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Mirrors Reflecting Latinas' Realities in an Urban Community

Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés

What are the realities of Latina adult learners? This question guided the design of this research project. Utilizing a focus group approach, six Latinas in Kansas City, Kansas, had the opportunity to speak freely about themselves and to share their stories with each other. This article focuses on the voices of these women without outside analysis and interpretation to capture the very essence of their experiences as a main avenue for understanding our changing Adult Basic Education population, as well as to validate their powerful and contradicting experiences.

This research seeks to understand the realities of Latinas as they immigrate to the United States and discover that to build a more secure life for themselves and their families they need to learn English to fully function in this new country. The questions asked in the focus group were designed to understand why these Latinas came to the United States, what obstacles they encountered, how and if they overcame them, their desire to learn English, the support received, and their suggestions to improve adult education.

The six Latina women also talked about a variety of issues. Their voices recreated the complex path that each one forged before and after immigrating to the U.S. Very eloquently, they touched upon matters that were important to them, such as immigration, changing societal and gender roles, oppression, personal expectations, their dreams for themselves and their families, and their quest to become fully functional members of this society.

Throughout the interview, they articulated the central role that education plays in their personal expectations and their families' advancement. At the same time, because they were nontraditional students, full-time workers, parents, caregivers, and foreign-born women, they experienced the educational path as a confusing and unstable one that did not conform with their realities. The uniqueness of learning about their experiences opens the door to go against the societal stereotypes usually held against Latinas as crystallized and romanticized images of passive members of a lesser culture, understood as if they were all cut with the same pattern. Instead, their stories offer a window into their own individualities, their strong ways of dealing with adversity, and their creative braiding of the multiple cultural realities that they inhabit on a daily basis.

The six women were enrolled in English classes in an adult learning center that services a primarily urban and Hispanic population.

Gabriela Díaz de Sabatés is a specialist in recruitment and retention of college students. She is Director of the PILOTS Program at Kansas State University, which provides academic services to at-risk freshman students. One of her main areas of research is the situation of Latina women within educational settings in the United States with special emphasis on immigration and cultural identity. She was born and raised in Argentina.

During class time, the English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers informed their students of this focus group opportunity. Six interested students volunteered to participate. The participants signed an interview consent form (in Spanish and English) which included their option to withdraw their participation at any time during the interview without any consequences. Also, a confidentiality clause was added to safeguard their identities and personal safety. Students only used self-selected pseudonyms during the interview.

The focus group took place on a Thursday morning at the Adult Basic Education center, and refreshments were served. It was conducted entirely in Spanish because all participants agreed that it was the language they felt most comfortable using. The interview was recorded for clarity purposes with the participants' consent, and it was later transcribed and translated by a bilingual/bicultural specialist. Participants received a small monetary recognition in appreciation for donating their valuable time and expertise.

The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 55 years of age. Four women came from Mexico, one from Honduras, and one from Guatemala. Three have been in the U.S. for at least nine years, and the other three were recent immigrants. Two of the women were legal residents/citizens while the other four were undocumented. None of the six women were fully literate in English, but they were all fully literate in Spanish. Most of them attended high school in their countries of origin while one of them had a college degree from Guatemala. They all had families that depended upon them (nuclear or extended) and from whom they received support. Four participants had children either living with them or staying in their native country. Two of the women performed cleaning jobs to support themselves and their families, and they all dreamt of their children getting a college degree in the U.S. to advance socioeconomically.

Below is the transcribed translation of the Latinas' voices from Spanish to English. Some phrases and expressions in Spanish were especially difficult to translate and lost some of their power in the process. As much as possible, the translation of their voices are true to the meaning and intent of their stories. Peculiarities of some expressions used are due to the imperfect nature of translations.

Latinas' Identities

Corazón: I want to tell you about myself and how I came here. I am from Durango, Mexico, and came to the U.S. because one day my brother invited me to attend a wedding. I liked it in here, and I stayed. I have been in the U.S. for nine years, but when I came here, I did so only with my youngest son and my husband. Later, I went back to get my two other sons that stayed in Mexico. I have a sister-in-law that's American, and she taught me how to live in the U.S. She taught me that I needed to learn to speak English, and two weeks after coming here, I started going to a place called the Franklin Center to learn English. I took my first classes there. I arrived in the States in May, and then we brought my kids in December: they started going to school the very next day. We got here on a Sunday night, and on Monday I took them to school, because I knew a little bit about here.

Melissa: I am Melissa. I came from Honduras four years ago. I have three children, and I am a single mother. I am working and I try to study so I can learn more. My daughter is twelve years old, my son is ten and the youngest is seven: My kids are in Honduras. I am here by myself and I live with my brothers.

Lucy: My name is Lucy. I came here in 1989 from Mexico. I've been here for a very long time. Thank God...I have my kids, they were both born here. My daughter is twelve years old, and my son is nine years old. They study here. They were born here.

Leonela: My name is Leonela, and I also I am looking for a better opportunity, because I wanted my kids to study, and there wasn't a way in Mexico. I have a daughter who's 19 years old, and my son is ten. I came because my husband works at the circus, and we were always traveling. My daughter always wanted to study, but she couldn't because we were always moving from one place to another. I wanted to have a stable life, and since my family lives here, I came here, but I came here without papers with my kids, looking for a stable place for them to settle and study. My daughter studied one for year, and then she started working and didn't want to go back to school. I am looking for a way to get her back. Right now she has a son so she might come back to school when he gets older. My son is going to school, but he doesn't like it very much because he wants to go back to the circus. I am struggling a little bit with him because he doesn't like school or to study. I keep insisting that he needs to study first and then we'll see if he goes back ... He likes to do the trapeze, that's what his Dad does. This is the reason why I've struggled with him so much because he keeps insisting that he wants to work at the circus. In it, kids start working when they are five or six years old, and they do trapeze. What he likes to do is climb on everything. He looks like a spider.

Carmen: My name is Carmen. It's been a year and five months since I've lived in the U.S. It's sometimes difficult, and I get homesick, but I think about my family and I keep going. It's a little bit difficult, but I am here because of them, and you have to keep going. I am married. I have his support and my family's, but I don't visit them often. It's not the same to be with the family you were raised by than with the one that I met when I came here. There are moments when you're fine, but there are moments when you're not well, but you have to keep going. I think that in the future. I will have a family and I'll keep going because of them. It won't be soon, but some day ...

Karla: Well, my name is Karla. I have three kids. I came here with the purpose of my kids to study. Do something better than what I did. My husband was already here. I came with my three kids. I am also illegal, but my purpose is for my kids to study and get ahead and be good people. I don't work. I just study. I have the opportunity that my husband works and gives me the opportunity to tell me, "You study and get ahead." I have all my family here, my brothers, all my family. I don't have any family in Mexico. This is why I'm hopeful that someday we will all be given the opportunity to have a paper or something that will allow us to stay here. More than anything because we are people that have an interest in being here, work, and not harm anyone. We just came here to work, study and get ahead.

Education

Corazón: I went to school in Mexico, but I only finished sixth grade, which we call elementary school over there. After that, I didn't have the opportunity to study because I can't really say ... there isn't ... right now, I am 50 years old, and when I was a little girl, my parents didn't have money, and people didn't study. I don't know why, but right now I am here, and I am very happy to live in the U.S. I don't want to be a burden to anyone, so I work and take English classes and thank you so much for inviting me.

Lucy: I have studied English here and over there I went to elementary school. In the U.S., I have worked and studied English but of course, as always, you find a job and stop studying English, and then you start working and then you return to studying, and that's the way it is. But like always, I'm moving ahead and working hard ... I came here for better opportunities that we didn't have over there and they have them here. These opportunities are jobs, the possibility to learn English, putting all your effort into learning English to continue moving forward, and especially to help our kids because we want to make sure that they get ahead, unlike us. You don't have the opportunity to study over there.

Leonela: In Mexico, I only attended elementary school, and I didn't finish middle school because of too much traveling. But now I am here and working hard, to be an example for my kids. You have to study because it's the only way to move ahead. There isn't any other way. My daughter is here, saying that she will continue to study later, as soon as the baby gets older, and I'll keep going. I keep studying English to help my son. I don't know, with his homework ... He's a little behind for the same reason that I'm struggling with him, he is insisting that he wants to go back to the circus. He tells me that he will work hard, and lately I have seen that he's doing a lot better ... It's the best example that you can give your kids too ... to study.

Karla: I only attended elementary school in Mexico, but I would have loved to study something ... well, that's our hope: That if we learn English more doors will be open to us to get ahead. I would like to study. In my case, I'm a stylist, but here my studies are not accepted. I have to go back and study in order to get my license. I can't to go to school and practice styling because I don't speak English. I have to finish high school here to continue studying and get my license. The GED program is very important. Here, we're being taught English first so we can go to school. We can get to a different level. The GED program is very important. I think it gives you a lot of opportunities, but sometimes you ask yourself: "What for?", but in the end you yourself ... It's not the same thing, to think that it's something good and that it's a better opportunity to work.

The Need for Learning English

Corazón: When I came to the U.S., I saw the need to learn English. The first place that my sister-in-law took me to was the mall. Nine years ago, when I came here there weren't many Hispanics. We went to a store, and she was pushing her granddaughter in the stroller while she said to me: "You go in the elevator with her, and I'll meet you at the top, because I'm scared of elevators". So I took the elevator and I didn't know what button to push. So I was there and the elevator door closed, and I thought: "Now what am I going to do?" I started praying and asking God what to do. I don't know how the elevator door opened. May be someone pushed a button (now I know that someone must have pushed the button to go up or down). The door opened, and I got out of the elevator quickly. Now, whom was I going to ask about using the elevator, or what was I going to ask? I could only stand there and look at the people, because no one spoke Spanish, and I didn't know how to ask someone in English: "Do you speak Spanish, can you help me?" I couldn't speak English. So, I stayed there asking God for my sister-in-law to come back. In my hometown in Mexico, there weren't big stores like this one. I didn't know what to do. It was something very new to me. My sister-in-law came back and was scared, she said "I was waiting for you, but you never came". That was one of the things that made me see that I needed to learn English.

Corazón: I didn't know I was coming to the United States to stay, I thought I was only visiting, but ... I came in May and thought we were going to go back to Mexico in December. So, after staying here for about six months, I started making tamales to sell and a lady told me (a neighbor from Mexico): "Why don't you make tamales?" and I said: "OK, I will sell them". So, I went to the street to sell tamales, but who was I going to sell them to? No one spoke Spanish. So I went back home. My husband knew a little bit of English. He studied it in middle school. He said: "I'll go with you". But the same thing happened, we walked and walked, and who were we going to sell the tamales to? Later, I went to see my brother and I asked him: "How do you say that I sell tamales in English?" He brought a notebook and wrote: "I sell tamales for \$10 a dozen". So, I came with the notebook and knocked on doors and said to people: "I sell tamales for \$10 a dozen." And that is how I started selling them. So, I started looking for a place where I could take English classes ... Now, thank God my English classes are close to where I live. I don't drive yet, but I can walk to school. I started looking for classes and the Franklin Center was two to three blocks from where I live, and I started going. I took classes for a year without missing a day. That's where I met Lucy. Lucy and I know each other from class. That's where I started learning. When I saw people writing I thought: "I will never learn to write", and that's why I saw the need to learn English. I started speaking as if I was playing, and I still do so. I speak to people as if I was telling a joke or playing a game.

Unidentified voice: Yeah ... you speak slower ... Yeah, because if you're too serious about it, it won't work.

Corazón: So, I started speaking to more people and, when my brothers visited shortly after, I started speaking to them. They said: "Do YOU speak English!?" ... and I answered: "Yes" I mean I don't speak ... "Keep doing that as if you're playing". Because their wives live in Chicago, but there's a lot of people that speak Spanish in Chicago. You don't need to speak English. Well, apparently you don't have to, but we're in the U.S. and we need to. So, I ... ummmm ... well, their wives have been here for all their lives, and they don't speak English.

Unidentified voice: My dream is to learn English because I want to work in a nursing home or in a hospital. It doesn't matter if it's cleaning, but that's my dream because I want to work with the elders. My dream is to make their lives easier; talk to them—of course it's going to be with Americans—and that's why I am learning English. I want to talk to them about how life is so beautiful. I tell my four kids and my husband, and they're proud of me. My daughter is always saying: "Mom, keep going, that's great!" I always practice with them. I speak to them a lot. My oldest son is 27 years old, and he's in Mexico. He's a lawyer. He's very happy that I speak English. He's over there, and he comes sometimes. He's a lawyer. We don't have many opportunities in Mexico. He has to come and work here. He's young. He's 27 and a recent graduate, and he came to the U.S. He came here and started working with his dad digging holes and working in landscaping.

The Difficulty of not Speaking English

Leonela: I've struggled a lot. I was working at a hotel, and we would go to work by bus. My mom started teaching me how to get on them. My mom doesn't speak English, but she's very smart. She moves around, I don't know how. She goes everywhere by bus. She memorizes the bus numbers and where they go and where she needs to get off. She would go everywhere. She taught me. I would take

three buses to get home. Close to 29th from Embassy Suites. I would struggle because I was afraid of getting lost or that they would take me somewhere else. I struggled like she said because I didn't know how to ask in English where it was going or where do I get off. This is how someone learns though, getting lost everywhere and that's what happened to me. I would get lost. At work, I have a lot of co-workers from Jamaica and Morocco. They are from many countries. Many want to speak to someone. They talk to me a lot. I'm lucky that wherever I go they want to talk to me a lot, and all I say is "I don't understand, I don't understand," because if they ask me two or three things I answer, but if they want to have a conversation, I leave making an excuse. I can't have a conversation. I can't and that's why ... sometimes I feel bad and say that I have to do it. I always find an excuse to leave quickly. I have an admirer who's African, and he always looks for me all the time. He always wants to talk to me, and I don't understand, he tells me many things, but I don't know what he says. I don't understand him. I don't understand him. When I met him, I would always see him in the elevator or in the hallways. He would tell me things, and all I would say is: "Hi." I would see him, and I didn't know what he was saying. I never knew what he was saying until one day they threw a party for us at the hotel. They gave us passes to bring guests, and I took my sister and some neighbor friends. So, my African friend came over and said that he would tell me so many things, and I never understood anything.

Leonela: What my first teacher taught me was to never say yes. If someone tells me something, never say yes. When they ask me something, I have to repeat it to myself, and I can practice, and I finally know what they are saying.

Melissa: What I do is that if I don't understand something, I ask them to write it down. The most difficult thing is to understand. Sometimes, you're too nervous to listen too. That's what happened to me when I first got here, I didn't know Missouri. Well, I didn't know anything, but they taught me what road to take to get to my job. I had to go by myself the third or fourth day of work, and I got lost. I-70 was closed, and I got lost. And I started crying and crying, and driving and driving, until I stopped at a Quick Trip and an American man came up to me. I had to signal to him if I could borrow his cell phone, and he said it wasn't charged. Finally, he dialed the numbers. He would ask me for the numbers to dial, and I didn't know how to say them in English. So, I told him to give me the phone, and I dialed it myself and I told my brother that I was lost and didn't know where I was. My brother speaks English very well, and he asked me if someone was close by. I said that an American was. My brother said that he wanted to speak to the American. I handed him the phone. Finally, I had to leave my car there, and the American took me home. My brother gave him the address, and the American took me home. I left the car and I didn't even know where I left it. The American told my brother in which Quick Trip my car was. So, I left my car there, and left with a person I didn't even know, and God put him in my way. I got out of work at 9:00 p.m., and it was 10:30 p.m. when I got lost. The American took me home at that time, and when I was close to my house, I was still so nervous I didn't know I was in front of my house. Now I want to learn English.

Leonela: When I had just arrived to the U.S., I didn't speak English. I knew how to drive, but it felt as if I couldn't see.

Lucy: My kids are my interpreters. I'm the one who doesn't speak English.

Unidentified voice: I tell you, it's important to speak English. Coming here and learning it quickly, because honestly if it takes you a while ... oh man! I came to California, little Mexico. California is a small Mexico. You don't need to speak English there. There are a lot of Hispanics in California. You still have to learn English though. Lately, there are a lot of Mexicans here now. Back then there weren't as many. Many years back, there weren't a lot, right? There were only a few Mexicans here. Now, it's filled. Back then life was harder. There weren't interpreters at clinics. I remember one time when my daughter was three months old, and I would go to the clinic, and there wasn't anyone who would interpret for me. It was difficult ... they would always give me the papers in English and I would take those with me, and the people I lived with would translate the papers for me. It was difficult.

Melissa: That also happened to me one time. I had just gotten here, and I went to a clinic, and they asked me for the name of the county I resided in. I couldn't remember the name of the county here, and I couldn't say so—because I didn't speak English—they didn't set up an appointment for me. That's right. They didn't see me. I had to go back home without seeing a doctor ... I didn't speak English. I was mad and went back home. Why can't they help by having an interpreter on the phone or do something to help us? They didn't get me in just because of that. Just because I didn't know the name of the county! I didn't know that the county was Wyandotte. They didn't help. Honestly, you get frustrated.

Everyone: Yeah, you get mad at yourself. You get mad at yourself because the service is there, and they help you. It's just that you don't know how to communicate with them.

Karla: Since I've never even dreamt about coming to the U.S., I was never interested in learning English. When I came here and I went to class the first day, I thought, "Oh no!" A teacher started teaching me with flashcards, and I remember that I used to call the *flamenco* a *Jacinto* because that's how I would play (to memorize the words), just so we could laugh. The teacher would show me a *poncho*, and I would write *compadre* (son/daughter's godfather). And I would say: "No, he's in Mexico". I did it as a game, and when I started writing and learned to write, I thought English was hard. I just realized about it this morning again: you just have to put an effort into it, and slowly you'll get it and understand it better. I started in September here, and I also clean houses. I would clean four days a week, but stopped so I could go to class. Now, I go Fridays and Saturdays which is when I don't take classes. My bosses are American, and I told them that I would not work any more because I had to study, unless they changed my working days. They are very proud of me. There are four houses that I clean, because I go every other Saturday, so I can go to different houses. They are very proud, and they always ask me how my classes are going. And sometimes they remember that I have class, and they tell me not to forget about going to class. I speak English to them and they tell me that I am progressing. When I started, my husband was a little bit jealous that I was going to school because it's not just a simple English class, it's through the Kansas City Kansas Community College. My husband was a little bit jealous, and he would say, since we would start class at 9:00 am, "Aren't you going to come home, so I can eat lunch?" He doesn't work in the winter. I would say: "I can do that, but I have to be in class by 9:00 a.m.". And he said: "Why are you going to school? Don't you see that the neighbors don't go?" and I would say: "But

don't you see that ever since we came, the neighbors haven't changed their curtains? That they haven't progressed?" ... When my husband saw that I was speaking more English, he told me that I was learning, and instead of asking me if I was going to feed him, he jokingly said: "Are you going to ..." and I knew he wanted to see what I would say, but instead he said: "Just kidding! School is more important", and he would put my backpack in the car and drive me to school. He sees that I am learning and that I'm not wasting my time.

Pride and Support

Corazón: I'm proud of myself for learning English. My kids are very proud too, because my son had to do writing, and he wrote that he was proud of me because I have the strength to keep going, and there might be people that want to keep me from doing it, but I have the strength to keep going. They correct me. I keep going and I keep doing it. I'm proud of myself.

Karla: My husband supports me in everything. He bought me a car so I could go to class. I know how to drive, but I didn't have a car. He bought me a little car. It makes noises and everything, but he bought it so I could study. He pays for my courses, and he's always encouraging me to study, and knows that I've always wanted to study. My kids are the same way. They ask me if I have learned and what I have learned. I have their support. Sometimes, finding a place to go to study is a different thing, but I've always had their support to study. My mom and my brothers, they all support me. I have their support.

Unidentified voice: Me too. I have my husband's and kids' support even though they are not here. My husband always tells me to go to school and find out things. He doesn't study or anything, but ...

Karla: I also have all of my family's support. They always push me to keep going. They always tell me that what I'm doing is good for me and my kids ... even my mom and dad. As a matter of fact, my car broke down, it got hit and it didn't work. My dad let me borrow his car, which is the one I am driving right now, so I wouldn't stop going to school and work of course, but you should have seen it. I was struggling because I was missing school and they almost kicked me out, but I told the teacher to please give me a chance and not kick me out because I really wanted to be there. I stopped coming to class because of that reason.

Corazón: Sometimes it's difficult to come to class because of transportation from home to school, especially when you don't have a car and you live far away. The bus doesn't go by my house. I used to go home by bus, but there aren't any buses now.

Finding English

Corazón: I stopped taking classes because I started working, so I didn't go to class. One day, I came to this building and read that they had classes here, and I quickly came to find out when they were, and they called me. So, I saw Lucy at a store and told her, "I found a place where they teach English classes. You should come." So, we came that same day, and we're here learning here again.

Lucy: I came to the Adult Learning Center a couple of times, and they didn't take me the first time ... there were already a lot of people ahead of me. You can only get in the waiting list if there is room.

Unidentified voice: It also took me a year and a half after filling out the application.

Leonela: Three months ... yeah.

Unidentified voice: I only waited two months. When I called in they said: "If there is room next time I will call you". I waited two months, and then I came here in person. I didn't wait for them to call me.

Everyone: Right now there isn't any space ... we don't have a teacher ... there's a lot of people ... There's no room in the morning. The morning classes are better because we work at nighttime. You learn better in the morning. We all work in the evenings.

Karla: Also, it will be good to have classes in the afternoon ... Yes, for the afternoon too. There should be classes in the morning and afternoon, so everyone can come, so those that cannot make it in the morning can come in the afternoon. My sister works in the morning. An ex-student dropped out because of the same reason. He was an excellent student but had to work in the morning.

Corazón: We were in class for two weeks without a teacher because they had to go to a different place. They didn't necessarily leave us without a teacher but they sent a teacher and then another one, which is fine. But one day, they left an announcement that we weren't going to have class, and everyone was there. This was a group of more than 20 people, and now half of them are gone because there isn't a teacher. So, we came one day to the center, and we didn't have class, and we came the next day, and everyone was outside. We all got together and went to KCK Community College, and we went to find out what happened. We all went, all of us. We were walking down a hallway looking for Cecilia Prieto which is in charge of something. She helps Hispanics. We were in the hallway, and a lady asked, "Are you visiting?" We said: "No, we are looking for Cecilia Prieto," and she said, "That's me." We said, "OK," and she said: "*Arriba la causa!*" because she liked it that we all went together to find out what happened. We needed a teacher, and they found a teacher for us. They didn't leave us without a teacher. We had two groups: one advanced and another one intermediate.

Unidentified voice (Lucy?): I went to the school to see if there were any courses or something free (of course) because I don't have the means for that ... I had gone to see if there was a school or a center or something they could give me information over there. In Missouri they gave me Cecilia's phone number which is the person that was teaching here. I called her and she said: "yes", but said that I had to wait because the group was too large already ... it was filled. She said she would call as soon as there was an opportunity. I waited for two months, but this is how I found out because I went looking for information over there (Missouri), looking for a place to learn.

Melissa: El Centro helps the community ... I found out through a friend that works in the library. She told me that they were giving English classes and that I could come. And I went to El Centro, that is on 26th street. They sent me here ... When people ask about English classes I just tell them, "Please write down your name and I'll tell the teacher. Write down your name and phone number."

Lucy: Sometimes you have the opportunity to study, but your kids are too young and when they're on vacation, you have to leave school to be with them because you cannot pay to take them somewhere else. There was a school where they had a daycare, right? There are schools where ... but just a few ... with daycares.

Experiencing Oppression

Karla: My son learned English quickly. He speaks as if he was born here. He learned it in four years. He hasn't gone to school, and he's not 100% fluent in English, but he speaks as if he's been here all of

his life. Everyone asks my kids if they were born here because they have truly worked hard. They've also suffered a lot too when they came here. They would call them "Mexicans". My daughter would cry a lot because she was 14 years old when she came here, and they would discriminate against her a lot. My son, who is 19 years old, would also be discriminated against by the other children. But, it's all good. I am very happy to be learning because they're teaching me here that I always have to say looking at someone in the eyes.

Unidentified voice: If someone asks me or calls me a wetback, I have to say: "Excuse me, where are you from?" I am learning a lot. I'm very proud of myself.

Corazón: My daughter was 14 years old when we came to the U.S., and now she's 22. She finished high school here, and she started going to Donnelly College, but because she's undocumented and because she didn't have the money to go to school, she stopped attending her classes. That's the problem ... And I have a son who turns 19 today! When we brought him to the U.S. he was 11 years old. He finished middle school here. He attended elementary school when we came to the States, finished that and started middle school at Argentine. He finished there and started high school at Harmond. He finished that and started studying at a technical college. He just graduated with a short course because he can't go to the university because we're still undocumented. He finished his degree in mechanical repair. He is working in a mechanic's workshop. I don't know if he's going to be able to go to the university some day, but he wants to do so. I have another son, and he was 5 years old when we came to the U.S. He went to Emmerson School. He finished and started at Argentine Middle School, and now he's in Summer Academic School. He's in 8th grade. All my children have always had good grades. I am studying English because I don't ever want to stop learning.

Melissa: I am studying English. I have a lot more to learn. I hope and trust in God that I will fix my papers someday to be with my family.

Latinas' Suggestions to Improve Adult Basic Education

Throughout the focus group, the participants made suggestions to improve classes, teaching, and create more consistency in the classroom. Here is a synopsis of their comments.

Classes

- I would like to spend eight hours daily in class.
- If there were more teachers, classes could be from Monday to Friday. I can take classes from Monday through Sunday three and a half hours of class every day.
- If we could only have more hours in class ... I would like to come from 8:00 a.m. or 7:30 a.m., and we could have normal classes like the kids, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Even though I work at night, at home I take care of my kids, but I would be there.
- Weekends would be good for those who cannot come during the week. There are a lot of people that rest only in the weekends.

Teaching

- Be bilingual. The majority of the teachers speak English only, and there are things that one cannot understand and prefers to have it explained in Spanish.
- We need teachers with an American pronunciation. That's what we need. It doesn't matter if she's Hispanic, but she has to know and pronounce English very well, because if they speak with an accent, then we're all going to learn to pronounce it incorrectly.

Consistency

- The other teachers left us because they had better job opportunities, and they were excellent teachers. These teachers had better job opportunities and decided to leave. They left to go to Chile. It's good for them, right? But it wasn't good for us, because the group got out of control. When the teachers left, half of the second group of students left too. Now both groups are combined, so some students are more advanced than us, and they get frustrated because we're not as advanced as they are. So, the instructors need to separate us.