

2014

# Through a Critical Sociocultural Lens: Parents' Perspectives OF An Early Childhood Program In Guatemala

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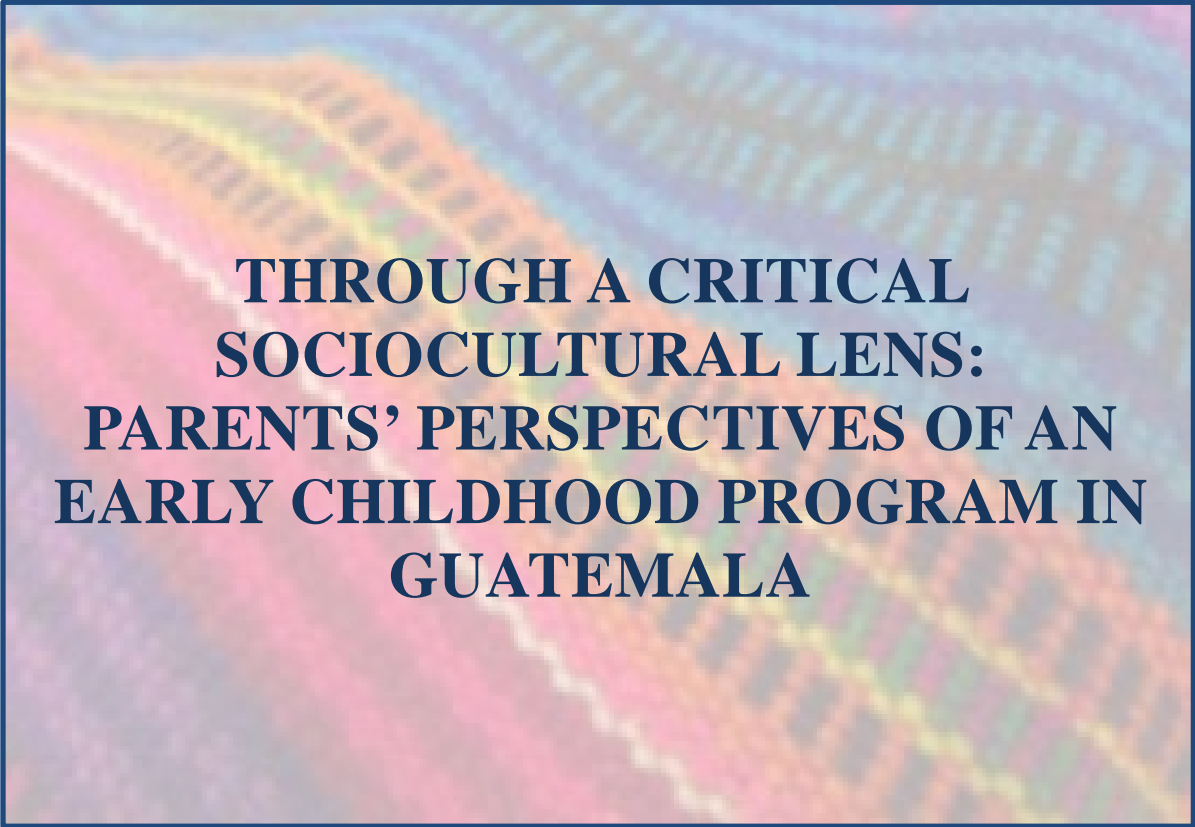
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Stempfelet, Yaëlle, "Through a Critical Sociocultural Lens: Parents' Perspectives OF An Early Childhood Program In Guatemala" (2014). *Master's Capstone Projects*. 33.

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**THROUGH A CRITICAL  
SOCIOCULTURAL LENS:  
PARENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF AN  
EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM IN  
GUATEMALA**

Yaëlle Stempfelet, M.Ed Candidate  
Master's Project

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## Abstract

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The present case study is on an Early Childhood program in Guatemala based on participant parents' feedback. The Early Childhood program is non-formal, focuses on emergent literacy and nutrition, and takes place in a community-run library in a poor, semi-rural town in the mountainous regions of Quiche, Guatemala. The library was set up by a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) that works in Guatemala as well as another neighboring country.

Using a critical sociocultural lens, this study assumes that the parents' perceptions reflect the state of the program and that involving their feedback through this research will ultimately help to bolster the program as well as assure its relevance to the community. The results of this study will contribute to the process of building and improving upon the Early Childhood program as the program model is being expanded to all the libraries in the NGO's network across Guatemala and Honduras.

The research process for this case study consists of mixed methods but was largely qualitative. Data was collected through a descriptive survey, interviews with parents, librarians, and NGO staff, as well as through observations of the EC program sessions. The data collected reflects the community of parents' perspectives on the contributing factors to the program's success as well as what the community feels could be improved upon. My role as an external research is also considered and discussed at length.

This study finds that school readiness and increased confidence and sociability were some of the largest benefits of the program as expressed by the parents. The parents also described changes in dynamics in their families including spending more time engaged in activities such as those learned in the Early Childhood program. In order to ensure this program's cultural relevance to the local communities in which it operates, this study also questions the ways in which the program is influencing this community, including local conceptualizations of Early Childhood as well as unintended impacts the program may be having. These considerations are important for the program to best serve the community of parents and direct beneficiaries in order to ensure the Early Childhood program meets the parent community's needs and desires and respects the cultural values of the community itself.

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## I. Introduction

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It is widely recognized that Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) has important positive and lasting effects on individuals, communities and greater society, particularly in under-served contexts (UNICEF, 2012; Nores & Barnett, 2010; Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Burger, 2009; Engle et al. 2007). From long term health, cognitive and socio-emotional benefits to economic benefits, the importance of the earliest years of life has become an internationally recognized issue from the policy talks of nationalized universal preschool, to the United Nations creation of an ECD Peace Consortium (UNICEF, 2013). ECED is on the agenda as part of the post-2015 development agenda (UNICEF, n.d.).

Working with parents and caregivers is a critical part of the ECED discussion. Programs working towards quality and sustainable ECED interventions must involve those primarily responsible for those children in culturally-relevant ways. ECED and parental education go hand in hand.

Because of the exceptionally strong influence of early experiences on brain architecture, the first years of life are a time of tremendous opportunity and equally great vulnerability. Optimal brain development requires a stimulating environment, adequate nutrients and social interaction with attentive caregivers (UNICEF, 2012).

There are many initiatives worldwide attempting to take the above mentioned principles and research and remake them to local communities and needs. This Master's Project is about one such program. The present case study is about an Early Childhood (EC) program in Guatemala based on participant parents' feedback. The EC program is non-formal, focuses on emergent literacy and nutrition, and takes place in a community-run library in a poor, semi-rural town in the mountainous regions of Quiche, Guatemala. The library was set up by an NGO that works in Guatemala as well as another neighboring country.

Using a critical sociocultural lens, this study assumes that the parents' perceptions reflect the state of the program and involving their feedback through this research will ultimately help to bolster the program as well as assure its relevance to the community. The results of this study

will contribute to the process of building and improving upon the EC program as the program model is being expanded to all the libraries in the NGO's network across Guatemala and Honduras. The study will also help ensure that the program remains relevant to the local contexts, and uses community-based resources to meet community needs.

The research process for this case study consists of mixed methods but was largely qualitative. Data was collected through a descriptive survey, interviews with parents, librarians, and NGO staff, as well as through observations of the EC program sessions. The data collected reflects the community of parents' perspectives of the contributing factors to the program's success as well as what the community feels could be improved upon. My role as an external researcher is also considered and discussed at length in Chapter IV.

## **Research Questions**

The research questions and sub-questions for this study are as follows:

- ✚ What are parents' perceptions of the Early Childhood Literacy and Nutrition (ECLN) program?
  - How do parents conceptualize Early Childhood Education and Development?
  - What are the perceived benefits of this program for the parents and their children?
  - How can parents' perceptions inform the program and its objective?

I will also attempt to address my role as an external researcher as well as how the parents' feedback can be used to better understand and inform the ECLN program.

## **Assumptions & Beliefs**

Why Early Childhood? To answer this question I will address a few of my personal assumptions and beliefs about Early Childhood:

The first five years of life, particularly the first three, are a critical time in human development (Berk, 2012). Although there are cultural and contextual variations in human development in terms of how and when certain skills and abilities are learned and developed, the early years

universally provide an important opportunity for long-term healthy growth (Berk, 2012).

While I believe the early years are universally important, I don't subscribe to a Universalist model of early childhood development. Childhood is both a biological and cultural process (Berk, 2012). I believe therefore that quality EC interventions are culturally and locally adapted and relevant. I define quality as being culturally-appropriate and both building upon existing community practices and serving the needs of the community. As Modica et al. (2010) explain, "Definitions of quality in education vary throughout the world. In developing countries, quality education depends upon relevance: family participation, program ownership and guidance, and the use of local resources (human, natural, and cultural) must all be relevant within context of a given community" (Peralta 2008).

I believe that quality and culturally relevant Early Childhood interventions can be greatly beneficial to communities, including under-served communities such as that of this case study. As cited in the introduction, there is ample research and evidence that EC interventions of all types (non-formal, informal, formal, health, education, social, etc.) can build upon community practices and provide benefits for health, economic, and other well-being factors (UNICEF, 2012; Nores & Barnett, 2010; Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007; Burger, 2009; Engle et al. 2007).

Finally, parental involvement and buy-in is essential to a quality ECED program or intervention. Understanding parents' needs and desires can improve EC interventions, as with this case study. Parents' feedback will be discussed in terms of providing perspective on community impacts and needs. This information can be taken into account to create a better informed EC program.

### **Conceptual Framework and Scope**

I use a critical sociocultural lens throughout this research which combines theories from cultural studies and sociocultural theories of development to think critically and reflexively beyond a Western-centric perspective for a more culturally nuanced understanding of the parents' experiences and feedback. For example I use Hall, Bourdieu, and Rogoff. Through this lens I



assume that, as Rogoff (2003) says,

The cultural-historical approach assumes the individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, its social and cultural-historical context. In the emerging sociocultural perspective, culture is not an entity that influences individuals. Instead, people contribute to the creation of cultural processes and cultural processes contribute to the creation of people (p. 51).

Underlying this approach is the importance of agency. People are active participants in culture, not passive recipients of this. The parents of this study as agents will be discussed later.

The appeal of using a critical sociocultural theoretical lens for analyzing this program is that the theory takes into account cultural and historical contexts, attempting to moderate my Western-centric model of thought while analyzing the parent's feedback on the program as well as my role in the research process. It allows for a more culturally-sensitive and nuanced understanding of the parents' perceptions, child development in general, down to the specific activities chosen for the curriculum. As Rogoff (2003) points out, "human development is a cultural process" (p.3) and "changes in cognition vary from culture to culture and cultures" (Berk citing Rogoff, 2012, p.25). I believe a critical sociocultural development theory helps allow for a more flexible understanding of this program within the context of its community's culture and its children's developmental needs. Also, I believe it is imperative in development work to remain reflexive and mindful of the various power dimensions and potential cultural dynamics at play in research. I will discuss this in depth when I discuss my own positionality and role as an external researcher in this study.

While the EC program in question provides both pre-literacy skill training and basic nutrition, this study focuses more heavily on the pre and emergent literacy aspect of the program due to my own limited knowledge of EC health issues. Finally, I also recognize that Guatemala contains many cultures and that there is great variation among its numerous Mayan populations.

## **Definitions**

There are many acronyms and terms for describing education and development of young children (ECED, ECD, ECE, ECCD, etc.). I use the acronym EC when referring to Early Childhood and ECED for Early Childhood Education and Development in general. I will use the

acronym ECLN (Early Childhood Literacy and Nutrition) throughout this document when referring to the program being studied.

Early childhood is most often defined, as in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child, as the period between birth and age eight (UNICEF, n.d). For the present research, when I refer to ECE, I am specifying early childhood education, development, stimulation and care as birth through age five, prior to the start of formal schooling in Guatemala at age six. The ECLN program this study refers to is for children under the age of five. I will refer to early literacy to encompass the pre and emergent literacy focus of this program.

Finally, I will discuss various definitions of culture in Chapter IV.

## **Outline**

I begin this paper by introducing the research topic, questions and by presenting my conceptual framework in Chapter I. I then frame the topic with an overview of relevant literature in Chapter II, followed by a discussion of the context of this study in Chapter III. Chapter IV is a presentation of the methods used to conduct this research. Here I include a discussion of my positionality and role as an external researcher and its relevance to this work. In Chapter V, I outline the results and themes which emerged from the data collection, followed by a discussion of these findings and recommendations in Chapter VI and conclusions in Chapter VII. Finally, the full reference list and relevant appendices can be found at the end of this paper.

## II. Literature Reviewed: Guatemala & ECED

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### Guatemala background

The Central American country Guatemala is a diverse and dynamic country in terms of its landscapes, microclimates and populations. It is a country accented by volcanos, tropical forests and arid lands. The country has 14.3 million people and while Spanish is the official language, there are 23 other officially recognized Amerindian languages including Quiche, Cakchiquel and Garifuna (Naciones Unidas, n.d.). It has one of the largest proportions of indigenous populations in Latin America of whom 43% speak an indigenous language and who are located predominantly in rural areas (McEwan & Throwbridge, 2007, p.63). Guatemala is the most highly populated country in Central America, with the highest fertility rates in Latin America. More than half of the population is under the age of 19 making it the youngest country in Latin America. The country is only slightly smaller than the state of Tennessee in the United States (The World Factbook – Guatemala, n.d).

According to the Global Education Fund, only three out of every ten Guatemalans graduate from sixth grade. Although enrollment in primary school is 96% (Global Education Fund, n.d.), completion rate is low. Studies have shown that around 16 per cent of children enrolled in primary school completed it within six years and less than 50 per cent completed it within 10 years, although enrollment in primary school is high (Stith et al. citing Gorman & Pollitt, 2003, p.4). Nearly 32% of the country's population is illiterate, with a 60% rate in the indigenous population. These indicators have been linked to a number of issues including a low quality of education due poor teacher training, inappropriate pedagogy for rural and indigenous children, and general lack of resources (Global Education Fund, n.d.). Socioeconomic status at birth is also associated with school attainment and cognition, where “poor children consistently had considerable developmental deficits compared with more affluent children. Thus poverty can be used as an indicator of poor development” (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007, p. 64). However how cognition is understood and measured in these studies may be problematic especially

when considering sociocultural differences in human development and how those differences are accounted for in the research.

Guatemala has a long history of colonization and suffered a 36-year civil war from 1960 to 1996 during which the country's indigenous communities were disproportionately affected suffering enormous persecution from the right-wing military governments, particularly in the Guatemalan highlands. This history remains ever present as seen with the trial of General Rios Montt, accused of genocide against the Maya of the Ixil region, which gained international press coverage last year (Malkin,2013).

### **Guatemala – Early Childhood and Nutrition**

Much of the research on children under the formal school-age in Guatemala addresses health and nutrition issues and their effects on child development (Ramakrishnan et al., 1999; Freeman et al. 1977; Maluccio et al., 2009). For example, in Guatemala, 49% of the population ages zero to five, between 2000 and 2007, was reported to suffer from stunting (USAID, 2011, p.10). A lower education level was also associated with stunted boys in Guatemala (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007, p.63). Before reviewing this research, it is worth noting, particularly keeping in mind critical sociocultural lens, that the definition of “cognition” and how it is measured in these studies can be problematic. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to do so therefore I will merely mention the point has not gone un-noticed.

The issue of malnutrition is often addressed through EC and maternal nutritional supplementation intervention programs. In a study by Engle et al. (2007), the authors stated that in Guatemala “supplementation before age 3 years showed beneficial effects on schooling, reading, and intelligence tests during adulthood (25–42 years)” (p.2). There is also research on the relationships between malnutrition, physical and cognitive development, and “preschool cognitive composites”. This study Stith et al., 2003, found,

Results indicate that growth, respiratory illness, paternal occupation, maternal schooling, home stimulation, house quality, and the two preschool cognitive composites were associated with educational attainment [...]. Taller children and those with a lower percentage of respiratory illness completed more years of school. Similarly, children of fathers with higher occupational status, of mothers with more years of schooling, from homes of better quality, and who had higher levels of home stimulation reported completing more years of school. Finally, children with higher performance on the two cognitive composites also reported higher grade attainment (p.7).

In the same study, while risk exposure was same for girls and boys, girls were much less likely to pursue secondary education at a rate of 27 per cent, as compared to boys at 40 per cent (Stith et al., 2003, p.8).

Many EC programs in Guatemala thus have a nutritional component such as the ECLN program. There is evidence of the positive effects of combining EC and nutrition. Engle et al. (2007) explain that “Myers reviewed the effects of nutrition and child development programmes on school progress (repetition, promotion, and dropout) in developing countries before 1990. Three of the four nutrition programmes, and six of the nine programmes with schooling data, showed significant effects of early intervention, particularly for the most disadvantaged” (Engle et al., 2007, p.3)

## **Guatemala – Early Childhood and Education**

Education is compulsory in Guatemala for children seven to 15 years of age. Pre-primary education refers to education for children between the ages of four and six. There is also ‘*nivel inicial*’ which refers to education for infants and toddlers ages one to three (UNESCO, 2006).

Guatemala has a *Curriculum National Base* (National Curriculum) for both age levels.

Guatemala has a variety of EC interventions, some public, some private and still others provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to UNESCO, 2006, some of these include:

Special projects and programs aiming at expanding or improving ECCE:

- Community preschool education readiness centres (CENACEP).
- Integrated Provision Project for children aged zero to six (PAIN).
- Educate me Hand-in-Hand non-institution-based programme.
- Take my Hand programme.<sup>1</sup>

Programmes run by government institutions

- Integrated Provision Programme of the Social Welfare Secretariat of the Office of the President of the Republic (SBS).
- Community homes programme of the Social Works Office of the Wife of the President (SOSEP).

Private sector

- Child Protection Society.
- Day care centres.
- Private schools.

Others

- Centres run by NGOs.

According to a USAID (2011) report, the percentage of children matriculated in pre-primary programs in Guatemala is 1.6% for ‘nivel initial’<sup>2</sup> and 45% for ‘nivel pre-primaria’<sup>3</sup> (USAID 2011 citing DIPLAN 2010). The Ministry of Education reported in 2006 that 79.9% of children entering primary school had preschool experience in 2003-2004 (UNESCO, 2006). These statistics indicate some discrepancies in the information on the number of children being served in pre-school programs.

While there are a number of EC initiatives around the country, children in rural areas typically have less access to pre-primary education program (USAID, 2011). Overall, indigenous and rural populations are at a disadvantage on almost all development indicators. For example, a 2000 household survey found that 79% of the indigenous population fell below the poverty line, compared to the 42% of the nonindigenous population (McEwan & Throwbridge, 2007, p.61). In terms of education, McEwan & Throwbridge (2007) report,

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<sup>1</sup> •Community preschool education readiness centres (CENACEP) cater to children aged six who are about to enter primary education. •The Integrated Provision Project (PAIN) offers coverage for children aged zero to six and their families. •The Educate me Hand-in-Hand non-institution-based programme provides coverage for children aged zero to six and their families. •The Take my Hand programme provides coverage for children aged zero to six through family-based literacy strategies. (Source: UNESCO, 2006, ECCE)

<sup>2</sup> Nivel initial – educational program for children under age 4

<sup>3</sup> Nivel pre-primaria – children ages 4, 5, 6

First, indigenous parents in Guatemala and other Latin American countries have less schooling and lower incomes, two indicators of the quality of the educational environment in the home (Hernandez-Zavala et al., 2006; Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 1994; Hall and Patrinos, 2006). Second, indigenous families attend schools with fewer instructional materials, lower-quality infrastructure, and less qualified teachers (Hernandez- Zavala et al., 2006; World Bank, 2004). Third, schools rarely address linguistic diversity among indigenous children, creating challenges for indigenous children whose dominant language is not Spanish” (p.62)

One of the most noteworthy statistics regarding the importance and lack of adequate ECED is the rates of failure and drop outs of first grade. USAID (2004) reported that between 1999 and 2004 nearly 50% of students failed first grade (p.2). In addition, in 2000 44% of indigenous children enrolled in first grade, compared to 31% of enrolled nonindigenous children, dropped out of school during their first grade year (Shapiro, 2006, p. 133). Understanding the long-term repercussions of these rates requires further research. Failure rates and school drop-out is disproportionately higher among indigenous populations as opposed to nonindigenous populations:

In 2000, indigenous adults had an average of 2.5 years of schooling, compared to 5.7 among nonindigenous adults (Shapiro, 2006). The inequities persist among younger cohorts. Among children ages 7–16, 77% of nonindigenous children attend school, compared to 63% of indigenous children (McEwan & Throwbridge, 2007, p.63).

In Guatemala, it was found that “preschool cognitive ability predicted children’s enrolment in secondary school and achievement scores in adolescence” (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007, p. 61). Again the emphasis on cognitive ability in this research, how it is defined, and the lack of mention of socio-cultural factors that may influence these study results are worth noting. That said, in a country which suffers high levels of poverty, the correlations between EC interventions, more formal schooling and later economic gains is also important to note. Engle et al. (2007) estimate that preschool participation contributes about 5 to 10 per cent in lifetime income from labor in both Brazil and Guatemala (p. 10).

## Guatemalan Mayan Parenting and Early Childhood Practices and Norms

For the purpose of this research project some understanding of existing research on Guatemalan, specifically Mayan parenting practices and norms with young children is important, however, I found very little research on this subject. Rogoff's (2003) book *The Cultural Nature of Child Development* outlines much of her own research with a Mayan community in Guatemala. It is important to note that there exist significant variations among Mayan communities and I do not wish to homogenize Guatemalan Mayan parenting. However, I will review some of Rogoff's research to provide a basis for understanding some childrearing norms in a Guatemalan Mayan community that may be present in other Mayan communities such as the one of this study. I have organized the information into a few categories of parenting practices.

### *Learning through cultural "guided participation"*

In one Mayan community in Guatemala, parents believe their children learn by observing others and practicing with some guidance by older sibling and adults. For example, "Guatemalan Mayan mothers reported that their children learned to walk and talk by watching others or with encouragement; few reported teaching the children to help them achieve these milestones" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 160).

Rogoff refers to the process of young children learning from others with more experience as 'guided participation' (Berk citing Rogoff, 2012, p.266). There are many examples of the guided participation of young children as learning. For example, "Mayan mothers from Guatemala assist their daughters in learning to weave by segmenting the process into steps, providing guidance in the context of joint participation, and adjusting the daughter's participation in weaving according to her increasing skill and interest (Rogoff, 1986)" (Rogoff citing Rogoff, p. 69).

Young children, specifically girls, begin contributing to work around the house around the age of four. Such tasks include caring for infants, cooking and other work (Rogoff, 1978, Rogoff, 2003, p. 168). In addition, Rogoff (2003) notes that "When a toddler is playing, Mayan mothers



reported, it is time for a mother to get her work done (Rogoff citing Rogoff and Mosier, p.121). These examples indicate that Mayan parents assume certain abilities in young children, in terms of their ability to take on tasks and play independently.

### *Community-oriented child-rearing*

Also related to the Mayan idea of learning through cultural and guided participation is the sense of community-oriented child-rearing. Child-rearing is a shared endeavor. This provides ample learning opportunities for young children. Rogoff (2003) explains,

If responsibility for caregiving is widely shared by a community, even very young children may have opportunities to engage in and observe community activities more broadly than if their care is delegated to an adult in an isolated household or an institution specializing in child care. For example [...] 3- to 5-year-old children largely took care of themselves, puttering around the neighborhood in small groups rather than having an adult caregiver and being restricted to the home (Mosier & Rogoff, 2002). If help was needed, nearby older children or adults assisted the children. Under such circumstances, children have the freedom to watch ongoing community activities and to engage in them according to their interest and emerging skills (p. 132).

Part of this community-orientated approach to child rearing is mothers and caretakers take direct care of their children as well as indirectly by ensuring other community members also care for their children and managing that support. For example, Rogoff describes a home observations describing, “when Mayan mothers were asked to help their toddlers operate novel objects, they sometimes recruited one of their older children to play with the toddler. The mothers supervised the sibling and sometimes directed the sibling’s interactions with the toddler, but seldom entered into a playmate role themselves with the toddler” (Rogoff, 2003, p. 122). This example also speaks to guided participation in which the toddler but also the siblings learn by doing while receiving guidance from a more knowledgeable adult. Not surprisingly, children’s social groups are seen to be largely of mixed ages (Rogoff citing Angelillo, Rogoff, & Morelli, 2003, p. 125).

Finally, this community-oriented child rearing can be understood in terms of how social organizations in this Guatemalan Mayan community are organized; mainly large groups of people interacting in a circle. These social circles consist of “complex multidirectional shared

engagements” (Chavajay, 1993; Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002). Small children, notably toddlers, considered to be members of this group as well as the larger community, and thus are integrated in them, rather than primarily receiving direct, one-on-one attention (Rogoff et al., 1993).

### *Importance of self-determination*

Child-rearing and other activities are collective in nature among this Mayan community yet freedom of choice and of self-determination is also valued. This affects how young children are treated by their adult caretakers. Rogoff compares the way Mayan mothers respond to their toddler’s demand, as compared to middle-class European American mothers:

Individual autonomy is respected with Mayan infants because it is inappropriate to go against other people’s self-determination, even if they themselves do not understand how to act in a responsible interdependent way. For example, Mayan mothers were much less likely than middle-class European American mothers to try to overrule toddlers’ wishes by insisting on their own way (even though the Mayan toddlers were twice as likely to refuse or insist on their own way; Rogoff et al., 1993). Middle-class European American mothers more often tried to supersede the children’s will, trying to force the children to follow the mother’s agenda. By the standards of the Mayan community, forcing amounts to lack of respect for the children’s autonomy (Rogoff, 2003, p. 203).

Instead, Guatemala Mayan parents use other strategies with their toddlers including distracting with promises or threatening (without necessarily carrying them out) because forcing a child to do something against their will is considered a violation of their individual autonomy and very young children are not yet considered able to understand and respect group norms. They are not considered yet able to cooperate as a group member. However, Rogoff (2003) notes that by age three to five, Mayan children have learned to collaborate in a group and respect individual self-determination in their communities. This also affects how children of varying ages treat each other, including siblings. For example,

In the Mayan approach, allowing toddlers not to follow the rules is based on the idea that their will should be given respect like that of any other person. Between the ages of 2 and 3, the age at which a new sibling is often born into the family, Mayan children are regarded as beginning to understand how to cooperate with the group. Then they change status from babies who have unchallenged access to

what they want, to people who understand how to cooperate and do not insist on access. They can then respect the wishes of their new little sibling (Rogoff, 2003, p. 165-166).

*Other examples of conceptualization of toddlerhood:*

The ways in which Mayan mothers interact with their toddlers in the presence of other adults provides further insight into the dynamics between parent and child in a social setting. Mayan mothers in a particular community in Guatemala continued to provide their toddlers with attention while they interact with other adults. This is important to consider when thinking about the ECLN program as it involves both parents and their young children in a group setting. Rogoff (2003) compares this dynamic with middle-class parenting in the United States,

Middle-class U.S. toddlers more frequently interrupted adult activity than did Mayan toddlers, perhaps because the middle-class mothers were less likely to attend to subtle bids for attention during their other ongoing activity (Rogoff et al., 1993). When engaged with other adults, the U.S. middle-class mothers often ceased interacting with their children. In contrast, the Mayan mothers maintained their supportive and attentive assistance to the children even when interacting with other adults. Thus, when middle-class U.S. mothers were involved in adult activities, toddlers may have had to resort to strong means to get attention, whereas Mayan toddlers received attention as a matter of course even while the mothers were engaged with adult activities (p.145).

While this is only a brief overview of Rogoff's work, I think it is helpful to provide some insight into Mayan parenting and other cultural norms. I will use some of this information in my discussion of the parent's perceptions of the ECLN program in Chapter VII.

### III. Case Study Context

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#### Characteristics of Quiche and the municipality

The ECLN program is held in a community library located in a municipal semirural town in the mountainous Quiche region of Guatemala. The Quiche region has a 72% rural population, 90% of which is Mayan indigenous (UNDP, 2011). Infant mortality rates under 12 months of age is 40% and for children under five years old is 63% (compared to 34% and 45% nation-wide). The rate of chronic (size per age) malnutrition in the region is 72.2% (UNDP, 2011).

The municipality where the community library is located has a population of about 26,000 people (UNDP, 2011), with a 97% Mayan indigenous population and 59% of the population between the ages zero and 19 years old. The municipality has a 65% poverty rate (SEGEPLAN, n.d.) and a 57.8% literacy rate (UNDP, 2011). According to the Guatemalan Ministry of Education, the rate of enrollment for the pre-primary level<sup>4</sup> in 2012 for children five and six years old for the Quiche region was 29.3%, compared to the national rate of 44.9%. The municipality in question has a 34.2% enrollment rate in preprimary programs (MINEDUC, n.d.). Parents participating in the library program, however, claim there are no preprimary programs in their community. This discrepancy could be due to faulty records on behalf of the Ministry of Education, or lack of knowledge from the community. The issue requires further inquiry.

#### Community Library History

The community library was founded in 2005 (NGO source) with the help of an NGO that serves libraries across Guatemala and Honduras. Community libraries in the NGO's network go through a process in order to be selected by the NGO to receive a library. Communities submit proposals to the NGO which has defined certain terms and conditions for starting a library. The municipality must provide and pay for a space as well as the librarian's salary. Once a community is chosen, the NGO then helps establish the library by working with the municipality,

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<sup>4</sup>  $TNC = \frac{1e}{Pe} \times 100$  (1e = enrolled in appropriate age level, Pe = population age at appropriate level)

populating the library with books and other resources such as computers and internet, and then by providing continuous professional development to the library staff.

The community library in this case study is located in the town's central square opposite the church providing a splash of color to offset the cement colored square. The library has one full time librarian and one full time Program Officer (PO) who is supporting the expansion of the ECED program to the other libraries in the NGOs network. In 2012, the ECED program served a total of 250 parents or around 22-25 per week (NGO, n.d.). The program is free and voluntary therefore there is turnover in the parent community attending the program. It provides books and resources ranging from children's literature to encyclopedias, and four computers with internet access. The walls are decorated with maps and other various educational resources, as well as handmade welcome signs and other messages.

In addition to functioning similarly to a public library, there are four programs run out of the community library targeting different age groups. There is the "Estimulación Temprana a la Lectura y Nutrición" program (that I am referring to as the ECLN program) and three reading-based programs targeting primary-school aged children, teenagers and adults. Engle et al., 2007 define early childhood stimulation as occurring "through responsive and increasingly complex developmentally appropriate interactions (matched to the child's emerging abilities) between caregivers and children that enhance child development" (p.2). This definition accurately describes what the ECLN program is attempting to do. One of the goals of the ECLN program is that it provides a basis from which children who will continue on through to the next age-appropriate program in the library (Source: NGO).

### **Early Childhood Literacy and Nutrition Program**

The ECLN program was originally introduced in 2008 when the NGO contracted an American consultant to create an EC curriculum and training focused on pre/emergent literacy and for the librarians in the NGO's network. According to the NGO, they soon after suffered a funding crisis and were only able to provide very limited follow-up for the training in the form of professional development (conversation with NGO, date). The majority of the librarians who were trained did not implement the program in their libraries with the exception of three or four, including the EC

program of this case study. The Quiche community library's EC program has become the model for the EC program within the NGO's network of libraries.

The library staff has been involved with this program since its inception six years ago. The program targets pregnant couples to parents with children aged five, prior to when children start formal schooling in Guatemala at age six. It is a non-formal EC program focusing only on pre/emergent literacy skills and basic nutrition. The nutrition component was introduced about two years ago as a response to problems of malnutrition in Guatemala and Honduras and the evidence of the benefits of good early basic nutrition in these communities such as that outlined in the previous chapter.

## IV. Methods

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### Introduction

I was introduced to this program through a friend who served on the Board of Directors. She approached me in 2013 as she was familiar with my professional and graduate work in Early Childhood as well as my previous work as a Montessori pre-school manager. She suggested I study the ECLN program at this community library which the NGO needed and use the study for my Masters project. I then spoke with a NGO staff person to find out more information about the program and ensure I would be a good fit for the position. We agreed I would implement the research and data collection in the summer of 2013.

The first and second week, my friend and Board Member, who helps fund the program, drove me to the program and then back to Antigua where I was residing. She introduced me to the Librarians and the mothers recognized her and knew her by name due to her involvement in supporting the library.

Over the course of five weeks, one day per week I left Antigua and drove three hours to the library for an 11am arrival. First I would meet with the head Librarian from 11am to about 12:30pm. The library closes between 12 and 2pm and both the Librarians have this time to go home and make lunch for their families. During this time, I would eat lunch and use the quiet of the library to take notes from my meeting with the Program Officer, write questions and plan any information I was providing for the day. Later, I would observe the ECLN session for that day. On days when interviews were scheduled, I would conduct them before the ECLN program which ended around 4:30pm. I would drive back to Antigua after the session.

### Approach & Data Collection:

For this study I used a mixed methods approach, using primarily qualitative research supplemented by a survey. NGO staff and the librarians reviewed and approved all of the data

collection tools used.

Data sources and collection can be seen in the following table:

<b>Table 1. DATA COLLECTION TOOLS</b>			
<b>Survey</b>	<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Observations</b>	<b>Document review</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>18 surveys - Respondents are parents who attend the ECLN program.</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>5 formal interviews with parents</b> (1 couple [mother and father], 3 mothers);</li> <li>• <b>1 formal interview with librarian;</b></li> <li>• <b>1 formal interview with NGO staff member;</b></li> <li>• <b>4 meetings with Program’s Officer;</b></li> <li>• <b>Informal conversations before and during EC sessions with mothers</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>6 hours of EC sessions</b></li> <li>• <b>24 hours in library total</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Curriculum guide</b></li> <li>• <b>Description of program</b></li> <li>• <b>Website</b></li> </ul>

### **Descriptive Survey**

Based on the preliminary conversations with the Program Office and Regional Director, I created a descriptive survey which the Programs Officer and Regional Director both approved (see Appendix I). The survey was administered to the mothers<sup>5</sup> attending the ECLN program at the time of the study by the Librarians during the week while I was not at the program as there was not time during the session itself while I was there. The survey was administered over the course

<sup>5</sup> Note: Only mothers were attending the program at the time of the study. However, I refer to ‘parents’ in the majority of this paper because I did interview one couple in their home as the wife was attending the program at the time and the husband had attended in the past.



of one week during the final week of the study. For the mothers who needed the support reading or writing, the librarians read the survey questions and wrote in answers are mothers dictated them. The purpose of the survey was to collect some baseline information on the current population of parents (only mothers) attending the sessions at the time of this study in July 2013. The survey instrument was therefore an exploratory instrument which provided some demographic information (such age, number of children, level of education) as well as qualitative insights into the community and their views of the ECLN program. The majority of questions were open-response with some multiple choice all with comments sections.

## **Document Review**

The Regional Director provided me with various documents for this study including the descriptions of the ECLN program, the original curriculum, the current curriculum guide. I also reviewed information from the website and promotional and fundraising websites.

## **Observations**

I was able to partake in three ECLN sessions. Due to the timing of the study, only three sessions took place during my time in Guatemala. The sessions generally began between 3 and 3:30pm and lasted until between 4:30 and 5pm. The mothers and their children would generally trickle in. Greetings were typically warm, the librarians knowing the mothers and their children's names. Children would embrace the Librarians. The Librarians would have music playing as parents and children entered. Chairs were set up in a large semi-circle in the middle of the library with foam pastel colored pads on the floor for children. Many children would run towards a book on a table as they awaited the start of the session. Most mothers would accompany them or take a seat on one of the chairs as their children gathered in front of them. Once at least 10 mothers and their children were present, the librarian would begin the session by welcoming everyone and talking about the theme for the day. At two of the sessions a song was sung to engage the children.

Participants generally seemed comfortable and during the three sessions I observed often the same women would speak up and engage during the sessions. Others would sometimes speak to

their children and help keep them in the center of the circle. Children would play with objects placed on the floor for them or sit on their parents laps. They would also be provided small chairs which they seemed to enjoy.

## **Interviews**

During the first session I observed, I was provided a space to introduce myself and explain my presence and study. I asked that any parent interested in speaking with me individually to provide me their opinions of the program could approach a librarian, call my cellphone, e-mail me (there is internet access at the library) or talk to me directly while I was at the library. I also left a sign-up sheet. I explained about the informed consent and that I would not use their names in the study, however, being a small community, explained it was likely they would be able to identify one another or know who spoke to me individually. I also explained that the information was meant to be used to improve upon the program and that because they were the model community, their insights would also serve to inform the expansion process to other community libraries. For my thesis, I explained I would use some quotes from our conversation but not their names. I could also answer any questions they have about the study or my work. I also put up a flyer with information on the study and how to participate on the wall of the library with my contact information. The interview questions can be found in Appendix II.

Only one mother volunteered by signing up on the sheet. The other three mothers were either approached by the librarians or by me during one of the sessions. I called them during the week to set up a time to meet. Twice I had to reschedule interviews with mothers who were not able to make it on the scheduled day. I was, in the end, able to interview all the mothers who volunteered to participate.

For each interview I explained the informed consent form, asked for approval to record during a small hand held recorder and got pseudonyms for parents the their children. I also took some notes by hand. I had the list of possible interview questions printed and out for participants to see if they were interested. The interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes.

**Table 2. INTERVIEWS**

<b>Interview 1</b>	<b>Interviews 2 &amp; 3</b>	<b>Interview 4</b>	<b>Librarian, Program's Officer, NGO Staff member</b>
One mother signed up and I was able to interview her during the second visit. The interview was held at her home and her husband was also present. He explained his interest in meeting me and learning more about ECED for his kids. He was able to participate in half the interview, and then took charge of the toddler who was getting loud and distracting.	Interviews 2 and 3 took place in my car parked in the town square in front of the library. This proved a good option when the mother wanted to meet me at the library but there were others present. No mothers seemed concerned about being seen with me from the car, they preferred the option rather than inside the library which might be loud and which was less private. Both these mothers were able to leave their children in the library for someone else to keep an eye on before the start of the session.	Interview 4 took place inside the library while it was closed during the lunch hour. Their child was present.	The meetings with the PO and the interview with the librarian took place inside the library during the lunch hour.  The interview with the NGO staff person took place via Skype.

The interviews were a mix of informal and formal open-ended questions (Patton as cited by Kellogg, p. 76, 1990). I was also able to have informal conversations before and during EC sessions with mothers.

After data was collected, I was able to meet with the Regional Director and Executive director in Guatemala for a recap of the data collection and some preliminary themes and ideas.

I transcribed interviews in Spanish and translated to English the quotes used for this thesis myself.

## **Rationale**

I designed a qualitative case study supported by a descriptive survey for several reasons. First, my time in the community was going to be limited. I had five trips planned for my time in Guatemala. I was travelling three hours to and from the community one day per week on the days the ECLN program was held. I wanted to maximize the use of my time in the community for observations and contact with the participating parents of the program. The survey which the librarians administered would provide me with a base knowledge of the demographics of the population as well as ensure that at the majority of participating parents would be able to contribute to the study should they be interested in doing so. It proved challenging to find the time and interest in formal interviews. A qualitative study would allow me to engage with interested parents directly, through interviews. I would be able to use their words and voices directly in the study (Rallis and Rossman, 2011). In addition, a qualitative study lent itself to the critical sociocultural perspective used in this research.

## **Limitations**

Limitations to this research include:

**Time:** The ECLN program is only held one day per week for the three first weeks of the month. During the six weeks I was in Guatemala, there were only three sessions held. This limited my observation of the program. In addition, I resided a three hour drive from the community and travel to and from required someone to drive me. It took one to two weeks for the parents to feel comfortable with me present.

**Introduction through Board of Director:** While on the one hand the woman who put me in contact with this program is respected by the parents and community for her support and contributions, her association is largely financial and my association with her could have influenced the pressure parents may or may not have felt to participate in the study.

**Same sample size:** Around 20 mothers were participating in this program at the time of my data collection. While I was able to get almost all participating parents to answer the survey, only four

formal interviews is not representative of the entire group.

Limited knowledge of Mayan populations: This was my first time working in a semi-rural community with a predominantly Mayan community.

## **My Role as External Researcher - Critical Sociocultural Lens**

In accordance with this largely qualitative study and my critical sociocultural lens, I will dedicate this section to a discussion of my positionality and role as an external researcher and its relevance to this work. Understanding my personal interests in this study—who I am and why I am doing this research—allows for reflexivity on the epistemological assumptions I bring into this research and their potential impacts on the study (Ravitch and Riggan, 2012, p.13). This will lead to a discussion of the interweaving of my theoretical framework and methodology.

According to Kellog (1998), in doing an evaluation in a cross-cultural or international program, the challenge to the evaluator includes, “including different perspectives, values; being aware of cultural blinders and biases”, which requires the skills of “cross-cultural sensitivity, skilled in understanding and incorporating different perspectives” (p.61). This challenge speaks to my attempt to address my role as an external researcher within this study including how this role can be incorporated into understanding feedback from the participating parents.

Ravitch and Riggan (2012) explain that a theoretical framework has the potential of raising “questions about [how] the assumptions or position of the researcher [...] reinforces dominant or hegemonic views of the *subject* (a term we view as problematic because it sets up hierarchy and is dehumanizing, we prefer the term participants) of the research, which in turn has implications for the study’s methodology” (p. 13). I chose a critical sociocultural theoretical lens as I believe it serves as a framework to reflect upon my assumptions as a researcher especially in relation to the participants of the study. It allows for an understanding of how my cultural and historical contexts affect the way I think, act, and interpret data in my research process. This lens allows me to deconstruct my research while participating in it. Using a critical sociocultural lens provides a framework through which I understand and interpret my role in the research process, the data and analysis collection process as well as my relationship with the participants. Using critical cultural theories to reflect upon my data collection enables me to reflect effectively upon the epistemological assumptions engrained in this research as thinking epistemologically “encourages researchers to see themselves not merely as followers of scientific procedure but as

interpreters and producers of it. It also explicitly defines research as an interpretive process: the way we collect data and analyze data is a process of *making* rather than *discovering* meaning” (Ravitch and Riggan, 2012, p.18).

Below, I reflect upon my research and situate myself within it through a discussion of cultural theorists, sociocultural understandings of development and qualitative research theories.

### **Understanding Culture and a Critical Sociocultural Theoretical framework**

The concept of culture is complex, multifaceted and therefore difficult to define. For this research I will concentrate primarily on three discussions of culture. The first is culture as the production of meaning, as discussed by Hall (1997): “Producing meaning depends on the practice of interpretation, and interpretation is sustained by us actively using the code - *encoding*, putting things into the code - and by the person at the other end interpreting or *decoding* the meaning” (p.62). This discussion of culture as *encoding* and *decoding* is highly appropriate to my thesis using qualitative research. In my data collection and analysis process, I am attempting to produce meaning from the feedback of the parents whom I interviewed and observed and who in turn actively participated in this research. I am interpreting their words to create meaning for my Masters Project. I am both literally coding data, and encoding and decoding the ways the parents interact with me, the ways they answer my questions, what they are not saying, and how they view my role and my presence in their community. There are many cultural layers to encode and decode. In this research I am actively engaging in the processes of producing meaning, encoding and decoding.

Secondly, I refer to culture in a Bourdieuan sense; as a form of capital, a representation of symbolic power, and as a potential reproducer of power (Bourdieu, 1993, 1989, 1984). Bourdieu (1989) described symbolic capital as “a credit; it is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (p. 23). My critical sociocultural lens lends itself to the analysis of the importance of cultural capital and its relationship with power. There are multiple cultures and potential power dynamics at play with my research. For example, I am a white, European American female student whose research is with predominantly

K'iche Mayan Guatemalan mothers of distinct educational and professional backgrounds. I possess symbolic capital in my role as an external researcher, legitimized by my association with an American University. There is historical significance to these identities (American involvement in the Guatemala civil war, tourism, aid and charity work etc.) which are beyond the scope of this study but interesting to note. Due to this history, as well as the proximity of the United States to Guatemala, I have noted in my experience in Guatemala a cultural bias of power that white Americans possess. Foucault (2011) comments on culture as reflections of us and as “a hierarchical organization of values, accessible to everybody, but at the same time the occasion of a mechanism of selection and exclusion” (p.173). It is important to me as a researcher not to exclude the parents’ voice in this case study, rather attempt to represent it while recognizing my own filter in its representation.

Finally, when analyzing the parents’ opinions about the program, especially program content, I attempt to use Rogoff’s cultural-historical understanding of learning outlined in the introduction. I again highlight the underlying assumption of these definitions of culture as well as the critical sociocultural lens: that as people who possess agency and we are active participants in our cultures, rather than passive recipients. The parents who participate in the ECLN program are active participants, as well as active participants of this research, rather than passive recipients of both. This clarification helps to better understand how the ECLN program can take into consideration this analysis of my role as an external researcher and how they can use the information from this case study to inform and improve upon the program. In other words, the parents’ perceptions and opinions of the program matter.

In addressing the power and bi-directional power dynamics at play in this research, and maintaining a critical sociocultural lens, I am mindful of Rogoff (2003) who cites Johada & Krewer’s work on the researchers “oscillation” between a deficit model and hyper-romanticized image of ‘other’ cultures, particularly indigenous. Rogoff (2003) states: “Both of these extremes treat people of cultural communities other than those of the observer as alien, to be reviled (or pitied) on the one hand, or to be wistfully revered on the other” (p. 17). I hope not to engage in this me vs. the dichotomy in this research.



## Common language

Despite the symbolic and overt differences between myself and the participants, I was able to bridge some of these cultural gaps through my research. Hall (1997) speaks to the importance of language in sharing culture which allows us to “see the world from within the same conceptual map and to make sense of it through the same language systems” (p.22). While not a native speaker, having lived in Guatemala for six years I am fluent in Spanish and in Guatemalan vernacular. Since the majority of the community is bilingual K’iche and Spanish speakers, our common language during the study as Spanish and I believe it greatly enabled me to bridge some of the more obvious as well as subtle cultural gaps. Through our shared language, I was able to effectively communicate my intentions, use humor and humility, Guatemalan expressions and appropriate slang, and allow my appreciation and commitment to Guatemala and young children to shine through. I believe my honesty was an asset to my research as well as being able to communicate it in a common language. It is worth nothing here that Spanish is the colonial and national language of Guatemala which no doubts adds to the complexity of dynamics for the program and for this research.

## Positionality and Reflexivity

Reflection on my personal history and interests, and engaging in “participatory consciousness” (Heshusius, 1994) is also relevant to this paper as it relates both to a critical sociocultural lens as well as the qualitative research choices for my thesis (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Etherington (2007) defines reflexivity in qualitative research as,

... a tool whereby we can include our “selves” at any stage, making transparent the values and beliefs we hold that almost certainly influence the research process and its outcomes. Reflexive research encourages us to display in our writing/conversations the interactions between ourselves and our participants from our first point of contact until we end those relationships, so that our work can be understood, not only in terms of *what* we have discovered, but *how* we have discovered it (p.601).

Etherington here speaks of reflexivity as being transparent in our thought processes and in our work. I chose to use a qualitative research process to allow for a dialog around reflexivity,

transparency and subjectivity, which I believe to be important. My critical sociocultural framework adds an additional layer to this discussion especially given the cultural differences between myself as a foreigner conducting an evaluation in a K'iche Mayan community. The lens provides an additional angle by which to reflect upon myself and my research. While I practice reflexivity with a goal of greater transparency in my research, my critical cultural lens keeps me analytic and critical of my ability to see beyond, or through, my 'personal habitus' (Bourdieu, 1993) which includes my history, class, and background. I am cognizant that my habitus is the lens through which I see the world. While my hope is that reflecting upon it will lessen the filter, it cannot eliminate it; rather, I can attempt to understand how my lenses intersect for better or for worse.

My previous Montessori experience, for example, has largely influenced my beliefs and understandings of child development and education and quality ECED. Inherent in the Montessori philosophy, for example, is the belief that children are able to self-regulate and be independent, and that these are necessary for life-long happiness and integration into society. Adults are meant to help guide children's learning and independence. Keeping a critical sociocultural lens and being reflexive of my own especially vis a vis my own perceptions of EC is challenging yet critical to this research. Mosier and Rogoff (2003)'s study of the perceived privileged treatment of toddlers in a Mayan community as compared to a community in the United States provides an example of a sociocultural perspective on development.

Cultural patterns of privileged treatment of toddlers are often interpreted as "indulgence" by U.S. researchers. However, we argue that it is not simply indulgence or a relaxation of standards for following rules (such as rules for taking turns with desired objects). Instead, we believe that privileged treatment of toddlers represents a contrasting cultural model in which toddlers, assumed not yet to misbehave willfully or to understand how to cooperate, are protected from being forced to comply, so that they will learn to voluntarily cooperate (p.1).

With such examples of sociocultural differences in EC, I tried to remain aware of my own assumptions around quality and 'good' practices in early childhood as I spoke with the parents about the ECLN program so as to attempt to not disregard local knowledge and practices around EC.

## Representation and Knowledge

The various interpretations of culture discussed as well as situating myself in this research serve as a basis for my critical sociocultural theoretical lens. Another important question to be analyzed through this lens is how I am representing the participants and their knowledge. My research questions ask parents their opinions of the ECE program in order to engage the parents, understand the program and use their feedback to improve the program. Through the interviews, followed by my data analysis, my findings will be a representation of what the parents have to say as I have interpreted them. I recognize that representing others is a highly interpretative and potentially problematic process. I want to be cautious not to demonize the parents who attend this EC program and their ‘subjugated knowledge’ (Foucault & Gordon, 1980) nor overexert or belittle my own. I believe I bring my own knowledge and experiences and the parents their own both of which we can mutually learn from. Rather, I am recognizing that these dynamics do exist and that they play a part in my research. I don’t want to emphasize a dichotomy of ‘me versus them’, nor categorize the parents as the ‘other’ although it is challenging not to play into dynamics of ‘us vs. them’ as a foreigner in their community.

I work with the underlying assumption that there is no fixed meaning, rather only one that is interpreted by, in this case, me as the researcher. As Hall (1997) suggests, “one important idea about representation is the acceptance of a degree of *cultural relativism* between one culture and another, a certain lack of equivalence, and hence the need for *translation* as we *move* from the mind-set or conceptual universe of one culture or another” (p.61). The language I use, the way I decide to structure the responses, and what I choose to leave out all affect the way I am representing the views of the parents. This process is also a way of creating knowledge through my research. I am cognizant that by simply doing this study I am promoting an agenda of the importance of early childhood for this community. The ‘conclusions’ I draw through my research further continue to a body of knowledge that is legitimized by a Western-dominated understanding of knowledge as created by the ‘researcher’ for the ‘researched’. As Foucault states, “There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations”

(Hall citing Foucault, 1997, p. 49). I hope that using a qualitative methodological approach with participants helps alleviate these existing power relations by engaging participants, listening and recording their perceptions, and using thick description practice to guide my research process.

This leads me to the Spivak's (1988) question of 'Can the subaltern speak?' Can I in fact 'represent' the voices and knowledge of the parents or am I simply reinforcing power dynamics? By asking this question am I reinforcing a negative dynamic in development of participants as 'subaltern'? Spivak (1988) states,

According to Foucault and Deleuze (in the First World, under the standardization and regimentation of socialized capital, though they do not seem to recognize this) the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here), *can speak and know their conditions*. We must now confront the following question: on the other side of the international division of labor from socialized capital, inside *and* outside the circuit of the epistemic violence of imperialist law and education supplementing an earlier economic text, *can the subaltern speak?* ( p. 78).

Does my research imply that I am creating a condition for the parents, who otherwise aren't legitimized, to have voice? I don't believe there is a simple answer to this question, however, as I have repeated my intention is to remain reflective and use participatory qualitative methods to lessen some of dynamics discussed in this section. I do believe, however, that this discussion adds to the research by thinking about and reflecting upon these issues and dynamics in order to better understand that feedback of the parents on the ECLN program. The NGO can consider these discussions when interpreting the results of this research.

## V. Results & Themes

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In this section I will outline the results from the data collected including survey results, themes which emerged from addressing my research questions on the parents' perceptions of the ECLN program, as well as parent feedback on the curriculum itself. I will discuss these emergent themes using a critical sociocultural lens in the following Chapter VI.

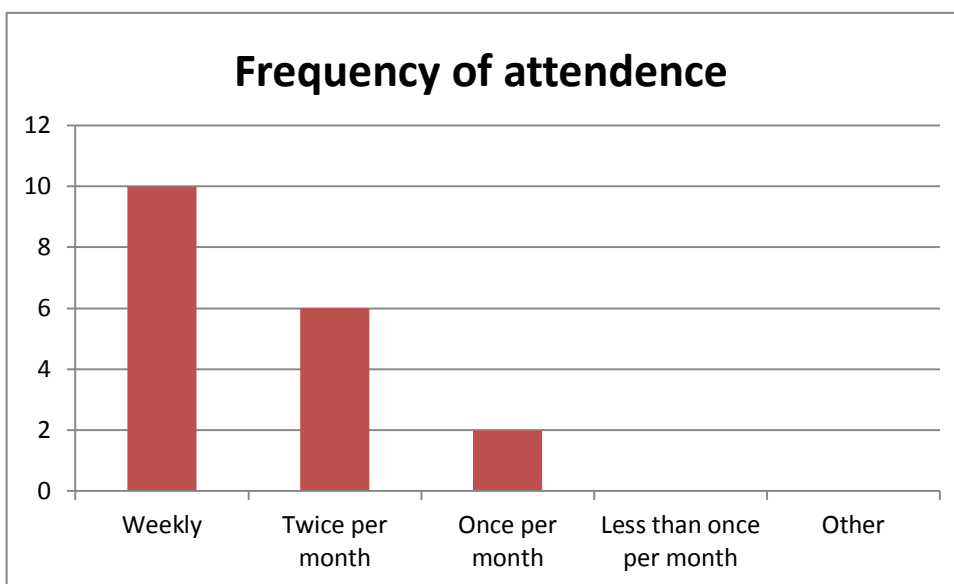
### Survey Results

The results of the descriptive statistics from the survey are provided in the following table. I translated the following information from Spanish to English. The information was provided in the form of a report to the NGO in January 2014. Answers to open-ended questions are incorporated in the next section on themes. This information provides some basic information about the demographics of the parent community attending at the time of this research.

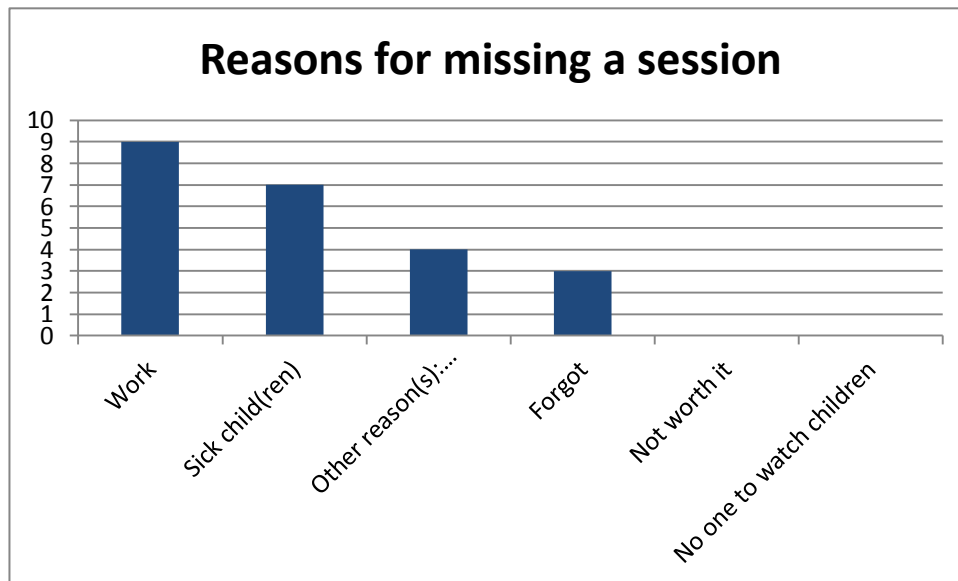
Table 3. PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS	
QUESTION	ANSWER
<b>Age of participants</b>	Max 36, Min 20 – Average 28.2
<b>Travel to library</b>	100% walking
<b>Distance (minutes) walking to library</b>	Max 25min, Min 2min, Average 11.9 min
<b>Literacy level</b>	16 literate, 2 not
<b>Number of children</b>	Max 5, Min 1, Average 2.24
<b>Time (years) participating in ECD program</b>	Max 7, Min 0.5, Average: 2.8
<b>Convenience of time/day of sessions</b>	All confirmed the day and time was convenient
<b>Frequency of sessions offered</b>	14 responded they would like the sessions to be more frequently offered, with 7 specifying at least 4 times per month would be better than 3; 4 responded it is fine as is, 3 times per week
<b>Opinion: ECED is not important, important or very important</b>	100% chose very important
<b>Languages spoken</b>	10 self-reported speaking Kiché and Spanish, 7 Spanish, 1 was reported as having a disability by the librarians who assisted her the survey

<b>Do you share knowledge learned in the sessions with others outside the library?</b>	17 responded yes, they do share what they learn during the sessions outside the library including with a husband, sister in-law, neighbors, sisters, family, friends. 1 responded no.
<b>Is it difficult to implement what you learn during the sessions outside of the Library?</b>	7 responded no, 7 responded sometimes
<b>Examples of literacy skills or nutrition themes implemented at home?</b>	Songs, read and tell stories, stories with movements, Reading techniques, cooking with more fruits and vegetables and more nutritious in general, more communication with children, using names of objects, animals, coloring, painting.

The following figures represent other questions and answers provided by the survey.

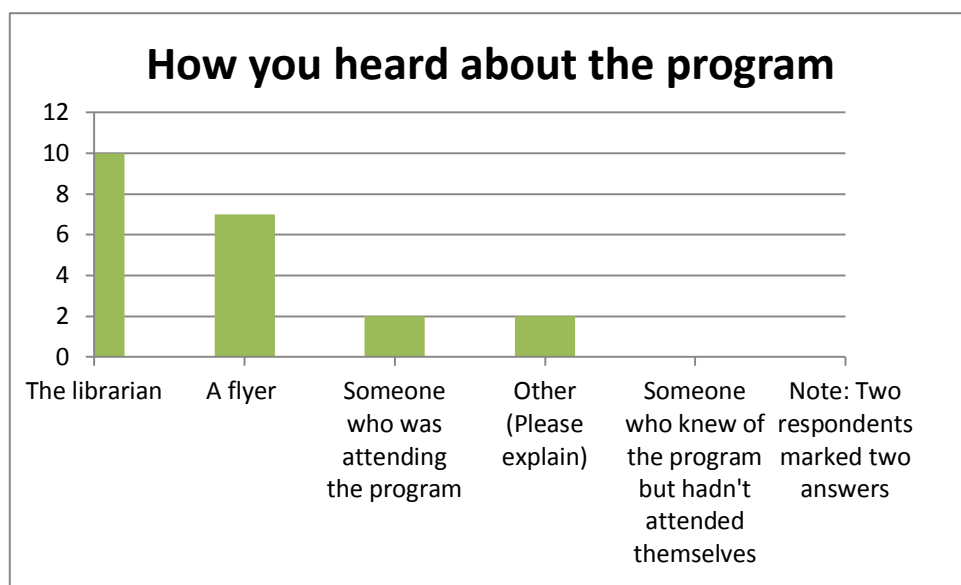


**Figure1.** This graph represents the self-reported frequency of attendance of the parents of the ECLN program. 55% attend every week, 33% at least two out of the three the sessions offered each month.



**Figure2.** This graph represents parent's responses to what factors affect their attendance of a session. Several parents provided more than 1 answer. Reasons due to work or sick children represented the majority of parent's reasons for missing an ECLN session.

**Figure 3.** In order to better understand how parents are recruited to attend, they were asked how they heard about the program. The majority of parents reported hearing about the ECLN program from word of mouth or from a flyer.



## Themes

In this section, I will outline the results of my data analysis by outlining major themes that emerged interviews and open-ended questions from the survey. In the following chapter, I will discuss this research using the critical socio-cultural lens. The five major themes are:

1. Conceptualization of ECED
2. School readiness
3. Socialization
4. Increased confidence
5. Change in family dynamics and behaviors

### Conceptualization of ECED

Every parent interviewed and surveyed was asked to explain their understanding of ECE. Parents most frequently responded that ECE was a preparation for life. For example, one mother was asked how she would explain what they thought about early childhood education and development in general, and she spoke of general enhancement of capabilities for young children. She said,

*It is, like, the human has capacities, virtues and all but a lot of time we haven't discovered them, so [ECED] serves [to] help [the child] to be creative, give him the tools so he can express what he is capable of [...]. [...] the first five or seven years are basic for them to in the future be successful people; people who can benefit from what they have (Mother 1, 2013).<sup>6</sup>*

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<sup>6</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “La ET para mi es la misma palabra lo dice, ‘estimulación’, es como el ser humano tiene capacidades, virtudes y todo pero muchas veces no la hemos descubierto, entonces la estimulación sirve de que el niño haga de todo: ayudarlo a que él sea creativo, darle las herramientas para que el exprese lo que él es capaz de hacer entonces ya sea con la pintura, ya sea, más chiquitos es con rallar todo, romper todo y de todo, es como cuando empiezan a estudiar y ya saben escribir su nombre y escriben su nombre por todos lados entonces ellos se expresan. Entonces es descubrir los talentos de ellos. Y que ellos pues desarrollen eso, ayudarlos a desarrollar estos talentos que tienen. Porque todos tienen estos talentos, solo que talentos diferentes. Hay que saberlos, aprovechar y apoyarlos a que ellos fortalezcan estos talentos. Para mi ET es eso y esos primeros 5 o 7 años es básico para que ellos en un futuro sean personas de éxito, persona que sepan aprovechar lo que ellos tienen.” (Madre 1, 2013)



They described ECED in terms of what they learned in the library as we will see throughout the themes. This could partly be a result of lack of clarity of the question, as some parents may have understood I was asking them to explain what the EC program in the library was, as opposed to talking about ECE in more general terms. Below are some responses parents had to the question of what is ECED on the survey:

*So that my child develops more.*

*It is learning to motivate our children towards literacy and to eat better.*

*It is to teach children to know things ahead of time.*

*It is a space where our children learn to be social<sup>7</sup>.  
(Survey responses)*

## **School Readiness**

Formal school preparation for their children holds great importance for the parents who participate in the ECLN program. The most common theme regarding ECE and benefits to the children was school readiness. In a country with a high rate of failure at the first grade level, it is an understandable focus point. Parents identified ways in which they felt their children were learning skills through the library program that would prepare them cognitively (interest in reading, ability to identify letters, desire to do homework), but also socio-emotionally referring to increased confidence and sociability of their children.

The majority expressed that they thought ECE could help prepare their children for the start of primary school at age six. This preparation was explained as including, for example, emergent literacy skills and the development of fine and gross motor skills. Specifically they cite example of holding pencil, crayon, how to color.

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<sup>7</sup> Original responses in Spanish: “Para que mis hijos se desarrollan más.”; “Es aprender a motivar a los niños a la lectura y a alimentarse mejor.”; “Es enseñar a los niños a conocer cosas antes de tiempo.”; “Es un espacio donde los niños aprenden a ser sociables.”

*In the case of my child, now since the first day she came, she brings her notebook and asks for homework and the señora [lady, mrs.] gives her homework for the week. And later s/he does them in the house and I help with the hand but yes s/he does it. And s/he knows that Tuesday, s/he asks, “What day is today?”; “Today we have to go to the library (Mother 5, 2013).<sup>8</sup>*

When asked how she would explain what the EC literacy and nutrition program was to a friend or family member, one mother answered,

*I explain to them that you can bring your child there because they provide like a sort of class for children, like they learn little by little and then when they go to school it isn't as hard for them. That is what I tell friends when I meet them (Mother 2, 2013).<sup>9</sup>*

### **Socio-emotional development: Socialization & Confidence**

*Many changes in our children can be seen because when they arrive they don't know anything but little by little the changes can be seen, they share with other children, their social environment is changing for their development to be able to share and interact with other children and people (Survey response).<sup>10</sup>*

In reference to ECED and benefits of the ECLN program, parents cited examples of socio-emotional development. They mention the importance of being creative, social, and using their imagination. The ECLN program is described as time when children can interact with other children their own age. Several explained that their child has greater confidence, which helps

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<sup>8</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Porque en el caso de mi nena/e, ahorita desde que el primer día que se vino, se trajo su cuaderno, y pide tarea y la seño le da su tarea para la semana. Y luego la hace en la casa, y yo le ayudo con la manita pero si el/la la hace. Y el/la ya sabe que el martes, me pregunta, mamá ¿qué día es hoy?, hoy sí tenemos que ir a la biblioteca” (Madre 5, 2013).

<sup>9</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “Yo lo que les explico es que puede llevar a su hijo allá porque allá les dan como un tipo de clase a los niños, como que van a poco a poco van aprendiendo y ya cuando se van a la escuela ya no les va a costar. Esto es lo que les he dicho a las amigas que yo las encuentro” (Madre 2, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Original survey response as written in Spanish: “Se ven muchos cambios en nuestros hijos ya que ellos cuando llegan no saben nada pero poco a poco se va viendo los cambios, comparten con los demás niños, su entorno social va cambiando para su desarrollo para poder compartir y convivir con otros niños y personas”.

them with the social aspect, to want to learn and the parents hope that this will help them in school. I come back to this theme in the next section.

*In my case yes it [ECLN] has helped me because I see my child is curious. I have seen in various children [...] him/her that come to an office, a clinic or a place where there are magazines, and “Mama I want that story” and grabs it and starts reading, looks at the pictures, “Mama read me this story”. S/he has this idea that there is a story, like s/he uses creativity and imagination thanks to the library. Because there they have the space and the books appropriate for them. And at home one doesn’t have it. So yes, I feel happy to have the support of the library (Mother 1, 2013).<sup>11</sup>*

The themes of school readiness and socio-emotional benefits are highly linked and often parents cited example of socio-emotional benefits within the context of school preparation. In this quote, a mother describes the socio-emotional benefits that will help with school:

*... one brings their child [to the library] and they develop more, they have more knowledge, they share with others, they aren’t so attached to one because that is the problem. The difference is that now the children can development for/by themselves, they don’t have shame, aren’t afraid of going places, they chat with other people, so it is very important (Mother 5, 2013).<sup>12</sup>*

Confidence was expressed as being important and shyness as something parents see their children overcoming as part of their experience in the ECD program in the community library. Again, increased confidence was also spoken about in terms of its importance for success in school.

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<sup>11</sup> Original Spanish quote: “En mi caso sí me ha ayudado porque yo miro con mi neno/a es curioso/a. He visto varios niño/as a diferencia de el/la de que llegan a una oficina, una clínica, o a un lugar donde hay revistas, ‘mama yo quiero esta historietita’, y lo hala y empieza a leer, mira las figuras, mama léeme este cuento”. El/la ya tiene esa idea de que allí hay una historia, como que el/la utiliza la creatividad y a imaginación gracias a la biblioteca. Porque allí tienen el espacio y los libros adecuados para ellos. Que en casa uno no lo tiene. Entonces sí, yo me siento feliz de tener este apoyo de la biblioteca” (Madre 1, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Original Spanish quote: En cambio ya uno trae sus hijos ellos ya se desenvuelvan más, tienen más conocimiento, ellos comparten con otras personas, ya no están apegados a uno porque eso es el problema. En cambio con esto ya los niños se van desenvuelvan por sí mismo, no tiene pena de ir a ningún lado, platican con cualquier persona, entonces es algo muy importante.

*It is very important because sometimes children come to school, at school and are very shy, maybe even have difficulty using hands, his/her fine motor [skill] is very weak and sometimes his/her gross motor skills are too, they have it but sometimes due to the same shyness they haven't developed it much. However when a child has participated in these EC sessions they are a little more outgoing. They are more sociable, they learn faster because they have already been stimulating their intellect, their fine and gross motor [skills] then learn a little bit faster. Not that they are smarter than others but learn faster and are children who do not give much trouble to teachers because they are slightly introduced, and they go a little ahead in that part of stimulation (Mother 4, 2013).<sup>13</sup>*

Parents described confidence as a benefit for children to not have fear of new places and people, and be outgoing.

*... one brings their child [to the library] and they develop more, they have more knowledge, they share with others, they aren't so attached to one because that is the problem. [...] children can development by themselves, they don't have shame to go anywhere, they chat with anyone, so it is very important (Mother 5, 2013).<sup>14</sup>*

### Changes in family interactions

Parents spoke to ways in which they felt the program has affected family interactions. These were framed as positive changes including increased engagement between parent and child,

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<sup>13</sup> Original Spanish quote: “Es muy importante porque a veces llegan los niños a la escuela, al colegio y se ven muy tímidos, aun les cuesta tal vez usar las manitas, su motricidad fina es muy débil y a veces su motricidad gruesa también, la tienen pero por la misma timidez no la desarrollan mucho. En cambio cuando ya un niño ya ha participado en estas sesiones de ET pues ya son un poco más extrovertidos. Son más sociables, aprenden más rápido porque ya se ha venido estimulando su intelecto, su motricidad fina e gruesa entonces aprenden un poco más rápido. No es que sean más inteligentes que otros sino aprenden más rápido y son niños que no dan mucha dificultad a los maestros porque ya van un poco inducidos, ya van un poco adelantados en esa parte de estimulación” (Madre 4).

<sup>14</sup> Original Spanish quote: “... uno trae sus hijos y ellos ya se desenvuelven más, tienen más conocimiento, ellos comparten con otras personas, ya no están apegados a uno porque eso es el problema. En cambio con esto ya los niños se van desarrollando por sí mismo, no tiene pena de ir a ningún lado, platican con cualquier persona, entonces es algo muy importante” (Madre 5).

multiplying effect among children and family members, children's buy-in and changes in parenting styles.

### Increased engagement

Another impact of the program mentioned was dedicated time spent between parents and children both inside and outside of the library, for example, reading books before bed becoming a routine. The time in the ECLN sessions in the community library is framed as time dedicated to the child so that they learn (ex: letters). Some parents expressed a lack of time to work on themes such as those provided in the library at home. Other parents expressed that the child doesn't have much to do at home and that they are bored. The ECLN sessions are seen an opportunity for the child and their parent to get out of the house and learn.

*I learned there, for example, the art of narration, because for me personally storytelling is hard. [...] if you had a child telling you every moment 'mom tell me this story', it is annoying and gets to a point when one has it up to here (signals with hand). So in the library there is the space, even once a week, one is dedicated to their children to read, tell, and explain what they see in the book. Personally it has helped me to see [the librarian]. [The librarian] is an excellent storyteller. S/he has a quality that all the children are attentive (laughing) so I have learned from [the librarian] how to tell stories to my daughter. So she now knows to find something, a piece of newspaper, whatever, "mama tell me this story". And I start to invent a story [...] (Mother 1, 2013).<sup>15</sup>*

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<sup>15</sup> Original Spanish quote: Mas lo que he aprendido allí es por ejemplo, el arte de la narración, porque a mí en lo personal me cuesta como que contar cuentos verdad. A veces las mamás... usted es soltera todavía (haha) y con todo imagina con sus estudios pues tiene esa presión. Y si tuviera un hijo que le decía a cada rato 'mama contáme un cuento' 'mama contáme un cuento' como que es fastidioso, llega un momento en que uno lo tiene esta aquí [señala con la mano]. Entonces en la biblioteca esta este espacio, aunque sea una vez a la semana, que uno se dedica a sus niños leerle, contarle, explicarle lo que él ve en el libro. Entonces en lo personal me ha ayudado ver a Alba. Alba es una excelente narradora de cuentos. Tiene una cualidad ella de que todos los niños están, atentos (jaja) entonces yo he aprendido de ella como contarle cuentos a mi hija. Entonces ella ya sabe encontrar algo, pedazo de prensa, lo que sea, mama contáme este cuento. Y yo le empieza a inventar una historia, que nada que ver. Si me cuesta todavía porque si me cuesta. Pero si me ha ayudado bastante a decirle 'ah mira deja eso allí y otro que tenga letras', entonces no si no que, aunque no tenga letras yo me las invento, aunque sean cortitas, pero si le doy una respuesta entonces en eso si me ha ayudado a mí.

## Multiplying effect

The parents gave several examples of how what they are learning in the ECLN sessions in the library is having a multiplying effect at home. The previous quote speaks to the ways in which parents are learning skills and other content through this library program. In another example, one mother explained that her daughter who attends the sessions reads to her infant sibling. Other examples include sharing songs learned, or nutritional tips and recipes. Parents also explained that ECLN program presents an opportunity for younger sibling that older siblings may not have had.

*Actually something beautiful: when I was pregnant, we would talk with her brother and chatted. She would grab a book, because she had her booklets, and said [brother] I'll tell a story, and started to read to her little brother. So it's very nice because she has learned it there [the library] (Mother 1, 2013).<sup>16</sup>*

Parents themselves expressed benefits from the program such as learning letters/numbers etc. The program provides access to information for parents through their children.

## Children's buy-in

Parents explained that the nutritional themes presented during ECLN sessions at the library, in addition to the pre-and emergent literacy techniques, provides practical ways for them to support their children's learning outside the library. One example given was the story-telling technique which is easy to do at home as seen in a previous quote. In addition to providing information, the ECLN sessions help parents learn to execute the techniques or implement what they learn about nutrition with their children in their daily lives. This helps strengthen and deepen the information and routines learned at the library. Parents explained children are encouraging their parents to eat better by insisting they buy vegetables and fruit when they are at the market. Parents explained

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<sup>16</sup> Original Spanish Quote: Incluso algo muy hermoso: cuando yo estaba embarazada, hablábamos con su hermanito y practicábamos. Ella agarraba un libro porque tenía sus libritos, y le decía [hermanito] le cuento un cuento y le empiezo a leer a su hermanito. Entonces es algo muy bonito porque ella lo ha aprendido allí [en la biblioteca] (Mother 1, 2013)

they thought having a third party (librarian) encourage these behaviors helped their children buy-into them. During one interview, the mother was talking about the topic of nutrition and mentioned gum and her two year old asked me “Ms., gum hurts teeth?” and her mother responded “Yes my love because it’s a lot of sugar for the teeth”.

*S/he learned there [library], yes, because here I was saying that the contents of the vegetables and everything but s/he did not accept the information from me but to get to the library and through the third person accepts information [laughing]. So if it has helped me a lot with feeding/nourishment (Mother 1, 2013).<sup>17</sup>*

### Change in discipline & parenting style

In addition, parents spoke to changes in their parenting styles and other behavior. One mother expressed her gratitude for the program and explained what she likes about it. She gives the specific example of being taught the importance of talking to children and explains she no longer hits her child:

*I have liked [the program] because we come here to receive talks, they talk to us about how to educate our children, they talk to us about how to feed them, how to be with them, how to not fight with our couple in front of the children [...]. Don't hit children but rather talk to them properly. Like [my child] I don't hit her anymore... (Mother 2, 2013).<sup>18</sup>*

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<sup>17</sup> Original Spanish quote: Lo aprendió allí, sí, porque aquí yo le decía de que los contenidos de las verduras y todo pero el/la no me aceptaba a mí la información sino que al llegar a la biblioteca como que ya, al tercera persona como que ya acepta la información [*riéndose*]. Entonces si me ha ayudado bastante con esto de la alimentación de el/la (Madre 1, 2013).

<sup>18</sup> Original Spanish quote: Entonces yo como estoy agradecida que existe este programa porque nos ayuda bastante. Nos ayuda bastante. Eso es lo que a mí ha ayudado bastante. A mí me ha gustado porque nosotros venimos aquí a recibir como charlas, nos hablan como educar a los niños, nos habla como alimentarlos, como saciarlos, como no pelear con la pareja delante de los niños, eso es lo que nos han hablado aquí y eso es lo que a mí me ha gustado porque nos ayuda bastante. Si no pegarle los niños sino que hay que hablarles en buena forma. Asi como Beatriz yo a ella no le pego (Madre 2, 2013).

## VI. Discussion & Recommendations

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Now that I've presented the results and themes from the data, I will reflect upon these findings through a critical sociocultural lens.

By and large, the data was very positive. It would seem the program seems to be doing exactly what it is intending to and the parents' commentary to me reflects this. I will discuss the results and data from the previous section below as well as probe deeper using critical sociocultural perspectives to try to expose and understand other realities that may also be at play in this research.

### Parental buy-in

As previously mentioned, the importance of parents in this study cannot be understated. This ECLN program runs under the assumption that parental participation in young children's education, particularly around emergent and early literacy skills, is crucial. Existing literature on parental participation in EC interventions, specifically around literacy, is largely US-based and focused around questions of school readiness and later academic success however is worth noting as the curriculum is largely based on this assumption.

For example, NAEYC did a literature review of theories of family engagement in EC intervention program. Their findings focused on two models of family engagement: a development-economic perspective and social exchange theories. They explain,

The family engagement literature clearly supports the importance of strong partnerships between families and early childhood education programs. Positive family-program connections have been linked to greater academic motivation, grade promotion, and socio-emotional skills across all young children, including those from diverse ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds (Christenson, 2000; Mantzicopoulos, 2003; McWayne et al., 2004) (Halgunseth, 2009).

Without parental buy-in, parents would not attend the program nor bring their children. Thus, although seemingly obvious, it is one of the most important factors in the sustainability of the ECLN program. The parents' buy-in to the program is notable in their feedback; they are



interested in keeping the program alive as well as improving upon it. I think is reflected in the benefits outlined in the themes. In addition, when the program was potentially going to drop from one day per week to one day per month, the mothers expressed they were very upset and explained that they were going to organize themselves to continue to provide a weekly session. That to me shows genuine interest in the program continuing.

Another consideration around this idea of buy-in is that from a research perspective. I wonder to what degree I was being told what parents thought I may want to hear, a common risk of this type of research. However a critical sociocultural lens, building off of Bourdieu, reminds me not to undermine the parents' social capital and agency in this research. They had agency in their responses and feedback on this program which, being positive, I think supports this notion of buy-in to the program and a desire to see it continue.

### **Emphasis on school-readiness**

As the data suggests, parents' feedback on the program demonstrates a need and desire on behalf of the parents for their children to succeed in school and parents even suggest other skills (additional fine motor and gross motor skills) they would like to see added to the curriculum. They feel the program helps provide their children with the skills (confidence, pre-literacy skills etc.) necessary for an easier transition and success in school. During interviews they cited scary examples of children struggling to adapt to school, including children urinating on themselves out of fear or lack of confidence, lagging behind due to lack of vocabulary or knowledge of letters, etc. This is important within the socioeconomic realities for Mayan communities in Guatemala. Research outlined in the literature review shows the marked challenges Mayan communities face as compared to non-indigenous communities in terms of educational attainment as well as other socio-economic indicators. Thus, the parents' heavy emphasis on school readiness is understandable when putting their feedback within the broader context in which they live. The ECLN program thus meets a need for school readiness as expressed by the parents of this community. One question is can (or should) these needs be better met? The ECLN program is not meant to be a comprehensive preschool program; however, can the parents' feedback on the importance of school readiness be further incorporated into the program? This

speaks to a larger debate about Guatemala's traditional and largely western-influenced school system which I will allude to later in this discussion.

### **Program alignment with local early childhood norms**

Certain elements of the ECLN program seem to be in line with local Mayan norms and ways of learning. These include:

#### **Community-oriented child rearing**

The ECLN program is run out of a community public space. It brings together parents and their children in order to work on early literacy and nutrition skills and knowledge. It is non-formal and emphasizes experiential learning. As outlined in the literature review, research on other Guatemalan Mayan indigenous groups indicates, for example, the value placed on young children learning through cooperation and responsibility-sharing both at home and in the broader community. Indigenous communities are described as being collectivist in nature and organized in "horizontal, group-oriented social coordination" (Chavajay and Rogoff's, 2002, p.56). In observations, for example, parents with infants passed their babies to a woman sitting next to or near them when they needed to go get up or use the restroom. This is in line with the community-oriented parenting and learning styles as outlined in much of Rogoff's (1993, 2003) work.

#### **Mixed-age groups**

Rogoff (2003) also showed the majority of social time outside school between children is in mixed age groups. Children between the ages of zero and six attend this program along with their parents. In my observations of the sessions, the children starting at the age where they could walk independently were sitting together on the floor in front of the parents who sat behind them in a circle. They interacted with each other, the librarian facilitator for the program as well as their parents.

I will note here that two parents interviewed suggested dividing between older and younger children to better meet their developmental needs as they felt at times the literacy content was

not applicable to the range of ages. This point can be addressed either by changing the types of activities to be better adaptable to the mix of ages, or better clarifying how they can be through librarian professional development and trainings.

### **Further adapting curriculum to the local culture**

There are elements of the program that seem in line with local norms around learning and parenting young children, it is important to consider how this program can be further adapted to the local culture and context. In line with my theoretical framework and beliefs about culturally relevant early childhood education is the importance of ‘quality’ education. In addition and as stated in the introduction, research shows that an important component of quality EC interventions is their cultural-appropriateness. Modica et al. (2010) identify several factors for successful EC interventions:

- Integration of health, nutrition, education, social, and economic development;
- Collaboration between government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and communities;
- A focus on children whose families are disadvantaged;
- Sufficient intensity and duration of programs;
- Family-educator partnerships in support of children's development;
- Opportunities for children to initiate their own learning and explore their surroundings through age-appropriate activities;
- Blending of traditional childrearing practices and cultural beliefs with evidence-based approaches;
- Providing early childhood program staff with systematic in-service training and practice, support and continuous supervision, observation methods to monitor children's development, and supportive materials (Engle et al. 2001)

Given the importance of culturally-relevant EC interventions, I want to highlight that parenting and thus beliefs, practices, and norms in EC are cultural phenomena. As Bronstein (2012) explains, “Children’s experiences with their parents within a cultural context consequently

scaffold them to become culturally competent members of their society” (Bronstein, 2012, p.213)”. In addition, Bronstein (2012) adds that cultural norms around childrearing and parenting are adapted to needs and environment of different societies.

With this in mind, an important question for the library and NGO to consider is what are some of the early childhood practices already happening in the community that can be built upon? What are the community of parents’ values and beliefs around early childhood that could be considered to further strengthen the program and its impact? Also, can the local language be incorporated into the curriculum and would that perhaps include a broader proportion of the community? While the program does adapt the curriculum by making it practical for the local community (ex: suggesting recipes with affordable and available foods from the local market), it may be able to build upon more customs and values around parenting.

Noteworthy is the fact that the original curriculum was written by a foreigner and the librarian who has continued to adapt it is from the community but not Mayan. As the NGO seeks to expand the ECLN program to other libraries, it could benefit from assuring cultural relevance to the communities in which it operates a Modica et al. (2010) explain “Using imported education practices and programs may undermine the culture and alienate children by threatening their sense of belonging” (p.1).

This case study doesn’t have the data to inform what local parenting practices exist to be built upon and incorporated into the curriculum. I suggest the librarians be trained in conducting needs assessments and in the Action Research cycle in order to help address these types of issues.

### **Influencing ideas about ECED**

This leads to a discussion around what might the unintended consequences of this program be and how those can be mitigated?

Hall (1997) discusses the importance of language and representation. He says “Representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world

meaningfully, to other people” (Hall, 1997, p. 15). The language parents used to describe and explain their understanding of ECE greatly paralleled the language used in the library. This is to be expected if the parents had not previously been exposed to this type of EC intervention. This brings up two larger points. First, as one parent indicated during an interview, parents may not have thought about ECED in terms in which the library frames it or in the terms in which I was asking out it. Thus ECED as a ‘concept’ in and of itself is shaped by the ECLN program. Then, by asking about it, I assign an added value to the concept of ECE being promoted in the ECLN program, which in turn has an impact on the parent’s conceptualization of ECE. In this way, the program is influencing (with parental participation and acceptance) local cultural norms and beliefs.

### **Unintended consequences**

What (unintended) consequences could this have? For example, Chavajay and Rogoff (2002) speak to the influence of formal schooling on Guatemalan Mayan mothering practices. They explain,

[...] Guatemalan Mayan mothers with 6–9 years of schooling used more language lessons and were more likely to attempt to enforce their own agendas with their toddlers (resembling European-American middle-class caregivers) compared with Mayan mothers with little or no schooling, who rarely adopted School-like relations in interacting with their toddlers (Rogoff et al., 1993). (p.56)

This point is also speaks by the previous themes of school readiness as well as parents’ feedback on changes in family dynamics which suggests similar changes are also happening in this community of parents. I want to be specific that I am not making a value judgment, rather, highlighting some of the potential dynamics important for the program to recognize and understand. Rogoff’s (2003) also explains that the ways in which Mayan mothers engaged with others was influenced by their experience in Western schooling:

Cultural variations in the ways people engage in groups seem also to reflect experience with the dyadic social organization common in Western schooling. Mayan mothers who had little or no experience in Western schooling usually worked in a multidirectional, coordinated way when

assembling a puzzle with three related children (Chavajay & Rogoff, 2002). In contrast, Mayan mothers who had extensive schooling experience often divided the task and directed the children to work in pairs or solo, rather than using the more traditional Mayan social organization of fluid collaboration in a multiparty group. Schooling seems to play an important cultural role in the structure of social relations (p.147).

Another example of an influence of behavior and conceptualization of early childhood can be seen in parental changes in bedtime routines which include reading. Mayan parents have reported not having such bedtime routines and typically practice co-sleeping or sleeping in the same room as parents (Morelli et al., 1992; Rogoff et al., 1993). However, the parents who attend the ECLN program noted starting a reading bedtime routine with their children. They explained this as a positive influence of the program.

One mother also commented that she no longer hits her child, rather, speaks to her. She also explains that one shouldn't fight with their partner in front of the child. While I have not done home observations to corroborate any of these stated changes in behavior, it is interesting that the parents chose to highlight these changes in behavior and dynamics as a direct impact of what they learn in the program.

### **Potential changes in community dynamics**

Parents in the program also seem to have strong ideas about the importance of the program and ECED. When asked about recruitment and what they think about increasing the attendance of the program, almost all of the mothers commented critically of those that choose not to come to the program, stating they may not care as much about the education of their children. This makes me wonder about potential changes in dynamics between community members. It may be relevant to note here that since the ECLN program is in Spanish, it automatic self-selects the participation of parents who can speak Spanish. This may once again speak to the desire to have children speak Spanish in order to succeed in the formal school system and workforce. It thus may be beneficial to have an understanding of the amount of parents in the community that do not attend due to language barriers or that perhaps choose not to attend due to a desire for a bilingual program to preserve their Mayan indigenous language. Interviewing parents who do not attend the program

would provide insightful future research.

I again suggest that these unintended consequences may be better understood and perhaps mitigated through incorporating some version of Action Research and needs assessments into the training of librarians on this curriculum. Also, librarians may benefit from librarian ‘learning circles’ where they could learn from each other’s practices as well as work with parents in the communities themselves. However, due to the distances between libraries, this would be challenging. It would also have to be assured that these techniques would be beneficial in these contexts.

### **Other Recommendations and Future Research Opportunities**

With this discussion in mind and in order to continue to better serve the communities needs and assure culturally-relevant EC practices and ideas, the following are some further recommendations for the NGO to consider. Again I reiterate that any recommendations need to be culturally-adapted or re-made.

- Consider creating a bilingual component to the curriculum to better integrate local knowledge and potentially reach more parents of the community.
- Continue and increase incorporation of local culture, including language and traditions. Consult with parents about their practices and how those can be built upon in the curriculum.
- Speak to parents who do not attend the program and find out what their experience is, reasons they don’t attend and what challenges/obstacles they face in order to inform the program and increase empathy and understanding among the community of parents.
- Longitudinal evaluations would help increase understanding of the program and its impact as children move through and past the ECLN program. Ex: Are children passing first grade? Are children reading better long-term?
- Incorporating into the curriculum training: Action Research needs assessments, learning circles (or some version of such resources).

## VII. Conclusion

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Through this case study I have provided an example of how better understanding parents desires and needs within their own contexts can increase awareness to ultimately improve EC interventions and more specifically increase quality by increasing cultural-relevance. Using open-ended survey questions and qualitative interviews, I was able to highlight and interpret the views of the parents on the ECLN program and EC in general then applied a critical sociocultural lens in attempting to understand those views and perspectives and how they can inform the ECLN program. I also attempted to remain reflexive of my role in this research by thinking about the dynamics at play in the research and how those realities speak to the research process for this case study.

How can the program make use of the parents' perceptions and feedback of the program? If the parents are understood as agents of their own needs and desires, then understanding those needs and desires can help inform the ECLN program to better serve the community of parents and children. This research provides a basis of knowledge from which to build upon in order to better the program. Critical sociocultural theories helps frame this discussion and analysis as well as the understanding that parents are not simply passive participants of this program but rather active agents in shaping their own use of the ECLN program.

In conclusion, I believe this research and discussion comes at a critical time to ensuring the program's relevance and appropriateness to the communities in which they operate as the NGO has begun expanding this model program to the other libraries within its network. I hope this research will serve to inform that process and ultimately better serve the communities in which the libraries operate.



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## Appendix I

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**Encuesta sobre el programa Estimulación Temprana a la Lectura y Nutrición (ET)** - La siguiente encuesta es totalmente anónima (por favor no poner su nombre en el documento). La meta de la encuesta es tener datos sobre los beneficiarios del programa ET y empezar una evaluación del programa por los beneficiarios. Su participación en esta encuesta es totalmente voluntaria. Puede dejar de hacerlo en cualquier momento. Favor de devolver esta encuestas directamente a Yaëlle o dejarla en la caja indicada localizada en la biblioteca comunitaria.

1. ¿Qué edad tiene? \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. ¿Sabe leer y escribir?  
Sí  
No  
Un poco  
Comentario: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
3. ¿Cuántos años de estudio tiene? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. ¿Cuántos hijos tiene y que edades tienen? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. ¿Cómo llega a la biblioteca? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)  
A pie?  
En bus?  
En carro?  
En tuc tuc?  
Otro? Favor de explicar:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
6. ¿Cuánto tiempo le tarda en llegar a la biblioteca desde su casa? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
7. ¿Cómo se enteró del programa de Estimulación Temprana de la biblioteca? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)  
Alguien que estaba atendiendo el programa?  
Alguien que sabía del programa pero que no había atendido?  
Un anuncio?

La bibliotecaria?  
Otro? (Favor de explicar)

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8. ¿Cuándo (mes y año) empezó a asistir a las sesiones de Estimulación Temprana?

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9. ¿Con que frecuencia asiste a las sesiones de Estimulación Temprana? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas.)

Cada semana?

Dos veces al mes?

Una vez al mes?

Menos de una vez al mes?

Otro?

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10. ¿Si no llega cada semana, cuales son las razones?

(Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas.)

Hijo(s) enfermos?

Trabajo?

Se le olvida?

No vale la pena?

No tiene a quien cuidar su(s) hijo(s)?

Otra(s)

razones?

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11. ¿Porque decidió asistir al programa de Estimulación Temprana?

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12. ¿Sabía lo que era Estimulación Temprana antes de llegar a las sesiones? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)

Sí

No

13. ¿En sus propias palabras, que es Estimulación Temprana a la lectura?

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14. ¿En sus propias palabras, de que se trata el tema de nutrición en Estimulación Temprana? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. ¿La Estimulación Temprana es importante? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)  
Muy importante  
Importante  
Un poco importante  
No tan importante  
Porque?: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

16. ¿Le conviene el día y la hora de las sesiones de Estimulación Temprana? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)  
Sí  
No  
Explicar: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

17. ¿Le gustaría que las sesiones de Estimulación Temprana fueron más frecuentes que 3 veces al mes? (Favor poner un cirulo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)  
Sí  
No  
Explicar: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

18. ¿Qué idiomas habla? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

19. ¿Qué cambios haría al programa de ET? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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20. ¿Comparte con amigos y familiares lo que aprende en las sesiones de ET? (Favor poner un círculo alrededor de las respuestas correctas)

Sí

No

Comentarios: \_\_\_\_\_

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21. ¿Si practica alguna destreza de lectura o tema de nutrición en la casa, que hace? \_\_\_\_\_

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22. ¿Es difícil implementar lo que aprende de pre-lectura y nutrición fuera de la biblioteca?

Sí

A veces

No

Porque? \_\_\_\_\_

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23. ¿Algún otro comentario? \_\_\_\_\_

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☺ Gracias por su participación ☺

## Appendix II

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### **Preguntas potenciales para padres de familia participando en el programa Estimulación Temprana a la Lectura y Nutrición (ET)**

- ¿Cómo se enteró del programa ET de la biblioteca?
- ¿Porque asiste a las sesiones ET?
- ¿Que sabía de ET a la lectura/nutrición antes de llegar?
- ¿Cómo explicaría a un amigo o un familiar lo que es ET?
- ¿La ET a la lectura es importante? ¿Porque?
- ¿Por qué el tema de nutrición es importante en la ET?
- ¿Cuántas veces al mes asiste a las sesiones?
- ¿Cree que deberían de involucrarse más padres de familia?
- ¿Cómo cree que se puede llegar a involucrar más padres?
- ¿Que está aprendiendo en las sesiones?
  - o ¿Sobre ET a la lectura?
  - o ¿Sobre nutrición?
- ¿Que están aprendiendo sus hijos?
  - o ¿Sobre ET a la lectura?
  - o ¿Sobre nutrición?
- ¿El horario/frecuencia de las sesiones le conviene?
- ¿Desde que llego a las sesiones, ha cambiado algún hábito?
- ¿Sus hijos les gustan llegar a las sesiones?
- ¿Cómo está la relación con su(s) hijo/a(s)?
- ¿Cómo piensa que se puede mejorar el programa ET a la lectura y nutrición?
- ¿Que no debería de cambiar?
- ¿Hay algo que no hemos discutido que quiere comentar?
- ¿Qué preguntas tiene?