

# **Pedagogies of Puppetry: Marginalization, hegemony and colonized treatment of Immigrant and Refugee Families**

## *Pedagogías del Títere: La marginación, hegemonía y el tratamiento colonizado de inmigrantes y familias refugiadas*

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**Abstract:** Pedagogy of the Puppet draws upon the theoretical underpinnings of LatCrit reviews through a decolonizing discourse of the deficit ways Latino and refugee families have been positioned in marginalized ways regarding their engagement in schools. Drawing on ethnographic methods, we unpack the disconnect these families experience in schools regarding barriers through the symbiosis of power relations between the puppeteer (school, administrators, teachers) related to the language, culture, and perceptions they hold of Latino and refugee families. We engage in unmasking the discourse of invisibility of the puppet, the Latino and refugee families, in order to address how schools can actively resist these hegemonic behaviors and actively awaken the puppeteer and take action to address these injustices. Using Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti's (1992) framework of funds of knowledge and Yosso's (2005) familial capital defined as the social and personal human resources students have access to in their environments. We extend Yosso's (2005) and Abdul-Razaq's (2017) work by providing examples of 21st century familial engagement for Latino and refugee families starting with parents and children's needs and assets as most beneficial to fostering respectful collaborative relationships between schools and families.

**Keywords:** Latino families, Refugee families, Familial engagement, Familial capital, Parental engagement

**Resumen:** La pedagogía de la marioneta se basa en los fundamentos teóricos de las críticas de LatCrit a través de un discurso descolonizante en que las maneras de déficit latino y las familias de refugiados se han colocado de manera marginalizada en relación con su participación en las escuelas. Basado en métodos etnográficos, a través de la simbiosis de las relaciones de poder entre el titiritero (escuela, administradores, maestros) relacionadas con el lenguaje, la cultura y las percepciones que tienen de las familias latinas y refugiadas. Nos dedicamos a desenmascarar el discurso de la invisibilidad de la marioneta, las familias latinas y las familias de refugiados, para entender cómo las escuelas pueden resistir activamente a estas conductas hegemónicas y activamente despertar al titiritero tomando medidas para enfrentar estas injusticias. Utilizando el marco teórico de fondos de conocimiento de Moll (1992) y el capital familiar de Yosso (2005) definido como los recursos humanos sociales y personales a los que los estudiantes tienen acceso en sus medios ambientes. Extendemos el trabajo de Yosso (2005) y Abdul-Razaq (2017) proporcionando ejemplos del compromiso familiar del siglo XXI para familias latinas y refugiadas, incluyendo comenzar con las necesidades y bienes de los padres y los niños como los más beneficiosos para fomentar relaciones de colaboración respetuosas entre las escuelas y las familias.

**Palabras clave:** Familias Latinas, Compromiso de los padres, Capital familiar, Familias refugiadas

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the United States and across the world, scholars and governments are taking a closer look at family engagement strategies. As student success has always been the focal point, families have been left behind. More funding has been provided for school districts to serve students and their families. However, engagement practices have not changed very much. For the most part, many schools are still old traditional “tourist” approaches to engaging families (Machado-Casas, 2014; Machado-Casas & Alaniz, 2015). However, research has continued to prove that these traditional practices don't work even though these practices are still utilized in schools across the United States. In this article, we expose some of the issues related to the way family involvement is approached from the families themselves, and the ways they are made feel in the process. We also address failed practices that continue to manipulate families in this process (Machado-Casas, 2009; 2012; 2015). Furthermore, we argue for the use of the term parental engagement as a counter-narrative to deficit definitions of parent involvement by centering on sociocultural knowledge of Latin@ families. By further developing an understanding of Latin@ needs within schools, we review culturally relevant information, opportunities for academic training for parents, and how to implement spaces for social networks for parents to become actively engaged in schools in order to have access to equal educational opportunities for their children and themselves.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Traditional aspects of parental family involvement are defined through different types of volunteer activities including: sporting events, Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), fundraisers, etc. (Hidalgo, 1998; Lopez, 2001). Lopez (2001) describes notions of parental involvement as being scripted and performed and argues that parents must understand the structures of schooling in order to navigate through these systems. The seminal work of Delgado-Gaitan (1994), Valdés (1996), and Bernal (2002) has shown that parental involvement for Latino families is often done in ways that do not align

with these traditional schooling expectations. Delgado-Gaitan's work highlights the emphasis Latino families take in preparing their children to be successful members of society and duly notes that often times, given their different upbringings, these notions of parental involvement are aspects of schooling that Latin@ parents are not accustomed to. Valdés (1996) suggests that through the creation of bridges between school and home in ways that value familial knowledge, Latin@ students can be successful in the United States. Bernal (2002) explains how students of color should be viewed as holders and creators of knowledge; these narratives serve as the overarching framework of this work. Students of color from Latino families have cultural and familial wealth. Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti (2005) defined this positivistic view of what parents bring to the table as funds of knowledge. Yosso's (2005) theory on community cultural wealth shifts the focus from negative perceptions of students of color and instead chooses to view the forms of knowledge they possess as resourceful. Community cultural wealth can come from many different aspects of their lives including: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Yosso (2005) argues that through these forms of capital, Communities of Color have learned to resist oppressive practices of schooling and be successful. Through Yosso's lens, we engage in the redefinition of family involvement and argue for family engagement as parents can be involved, but not engaged due to obstacles and barriers they encounter including language, resources, and non-familiarity with traditional notions of parental involvement. We are engaging in the notion of trained awareness to become agents of change and transformation through teacher education. In order to bring the puppeteer to self-check and move from a deficit point of view to a positive and holistic one.

### *Why Parental Involvement is Important*

Research has consistently shown that children learn well when their parents are actively involved in their learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Further,

parental support and modeling of learning helps to enhance and secure student achievement and long lasting educational gains (Darling-Hammond, 1997). Latino parents have communicated a great desire to be involved in their children's schoolwork but, due to language and computer literacy issues, this can be a challenging endeavor for Latino parents. Similarly, in a study conducted by Wilhelm & Tomás River Center (1996), Latino parents communicated that they do not know how to use a lot of software applications and consequently, they desire to take a computer course. Such findings point to the various positive implications of involving Latino parents in afterschool technology programs.

According to current research family engagement is considered a key factor for students' participation and educational success at school (Weiss et al, 2011). Family engagement can be defined as the group of philosophies and practices that effectively reinforces students' learning in a variety of settings (Auerbach, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014). It centers on children's learning not only just in the classroom or at school but also focuses on the many ways children are exposed to learning experiences at home and with the community. For this definition, it is important to understand family engagement using a framework that sees and values their funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2006) as well as the familial capital wealth (Yosso, 1995) families bring to the table. Also, it is of vital importance to know and understand how families are perceived in order to be valued for their familial and their communities' culture capital (Yosso, 2005). In other words, familial or family engagement could be considered as a shared responsibility between parents, teachers, administrators and the community (Weiss & Lopez 2011) involving a committed partnership dedicated to find meaningful ways in which families and schools engage with and support one another (Lowenhaupt, 2014). In the field of bilingual education, family engagement refers also to the enduring commitment that children of immigrant and newcomer families need in order to have the required support for academic success. Its vital role cannot be understated, as the child moves through life from infancy into young adulthood overcoming marginalization and oftentimes poor immigrant

acculturation (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Valdes, 1996; Valenzuela; 1999). According to Freire (1993) uninformed and deficit perceptions along with preconceived notions of families' myths must be challenged by praxis of reflection and action.

### *Refugees and Parent Involvement*

Since 1975, the United States has hosted more than 3,363,188 refugees from different parts of the world (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). Although the influx of refugees is continuing to contribute to the diverse linguistic and cultural background of the US society, the last few years was distinguished by the arrival of refugees from countries that were less presented in the United States e.g., Burma, Iraq, and Somalia.

Those refugee populations escaping violence and unrest in their country of origin which might indicate facing challenges when building trust and networking. Furthermore, and because acculturation process is reciprocal (Berry, 1997), many refugees in the United States feel unwelcomed or uncertain about their future (at least for the first few years from their arrival). This perceived unwelcoming environment and uncertainty is the result of the involuntarily circumstances of departure (Ogbu & Simmons, 1998) in addition to the torn web of trust and solidarity due to the violence among the same national group in the country of origin or the mistrust between people from the sending and receiving countries i.e., the United States and the sending countries.

This increased number of refugee families will add more challenges to the schools who are working to accommodate for such differences especially when the teachers are not fully equipped with tools and knowledge to engage refugee families or families from different cultural and linguistic background (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedman-Gonzalez, 2008). Additionally, the school systems have already failed to engage bi-cultural families (Shirley, 1997). As a

result, refugee families will become marginalized or isolated which will, negatively, affect or undermine the concerted effort of enhancing the academic success and well-being of thousands of refugee students.

Previous models of parental involvement, even the sophisticated ones have suffered short comings in clarity and applicability of families because of conceptualization (De Carvalho, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Olivos, 2006), or operationalization (Epstein, 1996; Christenson & Sheridan, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Green et al., 2007) These needs increase when families are immigrants due to the different level of cultural and linguistic accommodation needed. These differences require implementing cautious policies, classroom instructions, and school-family collaboration to better serve the immigrant children. The present of refugee children in schools will add even more layers to the need and accommodation because of the special circumstances of refugee students and their families e.g., economic, social, and psychological need. As a result, the need to reexamine and modify the previous models of family involvement become necessity.

### *What is Family engagement?*

Researchers in the matter have different views on what family engagement really is; more research needs to be done in order to establish a unifying definition of what family engagement looks like and what it entails. For the purpose of this article, family engagement is a shared responsibility between parents, teachers, administrators and the community (Casper et al., 2011). This involves a committed partnership dedicated to find meaningful ways in which families are viewed as equals in power dynamics, understanding the existence of monolithic interpretations of how families of immigrants and newcomers should look and behave (Lowenhaupt, 2014; Weiss et al., 2011). Family engagement refers also to the enduring commitment that children of immigrant and newcomer families need in order to have the support needed as the child moves through life from infancy into young adulthood, overcoming marginalization and poor immigrant acculturation (Lowenhaupt,

2014; Valdés, 1996; Valenzuela; 1999). Also, family engagement should be viewed as the group of philosophies and practices that effectively reinforces learning in a variety of settings (Auerbach, 2011; Evans, 2011; Lowenhaupt, 2014; Machado-Casas, 2009; 2012). Furthermore, the educator, administrator, researcher and community worker can benefit from an understanding about the culture and practices of the families. As well as, explore the notion that the existent deficit views may be informed by both their past experiences, and lack of experiences working with parents from culturally and linguistically diverse children (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). Above all, family engagement is strength-based, it emphasizes reciprocity and a true partnership between educators, school programs and families at home. Also, it is important to note that the term family, family member is understood along the term parent because “It better reflects the situations of diverse families, who often are raised communally by extended family member and close friends” (Machado-Casas, 2009). For this, we recognize the interactive model of literacy, where it is understood learning occurs in a variety of ways and in a multitude of settings – at home and in school, after-school programs, community programs, and religious or faith-based spaces.

This paper describes the difference between Family involvement and Family engagement and illustrates the shift needed to happen from the educator and school administrators’ perspectives. Using a strengths-based approach nestled in the Latino Critical thinking theories, families are viewed with a lens to explore how race, racism and socioeconomic status have influenced their experiences as students of color. LatCrit as a branch of CRT is used to explore how teachers’ beliefs and expectations contribute to the oppression and deficit views of the Latin@ family engagement, thus shaping the experiences of Latin@ education journey (Velez, 2008). According to current research, Family engagement is often considered a key factor on children’s participation and success in school (Weiss et al, 2006). This article focuses on the obstacles to Latin@ family engagement and the effect educators’ preconceived notions have when developing successful home-school



partnerships. Oftentimes, educators working with Latino families from working-class populations express their surprise and discomfort with poor perceived parental involvement from the Latino parents. Findings in a study by Poza et al. (2014) highlight the importance of understanding the Latino families' cultural ways. They concluded that Latino families often do engage in many of the parental involvement strategies educators come to expect from their more mainstream populations, but Latino families often do it through venues that bypass the school itself. Latino families may have a low visibility in the school, due to language barriers and time constraints. Latino families from the working-class can have relatively little presence at school, school events and even less face-to-face proactive interactions with their children's teachers and school administrators (Poza et al. 2014). Teachers may feel that parents' lack the desire to be involved and engaged in their children's educational journey. This lack of understanding in educational and cultural attitudes and behaviors can affect how educators perceive the families of their Latino children (Constantino, 2008). Researchers Quiñones and Kiyama (2014) explain how this cultural and educational dissonance between teachers' expectations and parents' perceptions could have a negative effect on the home-school partnership and could affect the Latino children's school success. According to research, family engagement and family involvement are two separate notions. Families can be involved but not engaged (Halgunseth, 2009, Quinones & Kiyama, 2014).

We start from the idea that often Latino families are involved in their children's education and well-being. Given the opportunity, Latino parents are eager to help their children succeed at school (Gándara, 2010) and look forward to having a better educational future for their children (Halgunseth et al., 2009; Baird, 2015). Family Engagement is strength-based, emphasizes reciprocity and a true partnership between educators, school programs and families at home. Family engagement has a more active meaning and a more effective and participatory tone. This research explores the use of family engagement as a more inclusive term that is a better fit for 21st century families. In order for families to be effectively engaged in their children's

school education, they have to participate in meaningful ways in partnership with educators and school administrators (Henderson & Bernal, 1994; Halgunseth et al., 2009). Pedagogies of puppetry recognizes the cultural and educational constraints teachers may face when partnering with Latino families and look to move from deficit perception views that define parent involvement as inadequate, non-existent or lacking and in need of change (Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006; Chrispeels et al., 2000; Poza et al., 2014) to a family engagement philosophy and attitudes that could be conducive to a more effective and holistic experience for the Latino children and their educational journey. Baird (2015) presents a counterstory narrative to the Latino parent involvement deficit view. Research reviewed focuses on the relationship between families and schools revealing that oftentimes EL families are involved in very dynamic processes. These processes may not ascribe to the culturally-lacking beliefs and expectations from the educators and school administrators not familiar or culturally aware of their population. These relationships and dynamic processes “Exist along a continuum from school-directed to parent-led” (Baird, 2015: 153), highlighting a clear relationship between the academic success of children from schools where there is a strong and healthy relationship between the type and philosophy of schools programs and the effectiveness of their family partnerships.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This paper uses data from a larger research study with 400 participants on the migration, mobility, and survival of Latina/os, Indigenous Latino Immigrants (ILI) (Machado-Casas, 2012), and refugees within the New Latino Diaspora in the South (Machado-Casas, 2009). Because this research study focuses on immigrant and refugee parents and their families (subordinated groups either absent from or misrepresented in historical accounts), narrative research methods (Merriam, 1998) were coupled with multiple interactive methods (Creswell, 2003) for data collection across multiple settings. Clandinin and Huber state that by “understanding ourselves and our worlds narratively, our attention is turned to how we engage in living, telling,

retelling, and reliving our lives within particular social and cultural plotlines” (2002: 20). Therefore, open-ended interviews were used to understand participant experiences. Narrative research is especially appropriate for this type of study because often, immigrant and refugee communities are not represented in writing; instead, they have a long history of oral communication. This study also builds on research related to Mexican indigenous migrants (Fox, 2006), second-generation immigrants (Portes et al., 2001), differences between culturally diverse families and schools (Valdés, 1996), Mexican migration (Durand & Massey, 1992), Refugees (Razaq-Abdul, 2017), and Latino immigrant transnationality (Trueba, 2004).

Over the course of six years focus groups and individual interviews were conducted with immigrants, ILI, and refugees across three states (North Carolina, Michigan, and Texas). Extensive observational field notes were utilized to document these events. There were a total of 400 parents in the study, 200 immigrants, 140 were ILIs, and 60 refugee families. Many immigrants, ILI, and refugee communities are not receptive to outsiders; therefore, in-depth interviews were conducted with just 30 participants whose countries of origin were representative of the three largest groups in the study sample of immigrants, refugees, and ILIs. All 30 participants had children who were enrolled in school at the time of the interview.

Participants were interviewed in Spanish and English at “safe” locations chosen by the participants. These included, but were not limited to: libraries, stores, restaurants, homes, and other public spaces conducive to open dialogue. Interviews lasted approximately 2–3 hours and were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Some indigenous and refugee participants had traductores ocultos (hidden translators) who assisted them when they experienced difficulties expressing a word or thought. Here, “hidden” refers to the translators’ sole purpose, which was to assist with vocabulary when necessary; they did not augment or interpret questions or responses. As suggested by Gándara (1995), participants were asked to tell their life stories, including life experiences and educational histories in their countries of

origin, their migrations to the United States, experiences with the U.S. educational system, and how living in the United States has impacted their cultural, linguistic, and social identities. Focus groups were conducted in Spanish and English depending of the language that was preferred by participants.

In the larger 230-person study, written and verbal surveys were used to collect data related to country of origin, language spoken, and nationality. According to the Office of Refugees (2017), there are 898,541 refugees resettled in the United States since 2002. Many of these refugees possess certain nationalities that were barely present in the United States. For example, and since 2002; the influx of some refugees from certain countries was unprecedented i.e., Burma 166,318, Iraq 141,470, and Somalia 101,186 (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). By the same token, the linguistic background of those refugees are also different from the previous waves. For example, half of the refugees' population resettled since 2002 spoke some sort of ten languages including Arabic, Nepali, Somali, or Sgaw Karen (Office of Refugee Resettlement, 2017). Although the population of refugees is increasing in every state, the states where we conducted the research had a specific number of refugees as follows: Texas, 82,127; Michigan, 40,870; and North Carolina, 30,040.

Participants came from Mexico (65 %), El Salvador (20 %), Guatemala (8 %), Honduras (5 %), other Central American countries (1 %) and the South American countries of Peru, Venezuela and Colombia (1 %). Indigenous communities identified in the study included those from Mexico (Otomí, Nahuatl, Maya, Zapoteco, Mixteco, and Tzotzil), El Salvador (Pipil, an almost extinct population), and Guatemala (Quiché and Kaqchikel), among others. Overall, there were over 17 indigenous languages spoken by those who participated in the monthly meetings. In terms of education in their countries of origin, 55 % reported at least some formal education (30 % K-12, 25 % higher education) and 45 % reported no formal education. For the purposes of

this paper, the quotes selected are based on the analysis of the overarching research data and includes quotes from various families who participated in this study.

#### **4. PEDAGOGIES OF PUPPETRY: MARGINALIZATION, HEGEMONY AND COLONIZED TREATMENT OF LATINO/INDIGENOUS FAMILIES**

Typically, when the topic of family engagement is raised, often the focal point is aimed at what are families doing to get involved or engaged. Yet, in many cases these questions could be answered by looking at the ways family programming conveys a sense of orchestrated behavior enacted in schools. This orchestrated behavior becomes a pedagogy of puppetry enacted by those in power in the school system. An act of manipulation and a form of abuse aimed disguised as “help” or as “doing families a favor”. Because of the colonizing power relations that exist within schools when working with minority families, there is an explicit power relation that if not assessed, leads to treatment colonization by the school districts—again becoming a pedagogy of puppetry. Additionally, this engagement could at times be two-fold—duality, active symbiosis (one feeds or cannot exist without the nature or power relationship). As a result, minority families who do not engage in parental involvement in ways that are accepted by the dominant society become further marginalized and silenced by schools. And like a show in which families are “puppeteered” there must also be “puppets or puppeteers” who enact their positions of power willingly and unwillingly upon families who simply need help or do not understand the system. However, the show that many families are put through when engaged with schools ends when families begin to recognize the ways in which they are being used for schools to put up a show. This process can take time as it requires “Concientizacion” (Freire, 1993) and an awareness of what is being done to them. The “pedagogy of the puppet” has two major protagonists, 1) The puppeteer, and 2) the puppetized. These two will be discussed in the next sections from the voices of the families who suffered the consequences of the pedagogy of the puppet.

### *The Puppeteer*

A recent shift in the study of Latin, ILI, and refugee parents in schools is to center on the empowerment of this community and on how schools in particular can serve as spaces to create advocacy (Jiménez-Castellanos et al., 2016; Olivos, Jiménez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011; Abdul-Razaq, 2017). Through their research, the authors reveal that tensions exist between the ways schools approach and implement Latino parental engagement and what the parents and community desire as their role. In their study this is explained through a “vertical” approach centered on a top-down reform by the school and district as opposed to a “horizontal leadership approach” in which parents and community members are valued (p.104). Similarly, our study also reflects instances of dissonance where Latino parents and internal school ideologies collide. In terms of the “vertical” approach our findings support that there are behaviors that are purposeful or not, conscious or unconscious that lead to positive or negative hegemonic practices. This is what one of the participants had to say about this:

“When my daughter starting coming to this school, I wanted to get involved. I used to volunteer in the school and got to know a lot of teachers and administrators. I began getting request to help in other classrooms and I did. They used to put me wherever they wanted and felt that they could do what they wanted with me. They treated me like an object. No one ever asked me what I wanted to do. Administrators created a schedule for me and they had me go from one place to another---like an object”.

The objectification status perceived by the parent in the quote above is an example of asymmetrical power and the deficit view held by schools about Latin@ families. The power, in the process of family involvement, is not equally dispersed between families and schools. The schools and policymakers are handling the majority, if not all, of the power in the case of family involvement (Jordan et al., 2002). Asymmetrical power entails that schools and policy-makers are not only defining the requirement of family involvement and the expectation of what and how things should line up, but also the outcome of the whole process (De Carvalho, 2001). Family

engagement, on the other hand, is calling for symmetrical power where a horizontal relationship is the norm, and where families are treated as an equal partner throughout the process of family engagement.

Once families go “astray” from that definition, expectation, and outcome, schools (using the deficit lens) will try to forcibly change the behavior of families to make them conform to the reality of inequality of power and perception (Olivos, 2006). This deficit view assumes that the home of the bicultural family is the origin of why bicultural families are lagging behind mainstream students (Valencia, 2002). Furthermore, race and class are influential factors in family involvement because of the exhibited power and privilege (Brantlinger, 2003; Fine, 1993; Lareau, 2000; Olivos, 2006). As a result, family engagement becomes a necessity to empower immigrant families and share with them the knowledge to navigate the school system. This knowledge will create a sense of belonging and partnership as important characteristics for family engagement. The “vertical” structure approach is prominent when examining the relationship between schools and immigrant families. One participant spoke with sorrow about the position the immigrant family has in regard to such “vertical” direction of power:

“As an immigrant mom I’m invisible. School officials do not see me. But when in meetings they say that they want us to get involved. They call us to tell us that they want us to get involved but we try they don’t. They want the numbers of the parents but not our opinions, feelings, or thoughts. I feel used by the school--they call only when they need us to show up to make up numbers but not because we actually matter.”

This is another example of the shortcomings of the parental involvement model- one way instruction where the school is imposing the definition and function of what is considered to be parental involvement. Schools are failing to engage immigrant families because they fail to discern the linguistic and cultural richness found within these families. Although immigrant families are facing many challenges when engaging schools, their interest in the education of their children is highly visible (Kim, 2009). The school, in the

example above, is fortifying and expanding the barrier between families and school by perpetuating the perceived negative school environment as a school-related barrier to parental involvement (Quezada et al., 2003). If schools adopt “family engagement” as opposed to “family involvement,” schools must treat immigrant families not only as more visible parents, but also as full partners with full sense of respect and participation in the entire process of engagement (Shirley, 1997). Whether it is a taking-for-granted assumption about how schools’ perception should be met with full understanding by the parents, or it is an ethnocentric view held by schools to impose the view of schools; family engagement is more than a linear way of communication. It is about the dynamic interaction of active listening based on the culturally relative view of both schools and families. It is about welcoming questions, suggestions, and ideas. It is about encouragement and empowerment by giving voice to families and bridge their gap of knowledge about schools if needed. The taking-for-granted assumption about what parents already know or do with school is illustrated in the example below:

“The idea of questioning---asking questions---saying something is not ever welcomed! We are not voice, we are bodies that can be moved from one place to another. We are families who are told that we are wrong, that our upbringing is wrong, and that we should know things about schools---we know nothing about. Somehow, we are supposed to read minds, and guess what actions have been planned for us.”

This example illustrates how schools, the puppeteers, have full control in both covert and overt ways (feel absolved, permission, savior mentality) over Latino, ILI, and refugee parents. Such behaviors are exhibited through the access to the discourse of visibility of power that schools have over Latino, ILI, and refugee communities and in particular parents who want to become actively engaged in the education of their children. The power of visibility of schools allows for them to interact with parents in such ways where they are able to further marginalize parents because they enter into a discourse with parents where they know what they ultimately are expecting of the Latino, ILI, and refugee families. This set of preconceived expected behaviors that



Latino, ILI, and refugee families should ascribe to leads to the hegemonic practices surrounding the puppetry of Latino, ILI, and refugee families. There are four distinct categories that were part of the findings for this population and that best described the power relations and advantages school officials had, they are 1) access to all; 2) full visibility; 3) knows end product and; 4) Has set of preconceived expected behaviors families should ascribe to. In the following sections, they will be discussed thoroughly.

### *Access to all*

The notion that families that have access and are often times welcomed is not one that if shared by all—particularly families who feel that for them it is more about showing them how limited their access is. This is what a participant had to say about this:

“It is a lie that we all have access to everything at the schools. The people in power are the ones who have access to it all. We don't. We pay taxes and we are treated as if don't deserve access”

Other family members felt that asking for access was a warning sign to administrators who saw them as threat. Asking for help was perhaps a mistake and often times it meant that their own knowledge and ability would be questioned.

“My kids needed special programs and I continued to tell the teacher and the administrator that my child needed help. She told me, “who are you to know what your child needs--are you a professional.” I did not know what to do. I told her no I'm not! She told me, “when you become one then you can dictate what you get.” that was three months ago and my kids still have not gotten services”.

### *Full visibility*

“I went to the school to speak to the principal about some problems I was having with the teacher of my child. When I arrived and I started asking question about how things worked in the school she told me, “I'm the only person who has the whole picture of the school. And I'm the only one who decides who gets to see it. Parents are not one of those groups”.

Through the discourse of power, the principal leverages her positionality as the dominant leader. The principal abuses the exchange in dialogue to ascribe parents to a submissive role. Through the ascription, parents are not seen as contributors to the structure of the school. Further, the illusion of a hierarchy is created in which the principal is superior and parents are dismissed.

### *Knows end product*

Oftentimes teachers' interpretations of parents' conduct and the socio-cultural disconnect evidenced through research are framed using a deficit model of school-centric frame that ignores or does not understand parents' views and policies and favors the perceptions and views of the professional educator who is usually white, middle-class (Auerbach, 2011; De Carvalho, 2001, Olivos, 2006). Parents get frustrated because they do not understand the preconceived set of expectations teachers may have.

“So many times, I have been told, “you have to trust me. I know what the end product is. You don't know where this going but I do.” I feel so frustrated every time I hear that. Yes, they know---but we don't! We are not told what the end looks like”

They do not conform to the norm and the teacher may find it difficult to consider parents' views and policies and take those into account when managing expectations of what parental engagement and family engagement should be (Auerbach, 2011; Olivos, 2006). In some cultures, for example, it may be viewed as a negative trait to go to the school and offer to help. It may be viewed as a sign of distrust or discomfort with teachers and school practices whereas here in the U.S., parents are expected to help and volunteer at schools at least some of the time (Auerbach, 2011; Valdés, 1996; Lowenhaupt, 2014). The cultural divide in expectations of parent engagement often leave frustrated parents in the dark while teachers give up on trying to

engage parents when conflict exists in these notions of what is considered “good” involvement (Valdés, 1996).

“Vivimos en la oscuridad (We live in darkness). We are not the ones who get to turn the lights. This is the sad part of this--we are not told how to turn the lights”.

The invisibility described above further illuminates the subtractive nature and dismissal of immigrant families in schools (Valenzuela, 1999). In essence, the institutionalized nature of schooling has created and become a gatekeeper of knowledge, not only to immigrant children, but also to their parents. By not providing access to the light switch, schools further impede and limit immigrant parents in their ability to engage in schools.

*Has set of preconceived expected behaviors families should ascribe to*

“Sometimes I feel manipulated when I’m treated based on what they think I am. Many times, people have a mental idea of who I am. They treat me like what they think I am-- instead of treating me as what I am. I’m a mother, and immigrant, a professional in my country and I have a lot knowledge. But at the school they live through preconceived idea of whom I am. Yet they never ask”.

Preconceived notions are manifested through society and dominant discourse. The ways the media chooses to portray immigrants is through a lens of either criminalization or victimization. Such ideas infiltrate and are manifested in schools and the ways in which they choose to limit parents through manipulated practices. Parents are treated as knowledge seekers and not individuals who possess and have knowledge they can contribute. These dominant orientations toward ascribed group identities reinforce marginalizing practices because those in power view them as rigid and permanent, thus negating and undermining any need to move beyond the deficit, unidimensional perceptions to engage individual families (Mahalingam, 2007).

## 5. THE PUPPETIZED

Through a discourse of invisibility, Latino parents and families have become commodified members of schools. Through Derek Bell (2008) and the work of later scholars in CRT and LatCRIT studies we come to understand how interest convergence operationalizes itself in U.S. society, and change benefitting communities of color is gained when the interest and needs of Whites is also met (insert studies). The families in our study also experienced such treatment through being puppetized (manipulated by school and school personnel). Two major findings will be discussed in this sections 1) Families navigating the discourse of invisibility; and 2) Comodified and manipulated families.

### *Families navigating the discourse of invisibility*

Families under this category oftentimes find themselves in schools where there are not many practices designed to view them as equals in the power structure. This monolithic view of immigrant and newcomers' families has resulted in their apparent invisibility (Machado-Casas, 2009; 2012; Machado-Casas & Flores, 2015). Families are not seen by the school and their communities. Schools often fail to incorporate the puppetized in meaningful and empowering ways (Lowenhaupt, 2014). This greatly contributes to the marginalization of the puppetized and the perpetuation of damaging stereotypes about the families based on pervasive ideas about socioeconomic level, class, race, culture, ethnicity, language, and nowadays, religion (Auerbach, 2011; Carman et al, 2013; Evans, 2011), These families struggle to leave the discourse of invisibility perpetuated by the hegemonic views that blatantly ignores the fundamental differences between their mainstream, white, middle-class ideas and the cultural lenses used to see -or in this case, not see- the families of the communities they are working to serve to the best of their abilities.

### *Commodified and Manipulated Families*

“A lady in the school told me that I should go to the PTA meetings that it was a meeting for teachers and parents to “talk”. I had questions for my daughter’s teachers so I went. When I got there, no one was translating, no one talked to us. They would say hi, and go sit down. We sat down, and waited. They stared and we did not understand a word that was being said. We were treated like puppets! When they got up, we got up. When they clapped, we clapped!”

Through this example, we see the manifestation of the interest convergence--- the puppeteer, and how they gain access to community and wealth and then abuse that and appropriate it in different ways. In the example above, we witness how the voice of Latino, ILI, and refugee parents and the community is not recognized or valued unless it aligns with the status-quo. The interest convergence here is one based off of a colonized mentality, in which schools and personnel. When explored, we found examples through our data that were centered on the dichotomous relationship between voice and power relations found between Latino parents and schools.

“The school wants me to get involved...then they need to treat me like I’m part of it by not ignoring me, humiliating me or my children, by talking to me, and not telling me that my language is not right...that my kids are not passing because they speak Spanish...because of me. By letting my kids have access to college to be successful and productive. By working with me, not by reducing me!”

The misappropriation of Latino, ILI, and refugee parental engagement in this example illustrates how schools become 21st century colonizers based on their abuse of power of Latino parents. In this example, we come to see how the only one who understand and have access to the information being presented are those who speak English. This idea of using English only allows the school to convey a message that only those who are privileged enough to speak English are allowed to have access to the knowledge being shared in the room and furthermore does not validate the culture and language in which Latino communities come from. By schools not providing translators, Latino parents become commodified members of PTA meetings who are in essence

subjected to forced participation through puppetry. When parents attend meetings, they are subjected to the pedagogies of puppetry. Meetings such as in the example above are based on “supposed mainstreamed knowledge”. Clearly, there is a disconnection between the interactions amongst school personnel and the Latina mother, which was based on a “business like” model of interaction. The misinformation here was that the Latina mother felt that through attending the PTA meeting she would gain access and visibility to address concerns with her child’s teacher. However, the “unspoken” rules of engagement were that at such meeting parental participation is attained through their ability to sit, listen, and “clap” when appropriate.

*Conocimiento Utilidad: Utility based knowledge as counterstory for 21st century colonized family engagement models*

Whether conscious or not, anyone who is in a position of power has the potential of becoming or acting in ways that can set him/her as a puppeteer. Understanding the risk of enacting this power away from hegemonic practices requires several processes, 1) conscious understanding of their role and how it affects families and students in schools; 2) the awakening of the rule of the puppeteer--it requires constantly checking yourself; 3) understanding and recognizing the puppeteered role in the power structure that leads to marginalization, and dehumanization. Minority communities are under attack and taking action is critical in order to address the needs of families. In doing so, one must redefine, reconstruct structures and behaviors (colonial structures and behaviors). And also move away from the traditional belief that families are supposed to come with a set of “know how’s and how to’s”. These expected parental family behaviors are damaging not only for families who are kept in the dark about what they need to know and therefore are seen as non-participants but also for students whose families are labeled as non-involved/engaged. In order to meet the needs of families we must change the ways we involve families and work towards actively engaging them. Involvement requires presence--engagement requires active connection, critical dialogue, and trans-sectional communication. When

families are engaged, they become active participants whose experiences and voices matter. When engaged families can counter any action directed at them only then can schools, families and communities be changed for the betterment of them all.

### *Redefining Latino family involvement to engagement*

Participants in the study suggest that interactions with schools are not active and lack respect, understanding, and were filled with unshared expectations of the Latino, ILI, and refugee families. In order to meet the needs of families, schools must depart from traditional forms of engagement and shift the paradigm from mute static participation and overrepresentation of the same families into engagement that includes building relationships with the families that lead to co-partnering and dialogue amongst the school and families. Therefore, one must begin with the family itself and develop forms of engagement that would validate and build bridges between family and school. Understanding what communities and families need will allow for parents to participate in schools more and opens up the dialogue to allow parents to become fully engaged in school activities. Not only will this allow to bridge these communities, but will allow for parents to feel included in their child's learning.

From building that bridge, schools need to build a system of checks and balances, where parents' demands or needs for their child are either met or heard. From the previous comments, we have seen parents feeling disconnected from school or not felt understood or heard. For this reason, schools need to make a system where if a parent has an issue or demand for their child, they must be able to feel comfortable approaching the school and speak up their concerns. The puppeteer must understand their hegemonic standing when talking to parents and understand how power may or may not play a role in working with parents. Furthermore, the cultural wealth of family's needs to be acknowledged, respected, and the power given back to families rather than institutions is critical in order to achieve any change.

Redefining the Latino, ILI, and refugee family engagement, begins with emphasizing the need for parental academic involvement by conveying it in a clear message of what is expected from parents and what that would entail (Abdul-Razaq, 2017; Machado-Casas, 2009; 2012; Machado-Casas & Alaniz; 2015) Certainly, parents would need to be made felt safe and welcomed by school administrators, faculty and staff (Halgunseth, 2009). Parents also need a place to share space within the school to create that safe and welcoming environment (Halgunseth, 2009). The space should be set in an area accessible to parents and contain the flexibility to meet with teachers and administrators during the parent's availability. As an added extra support to parents, school material, should be translated for parent inclusion and to eliminate language barriers (Halgunseth, 2009). With that said, translators should also be available to increase the connection with administrators, faculty and staff.

Thus, when Latino families get engaged in their children's schools, it is highly beneficial for both parents and children's needs (Halgunseth, 2009). Engaging the parents and positioning around the socio-cultural knowledge of the family also develops a set of needs and assets both beneficial to parents and schools. Parents, as stated previously, bring a wealth of resources needed to sustain a child's academic progress. Therefore, it is right and just to develop an understanding of the Latino, ILI, and refugee needs within schools and acknowledge the parents' knowledge as a beneficial asset. An unwritten contract could be made between Latino, ILI, and refugee families whereas schools can give parents the proper tools and skills needed to learn their parental rights, and parents can engage in their child's learning and teaching at home. Latino, ILI, and refugee families should be given culturally relevant information, support, and tools in their native language. As well as, following up with parents to make sure they understand the literature or information being sent home. Academic training opportunities should be made available for parents, which in turn leads to Latino, ILI, and refugee



families' creation of academic social networks within groups and the community. All of this should be made possible by providing possibilities for involvement and communicating a true commitment for Latino family engagement.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This article viewed the school practices and involvement of immigrant, ILI, and refugee parents through a LatCrit lens to highlight ways Latino families have been marginalized and manipulated within the school system. González et al., (2005) and Yosso's (2005) theoretical approach was employed to counter the negative narratives and perceptions of Latino, ILI, and refugee families. The studies addressed in this paper also point out how Latino, ILI, and refugee immigrant students and their families are seen through a deficit model with regards to their culture and language. To counter this reality, this article explained the difference in family involvement and family engagement by acknowledging the socio-cultural knowledge of Latino, ILI, and refugee families. The puppeteer was brought forth so as to explain the forms of power relations with schools, administrators, teachers and their discrediting of language, culture, and perceptions of Latino, ILI, and refugee families. Lastly, the article gave implications for these puppeteers to (re)evaluate their hegemonic practices and create new spaces and tools for Latino, ILI, and refugee families as a way to justly engage them.

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