

Reconceptualizing Leadership in Migrant Communities: Latina/o Parent Leadership Retreats as Sites of Community Cultural Wealth

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Abstract

This article examines how the Education Leadership Foundation (a leadership development community based organization) in partnership with the Migrant Education Program use parent retreats for building leadership, and skill development of migrant farm-working families. Utilizing cooperative and community responsive practices, these retreats build on the Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) in migrant communities as parents develop cohesive networks and community leaders to engage in school advocacy in the service of their children. This study draws from *testimonios* and participant observations to reveal the particular ways that social, familial, and resistant capital are activated. We examine the unique dimensions of leadership development within (im)migrant farmworker communities, and argue for the need to rethink the role of *testimonios* as a pedagogical tool in parent engagement and capacity building for leadership and agency in such communities.

Introduction

No me quedo otra mas que . . . ir a la escuela.

—Raúl Moreno

Translated to “I had no choice but to go to school,” this quote was uttered by Raúl Moreno when he delivered his *testimonio* at the opening of a parent leadership retreat. Raul was referencing the cruel realization of knowing that he would no longer be able to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a foreman in the fields—the man he most admired. Losing most of his vision after a tragic accident, Raúl had to dedicate himself to his studies and obtain the formal education that had eluded his illiterate farmworking father. In sharing his *testimonio* with participants in parent leadership retreats, Raul was modeling for them a type of “teaching that

enables transgressions” (hooks, 1994, p. 12) against and beyond the boundaries that so often deny migrant families the ability to engage in and with schools. These migrant parent leadership retreats were collaboratively organized by the Migrant Education Program (MEP) and the Educational Leadership Foundation (ELF) with the purpose of raising consciousness around the needs of (im)migrant families and communities and the roles that parents can play in addressing them.

ELF is a community benefit organization (CBO) founded on July 3, 2007 in Fresno, California by Raúl Moreno, a university and community leader, and former migrant student himself. The mission of ELF is to “empower communities through educational opportunities, leadership development, and civic engagement.” As a community-based organization, ELF has strategically focused on forming partnerships with other key community organizations and businesses to leverage different types of support for students and families. In addition to resources and mentorship, migrant students and their families throughout the San Joaquin Valley also require professional and leadership development. Towards addressing these needs, ELF develops parent retreats that build on culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2014) and community responsive methods (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015). This article examines the ways that Latina/o parent leadership retreats foster Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005) in (im)migrant communities as parents develop into leaders through cooperative and community responsive practices (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015).

The purpose of this article is to examine the unique dimensions of leadership development within (im)migrant farmworker communities, and argues for the need to rethink what is meant by parent engagement and capacity building for leadership and agency in such communities. This article is guided by the following research question: How do Latina/o migrant parental retreats help develop the leadership skills and abilities of parent participants? In contextualizing parent engagement and capacity building we first review the literature on Latina/o parent engagement and examine how these retreats are different from traditional forms of parental involvement. Next, we draw on Community Cultural Wealth and document how it provides a powerful framework for illuminating critical features of leadership to understand and engage Latino migrant communities. Finally, after an overview of the methodology, the study’s findings are revealed and we conclude with a set of recommendations that includes the use of *testimonio* as a pedagogy of leadership development.

The Power of *Testimonio* for Leadership Development in Migrant Communities

Within the field of education, the use of *testimonios* has attained heightened visibility broadly and, in particular, within the critical work of Chicana/Latina scholars undertaking pedagogical and methodological approaches (Delgado Bernal, Burciaga, & Carmona, 2012; Cruz, 2012). *Testimonios* are powerful narrative accounts with historical roots in Latin American liberation movements (Burgos-Debray, 1984). *Testimonios* can be understood as an account told by a person who “has experienced or witnessed great trauma, oppression, forced migration, or violence, or of a subject who has participated in a political movement for social justice” (Cruz, 2012, p. 461). There is a particular sense of urgency in which the *testimonio* directs attention to a cause or an issue as a way of raising consciousness (González, Plata, García, Torres, & Urrieta, 2003). As pedagogy (Freire, 2000), the use of *testimonios* centers critical reflection of lived experience, connects individual to collective knowledges, and disrupts the silencing of voices so prevalent in “top down” approaches commonly used in parent involvement and leadership development. This approach towards leadership development requires a deep faith in the ability of people to critically think, reflect, and engage as active participants in their local communities, schools, and the social worlds of their children.

Literature Review

Literature has documented that parental involvement is linked to improved student academic achievement (Chavkin, 1993; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Recently, scholars have examined the engagement practices of low-income Latino families (Auerbach, 2002; Ceja, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; González & Moll, 2002; Olivos, 2006) and have acknowledged the differing notions of involvement that often times exist between working class and immigrant families and school officials. Few studies have yet to examine the engagement practices of farmworking families (Lopez, 2001, Treviño, 2004), an occupation overrepresented in the region examined here. Most research on family engagement still conceptualizes being “involved” in school-centric terms defined by school officials (Olivos, 2006; Pérez Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005) and assumes egalitarian power relations in “partnerships” between the school and the home (Auerbach, 2002), ultimately subscribing to assimilatory ideologies.

A small but increasing number of studies are beginning to examine the role that community based organization can play in developing broader and deeper forms of engagement between families and schools (Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Some CBO's are developing the leadership capacity of parents to self-advocate and engage with schools around family and community needs, simultaneously building relationships and political power (Johnson, 2012; Warren et al., 2009). This study makes a contribution to that literature by exploring the ways one CBO utilizes *testimonios* in leadership retreats as a way to center migrant family and community needs in leadership development.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework

The concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) has been applied extensively in sociology and education to study U.S. inequality. An overemphasis in that literature toward forms of cultural capital that dominant groups possess (Carter, 2003; Dixon-Román, 2014), has resulted in a failure to examine the cultural capital held by marginalized groups. Yosso (2005) has proposed a model of Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) to suggest that centering the research lens on the cultures of Communities of Color, makes “visible” their “array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts” (p. 77). Yosso (2005) fleshed out empirical examples in the literature that revealed how Communities of Color nurture cultural capital through dynamic and overlapping processes leading to CCW in the following ways:

- Aspirational Capital: A hopefulness rooted in dreaming of possibilities beyond what is present today.
- Linguistic Capital: The intellectual and social skills learned from communication experiences, more so than from language or style.
- Resistant Capital: Oppositional dispositions undertaken to challenge inequality and marginalization.
- Navigational Capital: Maneuvering through social instructions.
- Social Capital: Networks of people and resources, often overlooked.
- Familial Capital: Cultural knowledges nurtured among *familia* grounded in community history and memory.

In conceptualizing the different forms of capital in CCW, Yosso (2005) contributes a framework that struggles for social and racial justice through a firm commitment to “conduct

research, teach and develop schools” (p. 82). CCW exposes the cultural deficit theorizing privileged in solely “seeing” cultural capital through its dominant forms, while highlighting how societal institutions could potentially transform and be remade by incorporating the experiences and knowledges of Communities of Color.

CCW’s anti-deficit framework focuses on ways to open channels that encourage dialogic leadership to emerge from within Latina/o migrant schools, organizations, and spaces. While all six forms of Yosso’s capital are present, this article focuses on three dimensions of CCW that exemplify ways researchers can redefine leadership in relation to parent engagement in migrant communities. Here, we highlight the role of social, familial, and resistant capitals because they privilege the role of shared experiences, cultural knowledge, and community-based collective action in the service of challenging inequities in schools and communities of these participants.

Methods and Methodology

This qualitative study explored the use of *testimonio* as part of a case study (Yin, 2014) that examined leadership development across two parent leadership retreats led by ELF in partnership with MEP. The three-day retreats took place in April and October of 2007 in a remote location in the California San Joaquin Valley. This study relied on multiple sources of data including individual and collective *testimonios*, ethnographic field notes (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), and collective reflections. In addition, leadership style pre- and post-assessments from participants in both retreats were also examined.

Data collected from the leadership retreats were analyzed and compiled into two separate reports produced on behalf of the Migrant Education Program. *Testimonios* were encouraged and shared across the 6 days. *Testimonios* were transcribed and manually coded (Saldaña, 2015) to identify ways parents articulated roles of leadership and the ways that community cultural wealth was expressed in relationship to schools, families, and communities.

Raúl’s Testimonio

Raúl Moreno frequently opens the parent leadership retreats by providing his powerful *testimonio*, or his own lived experience, as a product of the migrant farm-working context. As part of his and the ELF’s vision, working with communities necessitates a perspective that

privileges a focus on the lived experience of (im)migrant families, yet from an asset-based perspective. Raúl's parents and older siblings migrated to the U.S. from Mexico in 1973 leaving him and his younger siblings behind, until the following year when the family reunited in the community of Planada, in the San Joaquin Valley in California. A few months after settling in, he experienced a life-changing event at 12 years of age that would radically transform his educational and life trajectory. Participants in the educational leadership retreat listened intently as he shared his *testimonio*:

I was riding like a kid on a brand new bike . . . I remember seeing a beautiful girl that really caught my attention as she was sitting on the rear seat of the station wagon that her father was driving . . . I pedaled faster . . . to show off in front of her . . . By then I was going full speed, but the station wagon suddenly turned to the left, and I wasn't paying close attention . . . a car coming from the other side hit me throwing me 12 feet up in the air. I landed on my head in the pavement. Six months later, I remember waking up in a hospital in Santa Clara . . . the first thing that I asked my father when I saw him was . . . "Dad, why don't you bring me a comic?" My father didn't respond and instead he got up and withdrew a little. Then after he came closer, and I asked him "Dad, why don't you bring me a book? Bring me the [comic]" . . . It took him a couple of days but he brought me one . . . When he took me the comic, I had a big shock when I realized I could no longer read! I had lost 75 percent of my vision. So I asked him, "What happened Dad, why can I no longer read?"

He told me, "Well, the doctor said that maybe down the line."

"So then, I can't read?"

"Well son, what do you want me to do? I would read for you, but I don't know how to read either." Because he didn't know how to read, he only went up to the first grade . . . Excuse my language but I was very angry at God. I would curse at God. "And why me? Why did he do this to me? Why did I lose my sight?" I was angry at God because I returned to the fields to pick figs and guess what happened to me? I could no longer pick . . . because I could no longer see well. And so I failed . . . My dad pulled me aside one day and said to me, "Son, you have no other choice but to [pause] . . . but to go to school." So there I go with

a deep pain in my heart off to school. I went with that pain for two reasons . . . because at school I did not know a single person and second, because . . . I deeply admired my father and I yearned to be like him. I would often look at him and say, “One day I want to be like my father. I too want to be a foreman of the picking crew.” So then my dreams of becoming a foreman were shattered. I no longer had an option but to go off to school. Go to school without even speaking English, without being able to see the blackboard, and without friends? Forget about it.

Raul had little time to dwell on what he had lost as a result of the accident. He learned to rely on his hearing, he reached out for reading and writing support, and struggled, but graduated from high school. In college, he drew motivation from courageous students struggling against greater adversity. He leaned on study groups for support, transferred to a 4 year university and graduated with bachelors and Master degrees, and now assists others.

One day a few years ago, when my father visited me at the university he said to me, “Do you remember son when you used to curse at God because you suffered your accident and lost your eyesight? Do you realize now, that it was all a blessing by God—a blessing in disguise?”

Raúl’s *testimonio* conveys a response to experiencing a tragic incident that left him no option but to tackle adversity head on.

I tell you my *testimonio*...to each of us, our task is not so much to see our weaknesses, but to find the means to overcome them, to focus on the assets and strengths that we do have. I no longer have my eyesight, but God helped me to hear better . . . I invite you, if you have a particular weakness or are struggling with something—move that aside and let’s keep going forth as if there is no other option..

He invites participants in the retreat to collectively reflect around their own experiences of oppression and marginalization, and to focus on their areas of strength and think of particular ways to collectivize to overcome adversity.

Findings

In this section, examples from the approach employed in education and leadership retreats speak to the particular ways that these less formal, out-of-school spaces, are culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and responsive (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015) to Latina/o communities. For the purpose of this article, we primarily focus on three of the six ways that CCW of these parents were “seen” and legitimated.

Building Social Capital

Social capital includes the networks of people and the embedded resources within their communities (Yosso, 2005). First, teambuilding and icebreaker (*dinámicas*) activities were utilized strategically from the beginning of the retreat as a way to have parents interact in entertaining and engaging ways with each other. The *dinámicas* consisted of playing games where they were encouraged to learn each other’s names, birthdays, and ages and line up alphabetically. Other collaborative *dinámicas*/teambuilding activities implemented over the three-day retreat included participating in an assortment of hula-hoop activities, as well as “team skis”—participants utilized listening, communication, positive reinforcement, and cooperation skills. The *dinámicas* served the purpose of helping to forge relationships among parents, move outside of their comfort zones, and engage in activities that were also entertaining.

Second, after developing a stronger sense of community through the assortment of teambuilding activities, they began work—hand-in-hand with other parents from their school districts—on student and community needs efforts. In these groups, parents were asked to engage in dialogue identifying specific and common issues in their communities and schools. The primary objective of these dialogues was to begin to discuss and raise consciousness in a community context and propose possible roles parents could play in working towards addressing these pertinent issues. After the identification of the community needs and problems, representatives from each group incorporated possible solutions in their Parents Advisory Council (PAC) Operational Plan and then presented them to the larger group. Included in figure 1 are some of the identified needs and corresponding actions parents committed to undertake:

Migrant Student & Community Needs	PAC Operational Plan & Actions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increased parent involvement 2. Reliable transportation 3. Cleaner and friendlier schools 4. More bilingual/bi-cultural teachers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share information we learn with others in community 2. Ensure that more parents participate 3. Recruit more families 4. Create a supportive environment in meetings
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Academic counseling for students and parents 2. Information about universities & financial aid 3. Better student assessments 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advocate so that schools provide our children the necessary academic support 2. Know about our rights as parents & community members
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Improve one's own schools 2. Add more after school programming 3. Improved instruction in Math/English 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work closely with schools 2. Organize to generate new ideas 3. Participate in MEP activities
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health services (visual & dental) 2. Food & clothing 2. Racial discrimination in schools 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participate in direct action in community 2. Help create agency in those around me 3. Provide help to the neediest students

Figure 1. Parent Advisory Council Identified Needs & Actions

To conclude this session, members from each parent group presented the action steps that they vowed to take as a means towards addressing the needs they had identified.

Third, parents also participated in a networking and business card session where they were introduced to the hidden curriculum (Giroux & Purpel, 1983) around networking and engaging school and community leaders through mock school board presentations. Parents were provided with a protocol on how to “formally” address and engage school board members and power brokers in their respective communities. For most of these parents, entering formal spaces of power to engage “leaders” on a one-to-one basis is not something

they have been socialized to do. In this session, facilitators emphasized losing timidity, making eye contact when speaking, and giving a firm handshake as being key. Parents were also provided with MEP “fill in the name” business cards to take home with them for upcoming engagements. They were reminded that by introducing themselves as members of an organization like MEP they are advocating not just for the interests of their own child, but are seen as members of a collective. Mock school board presentations provided a safe space for parents to practice and have a platform to raise issues that emerged in prior dialogues. The range of issues raised by parents in these sessions included but were not limited to: the need for a spotlight by the school, after-school programs, services for undocumented students, babysitting services, false accusations of children with lice, police racial profiling, new textbooks, students being called “wetback” by others, unfair disciplinary procedures by teachers, and too many remedial classes.

Tapping into Familial Capital

Familial capital are the “cultural knowledges nurtured among familia,” all of which are grounded in community, history, and memory. In this context, familial capital addresses the migratory experience and how it extends the notion of family to include relatives and non-kin networks such as *compadres*. This form of wealth engages a commitment to community well-being and expands the concept of family.

The collaborative approach of the retreats structured opportunities for families to draw on each other’s familial capital and engage with one another in ways that surpassed typical leadership work in school spaces. For instance, Raúl Moreno guided parents through a reading of *Angel De Mi Guarda*,¹ a play he authored and published as a children’s book (Moreno, 2007). The play follows José and María Martínez, and their three children—Concepción, Angel, and Esperanza—through the turmoil leading to their departure from the state of Michoacán, México in their journey to the San Joaquin Valley agricultural town of Planada. The 13-scene play critically deals with the Martínez family’s social, political, and economic context prior to departure, including hunger and joblessness. This forces José Martínez to draw upon his social and familial capital (Yosso, 2005) by seeking the help of his *compadre* Manuel, who now resides

¹ Ángel de Mi Guarda translates to My Guardian Angel.

in California, and setting off a chain of events that climaxes when he and his family arrive at the Mexican border.

Angel de mi Guarda exposes the wide array of social and familial capital that migrant families rely on in order to borrow the \$15,000 that “*coyotes*” charge to smuggle each family into the United States. These seldom told perspectives reveal the many dangers that families face as they attempt to cross the U.S.–México border. Once in the U.S., exploitative labor conditions arguably structure a modern day version of indentured servitude for farmworker families. For José and María Martínez, this arduous transnational journey inculcated in their children the importance of obtaining a formal education (Lopez, 2001; Nava, 2012) in order to escape labor and economic exploitation, attain a higher standard of living, and no longer be subjected to such policies of dehumanization.

The most significant scenes of the play focus on the pressures the Martínez children face in terms of cultural assimilation. At 17 years old and as the oldest of the three Martínez children, Concepción has grown tired of her family’s harsh struggles, drops out of school, and elopes with her boyfriend. As time goes by, Angel, the middle child, deceives his non-English speaking parents into signing a consent form to enlist into the U.S. Army. Ashamed of his cultural background and the poverty he grew up in, Angel views his enlistment in the Army as a way to assimilate into mainstream U.S. society and leave behind his cultural background and heritage. In contrast, the youngest daughter, Esperanza, graduates high school near the top of her class and aspires to leave for a top-ranked four-year university, but struggles to gain her father’s approval. While, Mr. Martínez supports his daughter’s desire to obtain a higher education, his unfamiliarity with the educational system makes it difficult to give his permission. Ultimately, though, Mr. Martínez acquiesces and allows his daughter to go to college with the condition that her family remain a priority. The culminating scene captures the brutal irony of Angel—now an agent for the Department of Homeland Security and the Border Patrol—shooting and killing his own Godfather as he attempts to cross the U.S.–México border in pursuit of similar opportunities as his *compadre* José and the Martínez family had done only a couple of years before. The play ends with Angel embracing and comforting his dying Godfather—Angel has finally realized that cultural assimilation and his own desire to dutifully serve his new country have been fraught with serious contradictions and consequences.

Following the play, parents were invited to reflect and dialogue on their reactions to it. One of the mothers, María, shared her *testimonio* to address the contradictions of familial pursuit of the American Dream:

In the play, what was most sad was the young man Angel, who was Mexican. He came from México, he studied here, and then he became an ICE agent. The saddest thing to me was that he was there to repress and kill his own people. And it was sad what happened to his Godfather and that is what happens with us, with our children today. If they came here or were born here, now they become part of the same machine that does not let us pass through.

María spoke to the tragedy inherent in the socio-political processes that lead people to migrate (Gonzales, 2013) across borders. In these scenarios, immigrants face immense dangers, as well as leave much of what they know and love behind. María's commentary can also be understood as the fear that many immigrant families have of U.S institutions like the military, or that formal education will erode the cultural imprint that parents leave on their children. In his story of becoming a border patrol agent, in many ways Angel symbolizes the failure to cultivate an *educación* (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Valenzuela, 1999)—or the role a family plays “in inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). Not limited to formal education in the form of certificates and degrees, this notion of *educación* refers to “competence in the social world.” This competence in the social world would lead Angel to “respect the dignity and individuality” and humanity of border crossers grounded on empathy and learned from the lived experiences of his family and as a fellow migrant.

Another parent shared her *testimonio* highlighting the challenge to traditional gender roles, the evolving role of fathers, and the potential to also transform cultural knowledge and cultural roles in father–son relationships. The mother confided:

This is the first time that I come to a retreat like this one. One always says that one has problems, and we think that no one has problems bigger than our own. I'm starting to find out that for example, it is true that as a parent (more my husband in my case) who is the one that works, he is the one that worries more about putting something to eat on the table at home, than all that having to do with our children's education. In part my husband used to be like that . . . now

he is beginning to change because I have a son in high school and he is making his dad understand that he needs help, and not just economic support, but that he also needs to talk to him. He tells him, “Look dad I need you to understand that I will be graduating from high school soon, and I want to continue to study.” And my husband would tell him, “It’s just that studying is not for . . . you can’t keep going to school because you don’t have papers.” And my son would respond, “But you have to help to continue to fight so that I can continue to study. You only seem to worry about providing me with something to eat, to give me money with what I may need, but you don’t pay attention to what I may need you beyond those things.” And now I understand, it is true that some parents worry more so about providing the necessities, and school and the children get left in last place.

In the beautiful *testimonio* above, a mother shares the unconditional love a son has for his father and explains to him that he can play a much larger role for him beyond being a provider. Despite being undocumented, the son’s desire to continue to higher education reformulated for his father the concept of familial capital, or an evolved “caring, coping, and providing” (Burciaga & Erbstein, 2012; Yosso, 2005) that necessitates expanded roles adapted to the new realities facing migrant students and their families in the U.S. Furthermore, Raúl Moreno helped crystalize this session by reminding parents that evolving gender and leadership roles are important in a family. In fact, Moreno then challenged them to take the message to those who could not make it to the retreat.

Activating Resistant Capital

Resistant capital is defined as those “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior” that are put in motion to challenge political neglect, social inequality, and oppression” (Yosso, 2005). While one form of cultural awakening involves understanding oppressive structures, this process also necessitates counteracting them. Formal school spaces where parents are typically invited and expected to participate are often not welcoming to migrant Latina/o parents (Nava, 2012). The leadership retreats facilitated and cultivated the resistant capital of parents through individual and group reflections, in creating spaces for parents to

articulate the new knowledge co-created in this space, and in helping them build confidence that they can and do play very significant roles in the educational trajectory of their children.

The final day of the retreats served as an opportunity for participants to collectively reflect on their participation in the retreat and to share their desires of what they wished to engage in with their newfound knowledge. For example, Magdalena, who resided in a community outside of Fresno, shared how the retreat provided her an opportunity to practice some of the challenges parents will face in “real life” once they return to their respective communities. A benefit for her was gaining the motivation to follow through on her commitment toward getting her city to build a stoplight at a dangerous intersection across the street from the elementary school, hoping to save the lives of children who cross that intersection on a daily basis. María, another parent, revealed in her *testimonio* difficulties that her child has endured as a result of their undocumented immigration. When she sees injustices perpetrated against migrants, María asks herself, “Why don’t you want us? We only come to work the most difficult jobs. I never see a ‘white person’ bending down and picking lettuce like me.”

Other parents, including Guillermina and Socorro, took it upon themselves to challenge parents to broaden and expand the migrant education network of participants who attend leadership retreats. For example, Guillermina challenged other parents to recruit more and more participants for an upcoming retreat by urging, “We need to fill 3 or 4 buses next time. We need to have different parents next time as well.” She then stated how she pushes her children in school, “We tell them to always work hard so you don’t have to struggle like we do.” Socorro, another parent who provided her powerful *testimonio*, reminded the audience that her own community had originally begun their migrant parent meetings with 4 parents; now, more than 85 parents are often present at their meetings. She asserted, “We need to get and hook those parents that are in the background and reel them in! We can do it.” Her successful past strategies included raffles and an assortment of fundraisers to help raise money for scholarships for undocumented students attending college. During moments of reflection Socorro was often seen knitting beautiful blankets that she then used to raffle off to raise funds for scholarships for college-going students.

The culminating event of the retreat was the creation of Individual Action Plans (IAP) where parents made family, educational, and community commitments. IAPs provide parents

an opportunity to utilize the new knowledge and networks established during the retreat to mobilize them towards concretely listing the project and actions they commit to undertaking upon returning home. In their IAPs, parents listed commitments including being more supportive of their children, attending more parent–teacher meetings, paying closer attention to the educational progress of their kids, becoming involved in school-sanctioned activities, sharing the newly acquired information with community members, recruiting more parents (especially fathers) to upcoming events and retreats, and organizing their neighbors for social/educational issues, among others.

The retreats helped shift the consciousness of many parents by providing them opportunities to reflect on how they already provide *apoyo* (Nava, 2012), or support to further promote for the education of their children, and to imagine particular ways—both as individuals and as a collective—that they can assume leadership roles to help advance academic success and the pressing needs of their communities. Perhaps this parent said it best on why the retreats were transformative:

I've been to many workshops but what I liked about this one is that we worked as a team here, that we all had a place. It was fun, and we went more in depth in many of the things we did. I feel more motivated to return to my district. The information on the service agreement will help me out a lot. And also the event planning information that was given to us.

These *testimonios* depict how migrants in underserved communities can come together, build relationships, identify common problems in their communities, engage in deep critical reflection, while building leadership skills, and begin to exert and enact agency to mobilize for action upon their return to their communities.

Conclusion

In summary, community based organizations like ELF in partnership with MEP play an important role in bringing parents together to reflect on the educational needs of their community and to devise corresponding action plans that they can enact collectively. Beyond traditional programming for parental involvement, these retreats create opportunities for families to build social capital and their CCW is acknowledged. The leadership retreats serve

as spaces where broader and deeper engagement can begin to take place in ways that are rooted in the migrant experience and also builds on the strengths of migrant communities.

The parent retreats also reveal the powerful role that *testimonios* play as pedagogical tools that serve to affirm and legitimate the presence of migrant parents. This study reveals that when migrant families are engaged in the education of their children in culturally responsive, (Ladson-Billings, 2014) and community responsive (Tintiango-Cubales et al., 2015) approaches and when their culture and history are seen as assets (Cabrera, Milem, Jaquette, & Marx, 2014), parents can have deeply transformative and empowering learning experiences. The types of cultural wealth that emerged through the use of *testimonios* offer a realm of possibilities to develop the leadership capacity of parents looking to more meaningfully engage on their own terms and in ways that authentically address the needs of the migrant community.

This study illuminates how CBO's like the Education Leadership Foundation play an important role in supporting migrant leadership development by authentically drawing from the forms of cultural wealth that migrant families and communities bring to bear in the education of their children. By utilizing *testimonios* as pedagogy that emphasizes critical consciousness (Freire, 2000), educators can center the voices and experiences of families, learn from their struggles, and build upon their strengths in generating forms of educational engagement that are true to migrant families and the broader community. Further research should highlight the specific ways that CBO's can utilize asset based pedagogies and practices to legitimize the cultural wealth among Latino families, particularly in migrant communities. In addition, future research should examine how schools can learn from the framework established by the leadership retreats in order to rethink the goals and purposes of their parent engagement approaches.

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