Contradictions & Cultural Crafting:
Latino Immigrant Parents in a Preschool Popular Education Program

Using ritual analysis (Frake, 1964) and de Certeau’s (1984) “consumers of culture” theory, this paper analyzes how participants in a popular education program grapple with contradictions in pursuit of “empowerment” and “kindergarten-ready.”

Methods: For two years with my young son, I have been a participant observer in over 120 ¡Vamos al kinder! (Let’s go to kindergarten!) parent workshops, conducting interviews, and collecting documents. ¡Vamos al kinder!1 is for low-income, Spanish-speaking Latino children ages 3- to 5-years-old and their parents in a mid-size city in Oregon. While, children attend preschool classes, parents attend weekly workshops. Workshop goals include: 1. Affirm Latino parent knowledge; 2. Educate parents to prepare children for kindergarten; 3. Build parents’ leadership skills.

Analysis & Findings: This paper examines ¡Vamos al kinder!’s workshop structure through ritual analysis that considers how rituals deliver lessons and help individuals position themselves (Frake, 1964). I found facilitators and parents engage in practical and theoretical contradictions. Although enacted with respeto (respect) and cariño (affection), the program draws on opposing theories about parents’ school roles:

- Parents as “first teachers,” responsible for preparing children to be “kindergarten-ready,” originating from child development theories and often espousing deficit views of families.

These contradictions present practical challenges for egalitarian relationships between facilitators and parents. Yet, they are not simply reproducing hierarchies, but dynamically co-constructing what it means to parent in the US. They all tinker with ideas and representations “within the dominant cultural economy [adapting them] to their own interest and their own rules” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xiv). Together they engage in a complex, messy project of crafting hybrid cultural spaces.

(Abstract: 300 words, not including title)

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1 All names have been changed to protect the identities of research participants.