2017; Bates, 2017; Chester, 2017; Gebreyes, 2017b, 2017a; Lachenal, 2017; Ladau, 2017; Wilhelm, 2017.

While I prefer to use the term home language and do not personally ascribe to the label “mother tongue” to describe the languages students use outside of school, I have included the term here for two reasons: First, it is an integral part of Skutnabb-Kangas’ discourse around Linguistic Human Rights and second, given that this study is grounded in the experiences of mothers, it feels appropriate to use the term “mother tongue” as a way to underline the way language is embedded in the very personal connection that exists between a mother and a child.

“For the purpose of linguistic human rights, mother tongue(s) is/are the language(s) one has learned first and identifies with” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1994, p. 361).

Based on the United Nations Genocide Convention (Articles IIb and Ile and its Final Draft Article III1), linguistic genocide refers to active (short and long-term) practices that lead to the eradication of a language from an individual’s or community’s repertoire thus contributing not only to a loss of a language but also cultural identity (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2001, 2002).

The Hague Recommendations, formally known as The Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities,” are “A set of High Commissioner on National Minorities Recommendations on the education rights of national minorities” that “seek to provide guidance to [the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] participating
States on how best to ensure the education rights of national minorities within their borders. They cover the spirit of international instruments, measures and resources, decentralization and participation, public and private institutions, minority education at primary and secondary levels, minority education in vocational schools, minority education at the tertiary level and curriculum development” (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, n.d.)

23 For more on assimilation in the US see Alba, 2005; Brubaker, 2001; Vigdor, 2008.

24 For more on nationalism in the US see Baum, 2015; Gidda, 2016; Meyer, 2016; The Economist Group, 2016.

25 In 2016, multiple instances of language-based harassment were reported. In one case, a Swahili speaker in Minnesota was attacked by a White woman who proclaimed “In America, we speak English” before hitting the victim with a beer glass and causing serious injury to her face (Lynch, 2016). In another incident, a woman was harassed at a local retail store by a White customer who exclaimed “Speak English, you’re in America” (Chuck, 2016). Only the first accoster faced any legal consequence.

26 The Mexican government has declared that it “plans to have all of its students speaking English as well as Spanish within two decades” with an added expectation “that every school could have an English teacher in 10 years” (Partlow, 2017). One of the ways the Mexican government intends to increase its English education labor force is by training and employing deported citizens as English teachers upon their return to Mexico (Baverstock, 2017).

27 The percentages of Americans who feel this way are over 50% regardless of party affiliation. “[M]ore than eight-in-ten Republicans (83%) say language proficiency is a very important requisite for being truly American. [While f]ewer independents (67%) share that strong belief and even fewer Democrats (61%) agree” the sentiment is still strong (Stokes, 2017).

28 While it may seem unorthodox to discuss a field of research and practice in relation to theory, for many the field of DS (and as such DSE) is synonymous with the social construction model and vice-versa. Additionally, because this study is grounded in the educational experiences of the mothers of EBLADs it is necessary to discuss not only the SCM but also the fields of DS and DSE, which guide its application.

29 While the term “people with dis/abilities” is used here to refer to individuals who identify and/or are identified as having an impairment this term is not used within the design of this study because the “people” with dis/abilities are children who are neither aware of their label nor have identified any sense of ownership or sense of identity associated with it.

30 The difference between the social construction model, social interpretations and the minority (group) model is primarily semantics. In the social construction model “disability is primarily understood as a result of oppressive social arrangements” (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). However, Finkelstein (2004, 2007), who had originally introduced the idea of a social model, argued against calling it a model because he felt the term “model” was too
general and could be easily co-opted. He offered the term social interpretations as a more precise way of understanding the ways in which society’s views of disability impact people with impairments ability to move throughout the world (Finkelstein, 2001). The minority (group) model identified people with disabilities as a minoritized group similar to those who identify, or are identified, as African-Americans, women, and LGBTQ. The minority (group) model was developed by the members of the Society for Disability Studies “in the late 1970s and was influenced by the American Civil Rights Movement’s claims to equal status for minority groups […] Proponents of this model asserted that minority group members experience stereotyping, marginalization, and discrimination” (Connor et al., 2008).

31 It is also important to note that within the social construction model there is a clear distinction between impairment and dis/ability. The term impairment refers to the form, function or behavior embodied by the body (or body part) while the term disability refers to the values and patterns of meaning attributed to those bodies (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Garland-Thomson, 2005; Taylor, 2006).

32 Ideas around what it means to be normal are often referred to as normalcy. For more on normalcy and its historical and scientific development see Davis, 1995; Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010 and Gallagher, 2010.

33 The term “minoritizing” is used to implicate the active process by which people are given labels that place them within minoritized categories by external figures such as government entities or medical professionals. This is not exclusive to dis/ability labels as one can be minoritized on the grounds of race, ethnicity, language and class.

34 Segregation: The act of separating students from the general population within a school on the basis of demographic factors such as spoken language and/or dis/ability label. As such students may be placed in inclusive classrooms, self-contained special education classrooms as opposed to participating in a general education classroom.

35 The producer of the testimonio.

36 According to the United States Department of Education Title I schools are schools that receive additional funding under Title I, Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Title I “provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015, para. 1).

37 “Cantinflas, original name Mario Moreno, (born August 12, 1911, Mexico City, Mexico—died April 20, 1993, Mexico City), one of the most popular entertainers in the history of Latin-American cinema. An internationally known clown, acrobat, musician, bullfighter, and satirist, he was identified with the comic figure of a poor Mexican slum dweller, a pelado, who wears
trousers held up with a rope, a battered felt hat, a handkerchief tied around his neck, and a ragged coat” (The Editors of the Encyclopedia Britannica, n.d., para. 1).

38 PRM is discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

39 An independent party handled all transcriptions and translations. However, they were reviewed and confirmed by me and a third party was used in instances where a disagreement arose.

40 It is worth mentioning that labeling is inherently problematic and often results in an “us” and a “them.” Nonetheless, the need to label and categorize children emerges from a need to allocate services and, perhaps more importantly, allocate funds appropriately.

41 While the Latinx community is composed of a variety of nationalities, most research that focuses on the education of Latinxs (with and without dis/ability labels) concerns Mexican and Mexican-American youth which is reflective of the fact that people with Mexican origins are “the largest [Latinx] group in U.S. schools” (Ford, 2012).

42 Within the findings chapters I use the term disability, without a slash, because it is more representative of the ways the mothers perceive and understand the term.

43 “Neurodiversity is the idea that neurological differences like autism and ADHD are the result of normal, natural variation in the human genome. This represents new and fundamentally different way of looking at conditions that were traditionally pathologized; it’s a viewpoint that is not universally accepted though it is increasingly supported by science. That science suggests conditions like autism have a stable prevalence in human society as far back as we can measure. We are realizing that autism, ADHD, and other conditions emerge through a combination of genetic predisposition and environmental interaction; they are not the result of disease or injury (J. E. Robinson, 2013, para. 1).”

44 PAZ is a free afterschool program offered at the child’s school.

45 For the child interviews, the child was allowed to choose the language in which the interview would be conducted. Justin and Dan opted for an English interview María Teresa chose Spanish.

46 At the end of the collective session all of the Testimonialistas traded contact information. In order to respect their privacy, any contact I have had with the Testimonialistas since has revolved around the birth of my daughter, who was born 6 weeks after this study concluded. Unless, of course, the mother brought up a different topic. Nonetheless, to date I am not aware of them gathering again.
APPENDICES

Appendices A: Interview guides

A.1 – Family Inventory 236
A.2 – Mother – Child Relationship 238
A.3 – Motherhood & Dis/ability 239
A.4 – Life in Mexico 240
A.5 – Struggles of Motherhood 241
A.6 – Motherhood and Language 242
A.7 – Child Interview 243
A.8 – Pre- and Post-IEP meeting Interview questions 244
A.9 – Collective interview questions 245

Appendices B: Observation protocols

B.1 – Home Observation Guidelines 246
B.2 – Focused Observation Game Options 247

Appendix C: Recollection guideline 248
APPENDIX A.1: Family Inventory [English translation]
(Estimated duration: 60 minutes)

Background information:
What is your chosen name/alias?
What is your relationship to x?
Where were you born?
If you were born outside the U.S., how long have you been living in the United States?
Where your children born here or did they immigrate here as well?
Have your children always lived with you?
What is your highest level of education?
How many children do you have? What are their ages and names?

Parental Identity:
Do you agree with your child’s disability label? Why or why not?
If you disagree, how, if at all, have you expressed this to the school?

Probing questions
How old was your child when they were first evaluated for special education services?
How old are they now?
How was the evaluation process initiated? At your request or by the school?
What do you think about the special education process?
How did the process make you feel?
How did it make you feel about your child?

The role of language:
What languages do you feel most confident and comfortable speaking in?
What languages does your child feel most confident and comfortable speaking in?

Probing questions
What languages do you use to communicate with your child?
What languages does your child use to communicate with you?
Is Spanish an important part of how you communicate with your child?
What language(s) does your child use at school? How are these languages similar to or different from the languages you use at home?
Do you consider your child to be bilingual? Why or why not?
Is bilingualism for your children important to you? Why or why not?
Is it important to you that your child speaks, listens, reads and writes Spanish, as well as English? Why or why not?
Do you think that your child should be taught in two languages? Why or why not?

Relationship to the school:
Tell me about your relationship to your child’s school.

Probing questions
What type of program and classroom is your child in?
Why is your child in that setting?
Is your child’s classroom similar or different from other classrooms? How?
Do you think your child’s classroom is the best for him or her? Why or why not?
Do you feel as if you participate in your child’s education? How do you?
Do you get support from anyone outside of your child’s school to help you understand their disability and your rights as a parent?
How confident do you feel in your ability to advocate for your child?
APPENDIX A.2: Mother – Child Relationship [English translation]
(Estimated duration: 60 minutes)

**Guiding questions**

Tell me about child X.
Tell me about what it’s like to be their parent.
Tell me about the ways you help your child learn.
Tell me about the ways that their disability label impacts your family life.
Tell me about your relationship with the school / what school has been like for your family?

**Probing questions**

*Relationship to the child’s academic development:*
Tell me about your goals for your child.
Tell me about how their home and school lives differ.
How are they the same?
Tell me about a time when you were able to support your child’s learning.
Tell me about a time when you felt limited in your ability to support your child’s learning.

*Relationship to school/IEP Process:*
Tell me about what the IEP meeting experience is like for you.
Can you tell me about the decision to place your child in their current class?
Were you a part of the conversation when the setting was decided? Can you describe that experience?
What role did you play? Did you mostly listen, answer questions and/or ask questions?
Why?
Did you feel like you understood what was happening?
Is your child’s school placement good for the family or not? Explain.

*The role of language:*
Tell me how you feel about your child’s use of Spanish?
Tell me how you feel about your child’s use of English?
Do you want your child to be bilingual in the future? If yes, why? If not, why?
Can you think of a time when you have talked to the school about your linguistic goals for your child?
If yes, can you tell me about that?
What was the response? Did you feel satisfied by this response? Why or why not?
If not, why haven’t you communicated your wishes?
How do you support your child’s development of bilingualism at home?
Tell me about the ways that your child’s teacher develops their bilingualism?
Can you tell me about a time when speaking Spanish at home and English in school resulted in a hardship for you, your child or your family?

*Intersectionality:*
Do you think that your child’s dis/ability label influences the way you think about their bilingualism?
How does this impact the way you make decisions about their schooling?
Do you think that your child’s dis/ability label influences the way your child’s school thinks about or acts on their bilingualism?
APPENDIX A.3 – Motherhood & Dis/ability [English translation]

Define what it means to be a mother.  
What does it mean to be a mother to a bilingual child?  
What does it mean to be a mother to a child with a disability?

Tell me about your experience mothering your child from pregnancy to now  
How did you imagine motherhood?  
How is the reality similar or different?"

Tell me about what life/family was like before the diagnosis  
How is/was life different before and after the diagnosis?  
Tell me about process of learning the diagnosis

Do you feel like your child is different than other children?  
Tell me about 1st time you realized your child was not like other children  
Tell me about the first time you were told that your child was not like other children.  
Tell me about 1st time u realized would need to be different school/classroom.  
Tell me about your first IEP meeting

How is being a mother to this child different than being a mother to your other children?  
How did you decide that you wanted to have more children? What was that process like?
APPENDIX A.4: Life in Mexico  [English translation]

All:
How do you think your life would be different if you still lived in Mexico?
Your experience as a mother?
Your child’s linguistic skills/ability?
Your child’s disability (diagnosis)?

Tell me about your mother.

Follow up questions

Paty:
Tell me about your move to the US? How was that decision made? What was that experience for you as a mother?
What have been the advantages of that decision?
Have there been any disadvantages?

Ana:
Tell me about who you turn to?
Who supports you when you need a break or a shoulder to lean on?
What is your husband’s role in the education of your children?
When you were pregnant with David did you have any concerns about his health or his outcome?

Maria:
Tell me about your mother? – How does is she reflected in your mothering? How does she support your mothering experience?
Do you think that if things were different with Justin you would still be with your husband?
I want you to take a few minutes and think of all the things that you are in charge of, all of your responsibilities. I’d like you to list them. (minimum of 3 minutes)
Now I’d you group them by importance.

Next I’d like you to think of all the things that you are worried about right now. All your concerns – they can be concerns that directly impact you, your partner, your children, your family. List them.
Now I’d like you to put these in order of most to least concerning.

Talk to me about what worries you? How does this impact your ability to be/experiences as a mother?
Where does your child’s disability fall?
Where does your child’s bilingualism fall?
Where does your child’s educational achievement fall?

Now that we’ve talked, look over your list again, is there anything you’d like to change about the order? Why? Or why not?
APPENDIX A.6: Motherhood and Language [English translation]

Do you consider yourself monolingual or bilingual? Why?

On a scale from 1-10 how would rate your Spanish competency? 1 being is unable to communicate basic ideas or needs and 10 being able to confidently navigate Spanish-only environments. Why do you think that is?

On a scale from 1-10 how would rate your English competency? 1 being is unable to communicate basic ideas or needs and 10 being able to confidently navigate English-only environments. Why do you think that is?

When you first moved to the US were you concerned about the fact that you were a monolingual Spanish speaker?

Have you been able to take steps to become bilingual? What made these efforts possible or difficult to follow? How did these efforts turn out?

Has it been hard for you to navigate life in the US as a monolingual Spanish speaker?

How has being a monolingual Spanish-speaker impacted your ability to participate in your child’s education? How has being a monolingual Spanish-speaker impacted or shaped your experiences as a mom?
APPENDIX A.7: – Child Interview [English]

1. Tell me about your mom.
How do you feel about her?
How does she make you feel?
What do you think about her as a mom?

2. What are the ways your mom helps you learn?
How does she help you learn at home?
How does she help you learn at school?

3. What things make it hard for your mom to help you learn?

APPENDIX A.7: – Child Interview [Spanish]

1. Háblame de tu mamá.
• ¿Cómo te sientes acerca de ella?
  ¿Cómo te hace sentir?
  • ¿Qué piensas de ella como madre?

2. ¿Cuáles son las formas en que tu mama te ayuda a aprender?
• ¿Cómo te ayuda a aprender en casa?
• ¿Cómo te ayuda a aprender en la escuela

3. ¿Qué cosas hacen que sea difícil para tu mamá ayudarte a aprender?
APPENDIX A.8: Pre- and Post-IEP Meeting Interview Questions [English translation]

Pre - School Interaction Interview Questions For Parents

Expectations for the meeting:
1. What are your expectations for the meeting?
2. What do you think the teachers will talk about?
3. What, if anything, would you like to talk to the teachers about during the meeting?
4. Do you have any questions you’d like to ask the school about your child?
5. Do you have any issues or concerns that you would like to discuss?
6. How do you expect the meeting to go?
   a. Will it be long or short?
   b. What do you expect the mood of the meeting to be?
   c. Will you be an active participant in the meeting? Why or why not?

Post - School Interaction Interview Questions For Parents

Reactions to the meeting:
1. Did the meeting meet your expectations?
2. What did the teachers talk about?
3. Did the teachers speak about any of the topics you had hoped they would discuss with you? If not, did you ask them about said topics? Why or why not?
4. Were you able to share and get answers to the questions you wanted to ask about your child? Why or why not?
5. Do you have any new issues or concerns as a result of the meeting?
6. Do you feel satisfied with the way that the meeting went?
   a. Was it long or short? What was the reason for the length or brevity of the meeting?
   b. What was the mood of the meeting? Why do you think that?
   c. Were you an active participant in the meeting? Why or why not?
APPENDIX A.9: Collective Discussion Interview Questions [English translation]

What kind of services are available for parents like you at your child’s school?

Are you able to take advantage of these services? Why or why not?

What services would you like your child’s school to offer? Services that you think would make parenting your child and supporting their learning easier.

Have you asked for these services? Why or why not?

In several of the interviews I conducted I had a lot of moms tell me that they would want their child to be educated in a bilingual setting but they also said that they had never asked. Why do you think that is?

One participant made the following statement:

**Participante:** A veces siento que---, nosotros los hispanos, como que somos muy cohibidos, muy tímidos para defender los derechos de nuestros hijos, ¿no? Porque, a veces, cuando me toca incluso ir a las escuelas, hay mamás que exigen, piden, ¿verdad? Y uno como que---, como hispano se cohibe más, ¿no?

**Entrevistadora:** ¿Por qué crees que es así?

**Participante:** No lo sé, tal vez el país. Que estamos en otro país, que no es nuestro idioma, todo eso. Para mí, así lo siento.

**Participant:** Sometimes I feel that-- we Hispanics, like, we are very self-conscious, very shy to defend the rights of our children, right? Because, sometimes, even when I have to go to schools, there are moms who demand, ask, right? And one is all like --, as a Hispanic, one’s more self-conscious, right?

**Interviewer:** Why do you think that is the case?

**Participant:** I do not know, maybe the country. That we are in another country, that is not our language, all that. For me, I feel it.

What do you think about what she said? Is it true? Why or why not?
APPENDIX B.1 – Observation Guidelines

Household Observation Sheet #

Date __________________ Participant # ____________________________ Obs.# ______________

Setting __________________________ Start time: __________ End time: __________

Other adult(s) or child(ren) present ________________________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description of events</th>
<th>Questions / Comments/ Reflections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td></td>
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Focused-Task & Home Observation / Memo Guidelines

Field notes: detailed description of linguistic encounters with notable quotes. Semiotic means of communication used – i.e. gestures, singing, music, painting, drawing, technology, books, etc.

Post-Observation memo:
Overall description of the event followed by questions/comments, and then reflections.

Possible points for reflection:
• How and when do the child and mother use oral or written language?
• How is English employed?
• How is Spanish employed?
• With whom and to what end?

Optional inclusions:
• What are you noticing about the relationship between mother and child?
• What are you noticing about the ways they interact? Communicate?
• What does oral communication look like for this family? Is it bound to one language?
• What connections are you making other observations? Other life experiences?
• How did you feel before, during and after the observation?
• Are these questions you wanted to ask? Comments you wanted to make?
• Reflections?
APPENDIX B.2: Focused-Tasked Game Options  
(Estimated playing time 10-15 minutes)

Physical Activities:

- **Sketch Artist:** Mother describes an object as completely as possible for one minute without mentioning what it is to the child who won’t know what the object is. When the minute is over s/he will guess what it is. If s/he doesn’t guess, s/he can ask questions until s/he guesses. Then they will switch. (I will provide the object)

Mental Activities:

- **Are You an X or a Y?:** Very simple game where one player ask the other questions in this format: Ex: “Are you more like a horse or a lion? Why?” or “Are you more like a teacher or a model? Why?” or any other animals, flowers or whatever you can think of… and the partner has to chose one that he/she feels they’d most likely be from the two and explain why (I could supply picture cards with images on them to help prompt).
APPENDIX C – Recollection Guidelines

RECOLLECTION TO BE PREPARED IN ADVANCE OF THE SESSION
(Modified from the Institute on Descriptive Inquiries Guidelines)

The purpose of the recollection is to ground us in our own experience and to put this alongside the experiences of others. This process helps us to generate ideas, insights and questions.

Recollection is based in story and memory. We will share our stories as we enter into our theme: The Generous Community: creating a place where stories help us to better know one another and support each other.

When deciding what stories you will tell, select those that you will be comfortable sharing in a group. The following explains and frames this recollection.

To prepare your recollection: Think back to times when you felt connected to your child’s learning and schooling experience, yet were also unclear as to how to support them. This can be a moment in which you ultimately felt successful, ineffective, frustrated, confused or overwhelmed. Make a list of any of the situations that come to mind.

Now, consider which situations come up for you most vividly and choose one upon which to focus. How did you first become aware of these feelings of success or failure? What actions, words, or postures conveyed by others seemed to contribute to these feelings? How did you respond when this awareness first came upon you, and as time went on?

How did you come to be aware that your help was needed? What actions, words, or postures conveyed by others contributed to your feelings? How did you respond initially and over time? Were you aware of others or of one other person who may have felt like you at the time? If so, how could you tell that your feelings were the same or different?

Finally, consider how that experience influences you now as a mother, as a woman, as a partner, etc. How do they affect your relationships with others in your community? How do these experiences influence you as a member of or participant in a group? How are you affected when entering into a school situation? How does this influence your involvement with your child? With their school? With their learning?

Plan on no more than 10 minutes for telling your story. If you wish and as you feel that time may allow, you might concentrate on one story or you may share several moments that connect and share in an overarching theme / feeling for you.

The process during the small group will be:
• A reflection on a word (will be announced in the small group).
• Sharing the recollections that we have prepared in advance
• Pulling together of ideas and themes from the stories
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