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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.
- Parents as “agents for change,” responsible for fighting US school inequalities, influenced by Freire (1970) and valuing families’ experiences (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013).

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)

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