

The Journal of Educational Issue of Language Minority Students, V. 16, Summer1996. Boise State University.

¡Aquí Vivimos! Voices of Central American and Mexican Participants in a Family Literacy Project

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana

Marjorie Faulstich Orellana, PhD, is a postdoctoral researcher in the department of sociology at the University of California in Berkeley, CA.

May, 1992, one week after what has variously been called the L.A. Riots, the Uprising, the Civil Unrest, or Los Disturbios. The streets immediately surrounding Haven Street Elementary School, 1 on the borders of the Pico Union area in downtown Los Angeles, had been untouched by the flames, but long stretches on the nearest main streets had been reduced to ash and cinder. The destruction and fear that surrounded the community in those days, as well as the rage that fueled the flames, were reminiscent of the wars that many Haven Street families had left behind in Central America. Sixteen of these families brought their fears with them when they gathered for the first of six Saturdays of a family literacy project at the school. They agreed to write about their experiences and to compile their stories in a book for local distribution (*¡Aquí Vivimos!* Book Project, 1993).

This article represents my effort, as a teacher at the school site and one of the organizers of the program, to carry this community's voices to a larger audience. I will briefly describe the project, summarize the issues that seemed to be of greatest concern to this group of immigrant families, and relate the words of the participants as they reflected on their experiences in this country.

Literacy

The project was not designed to teach literacy, although the group of teachers who spearheaded the project recognized that families would come with a wide range of educational backgrounds since many parents have not had access to more than a primary grade education in their home countries. Instead we sought to provide both space and support (material and personnel), so that families could engage in the practice of reading and writing along with other members of the community. Influenced by the work of Freire (1970), we viewed literacy not as a skill but rather as a tool that can be used for learning and living together, for writing our own histories, and for sharing our stories with the world.

Authentic literacy: For some years now, researchers have explored variations in the literacy practices of diverse social groups and have contrasted those uses of literacy with the practices that are typically endorsed in school. (See for example Anderson & Stokes, 1984; Heath, 1983; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988.) In applying this research to curricula reforms, teachers have been encouraged to engage students in more authentic literacy activities: i.e., activities that are modeled on real world language uses, that do not divorce form from content, and that contextualize reading and writing within whole and meaningful activities (Edelsky, Altwerger, & Flores, 1991; Kucer, 1991).

One problem with some applications of this notion of authenticity in instruction is that activities may be designed that are modeled on tasks that are practiced outside of school but that do not constitute parallel activities because they are not shaped by the same forces, built out of the same purposes, or directed toward the same goals as those that inform the real-world tasks. These activities appear as copies designed to satisfy the requirements of school: Students write letters that will not be sent and stories that will not be read by anyone outside the classroom walls. In doing this, students may acquire literacy but may not connect their literacy learning in any significant way with their lives.

We tried to design the literacy activities of the Haven Street School program as more genuinely authentic activities by focusing on what we sought to accomplish rather than on the means that we would use to reach those goals. Although in some sense we did seek to cultivate literacy within this community, thus calling our project a "family literacy program," from the beginning, the organizers' explicitly communicated goal was to compile the stories of Haven Street families because those stories represented a valuable history that would otherwise be lost. Writing became a tool by which these immigrants' voices could reach a wider audience. The written stories could also be used to forge bonds within the community, exchange cultural knowledge across generations, and inform local schools' curricula in culturally relevant ways.

The project was also designed to respond to genuine, felt needs of the community rather than to be a teacher or researcher imposed project based on professionals' evaluations of the community's deficits. In informal conversations with the teachers who organized this effort, parents had stressed the need for affordable, local, structured enrichment activities for children on the weekends, and for children to have, if not "a room of their own," at least the space, support, and materials necessary for concentrating on reading and writing. Many residents of the Pico Union area live in small, overcrowded apartments where the needs of different family members may conflict and where there may be little room or resources for children to pursue a range of interests; parents saw this as a problem and called on the school to help find a solution. Parents had also noted their own desire for better communication with other parents and with the school staff and for space that would allow them to work together to find answers to common problems.

Critical Literacy: All literacy is not equal, and literacy can easily become a tool for domestication (Freire, 1970). Drill and practice approaches to reading and writing, which decontextualize language and focus the learners' attention on form rather than on meaning may especially be used to maintain the status quo, but even authentic uses of literacy, modeled on real-world uses of reading and writing, may be engaged without questioning the power relationships in those practices or without critically examining the social conditions in which those literacy practices are embedded. Our hope was that by first talking together and then by writing about our memories, beliefs, hopes, disappointments, and dreams, all participants could gain a better understanding of our lives, share our experiences with the children and with others, and begin to forge a collective future for the community. Our goal was to use literacy activities to read and write both the word and the world in the tradition of Paulo Freire. We sought to validate participants' life experiences and to use those experiences as a basis for serious social analysis of our local reality.

In our efforts to build community, we attempted to break down many of the barriers that divide us at the school during the work week and that reinforce power and status differentials. The project brought together paraprofessionals, teachers, parents, children, several custodians (who were hired to open the school but who stayed to participate despite language and cultural differences from the families), and friends of the community. As an important aspect of our effort to create egalitarian relationships, none of the organizers, teachers, or facilitators received any form of payment, and we all participated in the project along with our own family members, even as we helped to facilitate the process. ² Everyone who participated did so as a

voluntary endeavor, giving up a portion of their weekends for this communal effort. By meeting in the school auditorium, we also had no walls to partition us, and by gathering for dialogue in a circle formation, we were able to know each other in ways that are not possible in more formal settings. (This is not to claim that status differentials were erased, only that we made a conscious effort to reduce their influence on participants' involvement in the program.)

Setting and Participants

The Pico Union area of Los Angeles is known informally as "Little Central America." It is difficult to obtain an accurate count of the number of immigrants living in the area due to high transiency rates, the common practice of temporary or extended shared-housing by multiple families, and the undocumented status of many residents, but estimates of the total Central American immigrant population in Los Angeles county range from 500,000 to one million (Chinchilla, Hamilton, & Loucky, 1991), with the majority from El Salvador, followed by Guatemala. Most of the Central Americans have arrived within the last ten years, and the majority of those who arrived after 1981 did not qualify for amnesty under the Immigration Reform and Control Act, and so they remain undocumented. The majority of these immigrants make their first stop in the Pico Union area. Mexican immigration to central Los Angeles is also high, with many moving back and forth across the border, propelled by the search for work.

Ninety percent of the children at Haven Street School speak Spanish at home. A smaller group (approximately 8%) are Korean immigrants or first generation Korean-Americans. On one level, then, the school population, and the subpopulation who participated in this program, could be considered quite homogeneous. Yet within the Latino majority there exist large variations in background experiences: families come from different social classes, from both urban and rural settings; they have had diverse educational and work experiences (although the majority, even those with professional training, work as unskilled laborers in Los Angeles or are self- or unemployed), and they offer different reasons for leaving their home countries. The majority are of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent, but a growing number are from indigenous communities in Mexico and Guatemala; they identify culturally by their ethnic groups (Zapotec and K'anjobal Mayans are two of the largest ethnic groups in the area) and speak Spanish as a second language a fact that is not always noted or accommodated by the school.

A total of sixteen families participated in the Saturday program. Of these, seven were of Mexican origin, six were from El Salvador, and three were from Guatemala. All of the families spoke Spanish as a first language; no families spoke indigenous dialects, and no Koreans participated in this program because none of the teachers who organized the program had Korean students in their classrooms, and no special efforts were made to reach out to the Korean community or to indigenous groups at this time. In fact, recruitment efforts were minimal because this was a pilot program; invitations were extended only to the families of students in four classrooms at the school. The families were invited by word of mouth and by teacher-made leaflets that were sent home with no explicit attempt to follow up on those who did not return the forms. A number of families expressed interest in the program but were unable to attend due to work and family responsibilities; others may have refrained from attending due to fears that were generated in the community after the civil unrest. Childcare was provided for young children in our attempt to eliminate one obstacle to participation.

The families in the program were also varied in their composition with both nuclear and extended families represented and with members of each household defining their own terms of participation. Not all members of all families were able to attend all of the meetings, and no records of attendance were kept, but over the course of the six weeks the group grew larger, as participants recruited other family members and friends. In

all, 7 men, 14 women, and 23 children participated to some degree in the actual writing of the family histories.

The Program

Each session began with an opening circle in which everyone (teachers, parents, children, and occasional guests, such as the custodians) gathered to share our homework. This included bringing an item from our home countries and explaining its significance to our lives and sharing favorite poems or songs from our childhoods. The purpose of this activity was to foster a sense of inclusiveness, to validate our own histories, and to share those histories with each other and with our children.

After this, the organizers introduced the theme for the day's writing. These themes were established before the meeting by the teachers but were based on our conversations with members of the community and designed to establish some general lines for dialogue while still leaving room for participants to address their own concerns. Three broad themes were developed to focus the writing: memories of the parents' youth and of their homelands, expectations for life in the United States before coming here, and realities of life in Los Angeles (the good, the bad, the ugly... and hopes for the future). However, because the community had so recently experienced civil unrest, local problems were foremost in most participants' minds, and these formed a central theme that was woven through all of the sessions.

After introducing each theme with a brief explanation and a short discussion or brainstorming session to stimulate ideas, participants sat with the members of their household to write a piece for our anthology. At this point in the program, the teachers and paraprofessionals circulated and talked with families about their stories, helping to generate ideas and to find ways to involve all family members in the task. We brought in a collection of books that were related to the themes and encouraged families to use these to gather ideas.

During the last hour of each session, the children and adults met separately. The children played soccer on the school yard or engaged in art projects that were loosely organized around the themes. They made their own time lines, maps of their home countries, and illustrations of their families and communities, some of which were incorporated into the family anthology. The adults (except for a few teachers who opted to work with the children) met to discuss what they had written that day. This was designed to allow the children resources and space to participate in age-appropriate enrichment activities and simply to move about in ways that were not often possible in their homes and communities, given overcrowded conditions and unsafe neighborhoods. It was also designed to allow a space for adults to talk freely together without having to attend to the needs of their children.

In the adult group, the families' stories invariably led the group into extended, animated discussions about diverse social and political issues; I will summarize the main issues that were discussed in this article. We ended with a short evaluation period, which helped us to plan for the next week. It was difficult to close each week, however, as the adults' discussions would often continue well past the hoursome indication of the need they felt for support in the daily struggles for survival.

Within this general framework, we explored a variety of participation structures to promote dialogue and to encourage the active involvement of all participants. On one occasion, for example, we formed separate circles for the men and the women. On another, we asked the children to interview their parents about their childhood experiences. On a third occasion, teachers and parents worked together to enact a sociodrama which addressed the family's concerns about violence and drugs in their community. We experimented with different forms for documenting our stories; writing served as one vehicle, but we also audiotaped several

of the adults' discussions, videotaped the children's interviews of their parents, and displayed the children's art on the walls of the school cafeteria. These forms captured aspects of our experiences that did not come so readily in the printed word and allowed for greater participation by all members of the group.

Written Versus Oral Histories

After the first three sessions were conducted and a level of trust seemed to exist among all participants, we asked the families for permission to audiotape the group discussions because we felt that important issues were not being captured in the written texts. In the spoken dialogue we were most able to critically examine our experiences: we shared our memories, fears, hopes, and dreams; we discussed reasons for our differing interpretations of local reality, and we debated the causes and consequences of the pressing social problems that invariably surfaced as a topic of concern in these discussions. This level of analysis did not occur spontaneously in the families' individually-written stories, and in general the families presented much more cheerful, proper images in their written stories than they did in the group conversation. In the spoken dialogues, several participants broke out in tears when they spoke of their memories of home; others followed suit by expressing their rage, sorrows, and fears aspects of their experiences that they had never shared publicly in any other way.

In the next section of this article, I will describe the major themes that emerged in the discussions (based on my analysis of the transcripts of the audiotaped sessions) and in the texts. I have included excerpts from the families' writing and quotes from their conversations. My purpose in doing this, as stated previously, is to help project these families' voices to a larger audience so their stories might be heard within the national debate on immigration reform.

Myths and Realities About Life in the United States

Most participants agreed that their experiences in the United States have not been what they thought they would be. One woman, Rosa, expressed this in the following words:

Yo me imaginaba que aquí en Los Angeles era cierto todo lo que oía hablar-que el dinero era facil de ganar y que toda la gente hablaba inglés, que no habían carros viejos, solo nuevos, y que todo era comodidad.

(I imagined that here in Los Angeles everything I had heard was true that it was easy to make money and that everyone spoke English, that there were no old cars, only new ones, and that everything was easy.)

Rosa's husband added:

Yo pensaba que aquí se vivía mejor que en mi país, que se ganaba mucho dinero, que casi no se hablaba español. También me imaginaba que las ciudades eran bonitas, porque las había visto en películas o en tarjetas postales.

(I thought that people lived better here than in my country, that they earned a lot of money, and that hardly anyone spoke Spanish. I also imagined that the cities were beautiful, because I had seen them in movies or on postcards.)

Another participant, Celia, wrote:

Cuando yo pensé en venir a este país pensé encontrar muchas cosas que no encontré al llegar. Mis amigos

me contaban no exactamente que se recogía el dinero con pala, pero que era facil ganarlo, que en dos meses una podía tener carro, y en un año podía comprarse una casa. Además, hablaban de que lo buscaban a uno para trabajarnunca dijeron que había que buscar el trabajo, y que además, era tan dificil encontrarlo. Con ese pensamiento salí para acá, con la diferencia que la realidad es otra muy distinta.

(When I thought about coming to this country I thought I would find many things that I did not find when I arrived. My friends had told me not exactly that you could scoop up money with a shovel, but that it was easy to earn it, that in two months you could have a car, and in one year you could buy yourself a house. They also said that they came looking for you to work they never said that you have to go and look for work, and moreover, that it's hard to find it. It was with those thoughts that I came here, with the difference being that the reality is quite different.)

Celia went on to describe that reality:

No tenía donde vivir. No tenía dinero, mi esposo sin trabajo, y yo tampoco, y cuando encontramos donde vivir en un apartamento sencillo, dormíamos en la alfombra mi hermana, sus cuatro hijos, mi esposo, mis tres hijos, y yo. La alfombra tenía chinches, y todo estaba muy sucio, sin posibilidades de poder movernos, pues solo mi esposo trabajaba unas horas al día.

(We didn't have anywhere to live. We didn't have any money, my husband was without work, and I was also; and when we found a little apartment to live in, we had to sleep on the floor: my sister, her four children, my husband, my three children, and I. The rug had bugs, and everything was very dirty, and we couldn't move from there because only my husband worked and only a few hours a day.)

Another woman, Marta, summarized the way she felt in this new land poetically: "Todo se veía diferente; hasta el cielo se miraba más bajo, y yo me sentí más pequeña." (*"Everything looked different; even the sky looked lower, and I felt smaller."*)

Carlos, who had immigrated from El Salvador, suggested that it was unfortunate that people don't realize what it will really be like before they come here; "No le dicen como es, te dicen que vas a ir en un limosín, y uno viene con esa imagen." (*"They don't tell you what it's like, they tell you that you'll go around in a limousine, and so one comes with that idea."*)

Wilma expressed this more directly: "Nos han tomado el pelo, porque vemos que no todo lo que nos dijeron es cierto." (*"They pulled the wool over our eyes, because we see that not everything they told us is true."*) Another suggested one reason for the misperceptions: "La gente de allá piensa que aquí viene la gente a ganar, y si uno va y le dice que no, entonces dicen que uno es egoísta, y no quieren que otra persona venga para acá, y por eso no les contradecimos nada a las personas que están viniendo." (*"People over there think that people come here to make it big, and if you go and tell them no, then they think you're being selfish, that you don't want anyone else to come here, and so we don't contradict them when they're coming here."*)

Cultural Adjustments

"Dondequiera que uno vaya, uno padece y uno sufre, pero aquí creo que es un poquito más." (*"Wherever one goes, one hurts and suffers, but here, I think it's a bit more."*)

This quote summarizes what many participants seemed to feel about their adjustment to life in the United States. They spoke of racism, of the discrimination their children face, of the ways they are treated for being

Latino, for speaking Spanish, for lacking education. Jorge, who had worked as a professional in Mexico, noted that "Cuando uno llega acá, siente uno el cambio, porque en tu país estás acostumbrado a que te toman en cuenta." ("When you get here, you feel the change, because in your country you're accustomed to feeling like you matter.") Nelson, a Guatemalan, spoke of the alienation that the children must feel, growing up in a culture that is not really theirs and not seeing the rich cultural heritage of their parents. For this reason, he argued, it is critical that families share their heritage with their children, "lo cual no cuesta nada" ("which doesn't cost anything"), but which can be so difficult to do in the face of much stronger cultural forces.

Celia suggested that the changes may be even harder on the men than on the women in some ways:

Para los hombres hay mucha dificultad en venir para acá, porque los costumbres de allá son muy diferentes; los costumbren a ser servidos, y se encargaron del trabajo y nosotras de la casa. Pero aquí ya no se puede, porque aquí yo salgo a trabajar, y no se puede servirles a ellos.

(For the men it's hard to come here, because the traditions over there are very different; they're used to being served, and they're in charge of the work, and we're in charge of the house. Here that can't be, because here I go out to work, and you can't be serving them.)

In fact, many of the women found it easier to locate work than did the men, given that in Los Angeles there is a large demand for low-paid, under-the-table female domestic workers and childcare providers. While the women pay a high price by working double or triple shifts, first caring for other people's homes and children, and then their own, the men have also had to change their lifestyles, and many women have found ways to shift the burden of work within the household. Magda, whose husband did work, spoke with some pride about her responsibilities: "Yo tengo que hacer lo de hombre, yo soy la jefa, yo tengo que hablar con los hombres, y hacer todo, porque él llega de un trabajo a otro, y llega fastigiado." (*"I have to do the work of a man, I'm the boss, I have to talk with the other men, and do everything, because he goes from one job to another, and gets home exhausted."*)

Work Experiences

The group spoke of the difficulties of finding work and of the struggles they had gone through in assorted low-paying jobs, mostly in the garment industry or in janitorial work. None had thought it would be so hard to find a decent job:

...porque allá hasta dicen que aquí a la gente Latina hasta le tocan la puerta para que vayan a trabajar...lo cual no es cierto, porque vemos que somos nosotros los que tenemos que tocar las puertas, muchas puertas, para trabajar.

(*...because over there they even say that they come knocking on the doors of Latinos to offer work.. which isn't true, because we see that it's we who have to knock on doors, lots of doors, in order to work.*)

One woman spoke through tears of how difficult it has been for her not to be able to work: "Desde que llegué aquí, me siento inútil, porque aquí para agarrar un trabajo le piden papeles, permiso, requisitos; uno tiene que dar cuenta hasta de lo que comió ayer!" (*"Ever since I got here, I feel useless, because to get a job they ask for papers, permission, prerequisites; one has to account even for what one ate yesterday!"*) This was a woman who worked in all kinds of jobs in Mexico; "No solo lavaba y planchaba, sino más fue a trabajar en construcción, en plomería." (*"I didn't only wash and iron, I went to work in construction, in*

plumbing.") The difficulties of finding and maintaining jobs was central to participants' discussions; notably, very little mention was made of the difficult conditions that existed for those who managed to find work, such as in small, overcrowded sweatshops in which workers receive pay that is well under the minimum wage.

Living Situations

One family addressed the tensions that arise from sharing a tiny apartment with other families: "Por muy bien que uno quiere llevar con los otros, siempre hay problemas." ("*No matter how much one wants to get along, there are always problems.*") They also expressed the relief that came from finding their own place, even though the rent put a strain on the family budget. Wilma began crying as she lamented what she had left behind:

Uno en su tierra tiene un cuarto, puede trabajar un poco más, con o sin estudios; aquí uno no puede ni salir porque le pegan un balazo las pandillas...Aquí vivimos encerrados; los niños llegan de la escuela, y otra vez encerrados. No más tienen un momento en que vienen a jugar en la escuela...Pero le gusta aquí el sueño, verdad, de sacarnos adelante.

(In your own country you can have your own room, you can work more, whether you've been to school or not; here you can't even go out because the gangs will shoot you. We live all closed in here; the children come home from school, and once again, they're closed in. They only have a little time to play when they come to school...But what people like here is the dream, you know, of getting ahead.)

Celia described daily life in her neighborhood when she recounted an incident that happened the night before one of the sessions:

Anoche yo estaba despierta y escuché varios disparos. Como a los cinco minutos llegaron la ambulancia y la policía. Se quedaron un poco de tiempo en este lugar. Yo no ví lo que pasó; pues era muy tarde en la noche, pero puedo imaginar lo que pasó. Pienso que fue problema entre pandilleros. Yo solamente le di gracias a Dios que mis hijos y yo estuvieramos dentro de la casa. Cualquier persona que lea esto pensará que fue sacado de una película del oeste, con buen argumento.

Pero créanlo, que son cosas de gente real.

(Last night I was awake and I heard various shots. About five minutes later an ambulance and the police arrived. They stayed a little while. I didn't see what happened, because it was so late, but I can imagine what went on. I think it was a problem between gangs. I only thank God that my children and I were inside the house. Anyone reading this will think it was taken from a Western movie, with good reason. But believe it, because these things are real.)

Almost all of the adults mentioned the longing their children had for a place to play, for example, or for a pet (disallowed in their apartments). They talked of how their children are bothered by the garbage in the streets, the drug sales they see on the corners, and the local gangs. The parents spoke intensely of their fears for their children growing up in an area of violence, fears of the attraction that gangs might be to their children, fears of not being able to offer their children better alternatives. They looked to the schools to help provide answers, and although in the first few sessions most had only positive things to say about the school, over the course of the six weeks participants seemed gradually to feel safe enough to venture some criticisms and to call on the school to help find solutions to the local problems. One parent wrote an

extended analysis of the local situation, arguing for more connections between the school and the community, for more meaningful parent meetings, and simply for more schools: "para que los niños estén más tiempo en las escuelas" ("*so that the children can spend more time in school*"). This was a sentiment that was shared by most of the parents. School was seen as an important force in their children's lives, and one which they respected, but they considered the current efforts by the school system inadequate to meet the needs of their children.

Hope for the Future

Despite the problems that all participants faced, the families were committed to forging a life here as the only means of providing materially for their children and of offering at least the possibility of something better for their futures. While they felt great nostalgia for their home countries, most felt that they could not return, and they looked instead for ways to make their children's lives, if not their own, safer and more hopeful here. They spoke of the need for more space and for open dialogue of the type that ensued during the course of this program.

One of the paraprofessionals who participated in the workshops spoke eloquently about what these sessions meant to him:

Nosotros somos los doctores de nosotros mismos. El haber expresado sin temor nuestras experiencias, está iluminando el camino. Lo que platicábamos nosotros se puede escribir en dos o tres libros. Tuvimos unas experiencias increíbles, algunos muy tristes, otras chistosas, y estoy maravillado, sinceramente. Porque especialmente en este tiempo, toda la raza, de todos los colores, ahorita la compartimos y nos entendimos. La comunicación es lo principal.

(We are our own doctors. The fact that we have talked about our experiences without fear, is illuminating the path. The things that we have talked about could fill two or three books. We have had incredible experiences, some very sad, others funny, and I am sincerely amazed. Because especially in these times, the whole race, of all colors, right now we have shared and understood each other. Communication is the key.)

Disseminating the Stories

When the project ended, a production team was formed to type the stories and produce them in book form. Our original aim was to involve families in the editing and lay out, but this was not achieved because none of the organizers of the project were able to sustain the time commitment that such an endeavor would have required. Instead, the stories were typed and edited by volunteers, with the book finally going to press the following year. When it was released, the families gathered at the school for a reunion meeting and a book signing, and each family took home a copy to read with their friends and neighbors.

The book was then distributed to local libraries and community organizations and to classrooms at the school. A brief teacher's guide was developed with suggestions for going into, through, and beyond this text and for incorporating it into social science and literature curricula. The book is now being used in preservice training classes and in teacher workshops in the greater Los Angeles area as a means of familiarizing teachers with the experiences of immigrant families and of highlighting some of the communities' funds of knowledge (Moll, 1992), with teachers encouraged to build on community members' background experiences and to incorporate families' knowledge into their classroom programs.

Proceeds from the book are also being used to support a Parents' Center that opened at the school last year.

The center was formed after a group of parents who had participated in the literacy program lobbied the school for more formal, sustained, and supported spaces for meeting with each other. The school responded to the call, setting aside two classrooms for the center, and securing funding for ESL and other adult classes. This was an unforeseen effect of the literacy project.

Finally, we are striving to disseminate the families' stories on a wider scale through articles such as this one. Given the attacks on immigration that mark the 1990s, and the widespread misperceptions or stereotyped assumptions that fuel those attacks, it is important to publish information about immigrants' actual living conditions and to incorporate the perspectives of immigrants themselves into the national debate. Clearly, the stories that were told in this family literacy program represent only sixteen sets of experiences in this country, and while the words of these participants allow a window into the immigration experience, many other families have stories to tell, opinions to express, and perspectives to share. Family literacy programs that serve immigrant communities can serve as one vehicle for achieving this; in the process of cultivating literacy, immigrant families can share their own unique stories with each other, with their children, and with the world around them.

References

Anderson, A.B., & Stokes, S.J. (1984). Social and institutional influences on the development and practice of literacy. In G. Hillel, A. Oberg, & F. Smith (Eds.) *Awakening to literacy*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

¡Aquí vivimos! (1993). Voces de familias mexicanas y centroamericanas en la ciudad de Los Angeles. Los Angeles, CA: ¡Aquí Vivimos! Book Project.

Chinchilla, N., Hamilton, N., & Loucky, J. (1992). *Central Americans in Los Angeles: An immigrant community in transition*. Unpublished paper.

Edelsky, C., Altwerger, B., & Flores, B. (1991). *Whole language: What's the difference?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogía del oprimido*. México, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Heath, S. B. (1993). *Ways with words*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kucer, S.B. (1991). *Authenticity as the basis for instruction*. Unpublished paper.

Moll, L.C. (1992). Bilingual classrooms and community analysis. *Educational Researcher*, 21, pp. 20-24.

Taylor, D., & Dorsey-Gaines, C. (1988). *Growing up literate: Learning from inner-city families*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Footnotes

1 Pseudonyms have been used for the school and the participants.

2 The project had a small budget for materials, supplies, and the production of the anthology, funded by a small grant from the Los Angeles Educational Partnership program. The teachers who initiated the project also secured the grant.

[Return to JEILMS v.16 Table of Contents](#)

The HTML version of this document was prepared by NCBE and posted to the web with the permission of the author/publisher.

[go to HOME PAGE](#)

www.ncela.gwu.edu

Central American mothers participating in the caravan make and offering at a cross in memory of the migrants. Photo by Mario Marlo from @Somoselmedio, under Creative Commons license (CC BY-NC-SA 3.0). Marcela Salas Cassani, in the blog Desinformemonos [es], writes the success story of this year's caravan. The caravan of Central American mothers "Releasing Hope" which is scheduled to visit 15 states of the Mexican Republic in 20 days, in order to locate missing migrants en route to the United States, has begun to bring results. So far, four people have been reunited with their families: Max Funes, Marvin Celaya, Gabriel Salmerán y Silverio Mateo. Mother participating in the caravan stands in front of photos of missing migrants.