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## **Cultural competence needs of non-Latino foster parents: A study of transcultural foster care with Latino children**

Myriam Renee Aguilar

Amanda Nicole Robles

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CULTURAL COMPETENCE NEEDS OF NON-LATINO FOSTER  
PARENTS: A STUDY OF TRANSCULTURAL FOSTER  
CARE WITH LATINO CHILDREN

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

---

by  
Myriam Renee Aguilar  
Amanda Nicole Robles

June 2005

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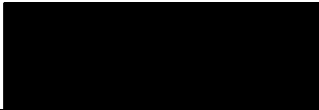
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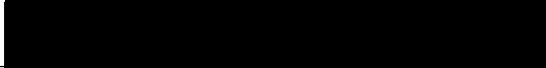
by  
Myriam Renee Aguilar  
Amanda Nicole Robles

June 2005

Approved by:

  
Dr. Nancy Mary, Faculty Supervisor  
Social Work

6-7-05  
Date

  
Cathy Cimballo, Agency Director,  
Department of Children's Services,  
San Bernardino County

  
Dr. Rosemary McCaslin,  
M.S.W. Research Coordinator

## ABSTRACT

Latino foster care children currently make up about 40% of California's foster care population. The majority of foster parents are non-Latinos. This study will attempt to assess the cultural competency training needs of non-Latino caregivers who have Latino children in their homes. Through quantitative and qualitative measurement of cultural competency training needs, this study seeks to evaluate if non-Latino foster parents are provided with adequate cultural training to address the unique cultural needs of Latino foster children. Determining gaps in training and non-Latino foster parent attitudes towards cultural competence will also be assessed.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors would like to acknowledge Dr. Nancy Mary for her guidance and support in the process of this research project.

## DEDICATION

Amanda would like to dedicate this work to her Grams. Grams, you taught me strength, perseverance and most importantly, you taught me how to value and love all creatures...whether they be two legged or four legged. It is my dearest wish that I make you proud. I love you. Claudia Jeanette Coonrod, April 1, 1920 - January 14, 1994

Myriam would like to dedicate this to her family. Through these difficult past two years they have given me support when I felt like giving up, happiness when I needed to laugh out loud and love which is always the most essential. Most importantly, I dedicate this to my baby boy who came to me at a time when I needed a sense of purpose and the motivation to go on. Adrian, thank you for sharing your life with mine. Los quiero mucho.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Entering into the foster care system is a disruptive occurrence in the life of a child. It can be even more unsettling to a child who enters into a foster family where the cultural norms are much different than their own. This is the case when Latino foster children enter into non-Latino foster families. Latino children make up 40 percent of foster care children in California and, although little research exists on the exact number of available Latino foster parents, it is believed that the need far outnumbers the availability (Casey Family Programs, 2001). According to San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services statistics, 35 percent of the children in County foster care are identified as Latino and the percentage of children in the entire San Bernardino County area who are of Latino descent is 49 percent (San Bernardino County Department of Children's Services, 2005). The exact number of Latino foster parents in San Bernardino County is unknown, but is suspected to be much lower than the number of Latino foster children needing placements. Thus, Latino foster children are

tradition of celebrating a young Latina's "sweet 15" (Foster Care Youth United, 1996). Maria described how her Latino food, language and customs were not seen as important to her foster parents and even became cause for mockery at times (Foster Care Youth United, 1996). Maria's case may not be the norm for most transcultural foster families. However, this case is a vivid example of how foster parents can be culturally insensitive towards Latino children.

Social workers have brought the issue of cultural competency to the forefront in recent years (Vonk, 2001). Social workers need to have cultural competency in their practice approach to interact in a responsible and ethical manner with clients. However, it often falls upon social workers to also teach some cultural competency to foster parents. Vonk (2001) noted that teaching a parent about cultural competency is important so that the parent can meet the unique needs of the children they are caring for.

#### Purpose of the Study

The foster care system continues to deal with issues of race among other concerns. Overcrowding, lack of funding and low recruitment of foster parents are but a few of these pressing concerns. The County of San

Bernardino is an excellent example of a large county struggling with the many complications of an overburdened foster care system. This study will focus on some of the non-Latino foster parents in San Bernardino County who are acting as caregivers for Latino children. It will focus on four major aspects of cultural competency and cultural training. The purpose of this study is to assess what the non-Latino caregivers learned in their cultural training. This study will also assess if these caregivers use what they learned, and will query caregivers' regarding any gaps in training and caregivers' personal attitudes towards the Latino culture of the children they care for.

Specifically, this study will focus on temporary foster placements with the above mentioned cultural guidelines. Surveys will be used to collect data from non-Latino foster parents picked from a sample of current non-Latino foster parents caring for Latino foster children. This sample will be provided by San Bernardino County.

Research for this project will be done through a primarily quantitative survey. The rationale for this research method is, in part, the desire for a larger sample size. Also, by gathering quantitative data by survey, more information can be requested and thus

processed than in a qualitative study. Surveys are used to reach a large population and provide an array of information (Grinnell, 2001).

#### Significance of the Project for Social Work

This study will be focusing on the assessment phase of the generalist practice model. Assessing the cultural competency of non-Latino foster parents caring for Latino children will provide measurable data to formulate outcomes. These outcomes include the retention of training, gaps in training and suggested improvements that can effect how the County of San Bernardino trains its foster families in Latino cultural competency. Typically children of color have "poorer outcomes and receive fewer services" than Caucasian children (Courtney & Barth, 1996). Race and culture are obvious client issues in the foster care system. Yet for all of its importance there is little research done on the topic of the cultural competence of foster parents.

The results of this study will provide more information on a much ignored topic. There exists a plethora of information on topics like matching races and not allowing race to be a factor in placement. This study will address the reality that transcultural placements

exist. The transcultural knowledge gained could assist in the growth and well being of the children that are being placed in these homes. The results could provide San Bernardino County with an awareness of the cultural competence of their foster parents. This in turn may provide helpful information affecting cultural training given to potential and current foster parents.

Foster care is a domain of the Title IV-E program. Additionally, minority children and children who have been abused or neglected (as most foster children have been) are vulnerable populations that are served by the child welfare program. This study will address how these vulnerable children are respected, nurtured and kept in touch with their unique culture through the cultural competence training of the foster parents that care for them.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Chapter Two consists of literature pertinent to this study. Cultural competency in our society, in child welfare and in transcultural care giving as well as racial identity and ethnic self concept will be reported on. Last, the existing research on minorities in foster care and the theory guiding this research will be elaborated on.

#### Cultural Competence when Working with Latinos

Approximately one in eight people in the United States is of Latino descent (Suleiman, 2003). California has the largest Latino population in the country and the numbers are expected to continue rising (Bernstein, 2003). It is safe to say that Latinos are a growing population requiring more services including health care and social services. Service providers who previously saw very little need to incorporate Latino cultural competence into their routine are now experiencing a large rise in need for cultural information and understanding as well as the need to break down language barriers (Suleiman, 2003).

Latino cultures involve some common underpinnings. These common factors include valuing family orientation, a strong work ethic and language (Suleiman, 2003). Some negative factors are commonalities as well including high levels of poverty and stress, and fairly low levels of education and health insurance when compared to other ethnic groups (Suleiman, 2003). Because of the vulnerability that Latino families and children exhibit, they often come in contact with the systems of surrogate care. When this contact occurs it is the agency's responsibility to provide "meaningful" and complete services in a culturally competent manner (Suleiman, 2003).

When specifically dealing with cultural competence in child welfare, Sherraden and Segal (1996) point out that diversity is not frequently a consideration for research. Sherraden and Segal also point out that when child welfare workers are addressing Latino families it is important to recognize the difference in cultures among the many Latino groups [e.g., Puerto Rican, Mexican, Cuban] (1996). Child welfare workers cannot simply peruse a few books or take a class and expect to be culturally competent (Sherraden & Segal, 1996).

Vidal de Haymes and Medina (1995) express the importance of taking a holistic approach with Latinos in child welfare. This is an important cultural consideration for child welfare. Latinos have been frequently overlooked in our child welfare system and can categorize their contact with child welfare as primarily negative (Vidal de Haymes & Medina, 1995). Reasons for this negative experience could stem from the longer stay for Latino foster children in the system, underutilization of services for Latinos and service plans that tend to be less detailed (Vidal de Haymes & Medina, 1995)

A study by Lu, Landsverk, Ellis-Macleod, Newton, Ganger, and Johnson (2004) examine race and ethnicity and outcomes for children in child protective services. These researchers discovered that some inequities in care may have occurred due to the lack of cultural competency. Some of the reunification services received by the minority families were incorrect to meet their needs (Lu et al., 2004). A review was done of the charts of 3936 minors under the age of 17 who were referred to child protective services for a variety of abuse (Lu et al., 2004). This study found that out of this sample approximately 60.5 % of the children were minorities, while the child minority population of the study county was only 48.4% (Lu et al.,



2004). African American children were found to be placed out of home more frequently and were more overrepresented than Anglo, Asian or Latino children (Lu et al., 2004).

A macro study was conducted by Nybell and Gray (2004) regarding the role of cultural competency in organizations. Interviews were conducted in three area agencies. This qualitative study focused on how staff defined cultural competence and what workers saw as cultural barriers in their work with clients and the community. All agencies reported the need for more ethnically diverse staff and expounded on issues such as language and common ground that, if addressed, could facilitate how workers provide services (Nybell & Gray, 2004).

#### Racial Identity and Self Concept

Issues of societal and agency cultural competence have been addressed above. Cultural competence literature regarding transcultural caregivers will also be addressed. Information on this is limited. However, this research points to a range of 70 to 90% of transcultural placements reporting a good adjustment rate (Vonk, 2001). There is some evidence that points to some difficulty in racial and cultural identity in children who were transculturally

The Mexican-American Value Attitude Scale and a list of questions made up by the researcher (Andujo, 1988).

Andujo (1988) found that the majority of the transcultural adoptive parents were Protestant, resided in predominately Anglo areas and the children went to schools where the majority of their peers were Anglo. There was no real difference in the levels of self esteem when the researcher compared the same ethnicity foster children with the transcultural foster children (Andujo, 1988). The major differences were in self identification and levels of acculturation.

The Latino children were much more likely to identify themselves as "Mexican American" if their adoptive parents were Latino (Andujo, 1988). The transculturally adopted children usually called themselves "American" (Andujo, 1988). Andujo also found that Latino families raising Latino children who had a high income were reported to be more acculturated and thus similar to the non-Latino families (1988). These high income Latino families were found to deemphasize their culture and ethnicity when parenting the Latino adoptees (Andujo, 1988).

Issues of racial identity beyond what the children identified themselves as ethnically or racially were also found to be pertinent. Latino children in transcultural

homes tended to identify themselves by the color of their skin while children in same culture homes did not see this as a significant self identifier (Andujo, 1988). This difference in self identity may partially be due to the way that the non-Latino parents tended to raise their children with "an orientation toward the Anglo American culture and deemphasized ethnicity" (Andujo, pg. 533, 1988).

Andujo (1988) suggests that there are some ways for an adoptive family to encourage a healthy cultural identity in Latino children. An adoptive family can choose to interact and build relationships with other Latino's in a meaningful and consistent manner (Andujo, 1988). Families can also choose to seek out resources and activities for the child within their community that are culturally relevant (Andujo, 1988). The child should not have a limited idea of what it is to be Latino.

If a child is in foster care, a foster parent may be able to facilitate this identity process in a manner that does not discount either culture but maintains the importance of both. Foster parents can help children develop healthy self concepts by providing the child with a positive reflection of how the foster parent sees the child (Casey Family Programs, 2004). There is some

evidence that children in kinship care can develop and maintain a healthy ethnic identity (Casey Family Programs, 2004).

There are several actions that can be implemented by foster parents that can help foster children develop "healthier ethnic identities" (Casey Family Programs, 2004). These include exposing the child to customs that were relevant to the child's culture, showing a willingness to have open, honest and respectful conversations about race and listening to the child's experiences of racism and then advocating for that child (Casey Family Programs, 2004).

Racial and ethnic considerations during the placement of these children are often lacking. Research suggests that "children in foster care are increasingly placed in situations that reduce the likelihood of their developing a healthy cultural identity" (Casey Family Programs, 2004). Examination of placements involving biracial children revealed that for the most part workers did not assess placements for racial composition of the neighborhood, religious factors, cultural sensitivity and the family's racial beliefs (Casey Family Programs, 2004).

If a family or community is unaccepting of a child's race or ethnicity the child may feel uncomfortable or

unsafe. The child may respond to these feelings by distancing themselves from their own culture and adapting a negative view of their own culture (Phinney, 1993). In a positive light, the child may also respond by recognizing the positive aspects of his culture and relate well to his cultural aspects (Phinney, 1993)

### Theory Guiding Conceptualization

The main theory that guides this study through the ideas of culture and caregiving as ways to foster identity is Socio-cultural theory. Socio-cultural theory is best conceptualized through the work of Vygotsky. This theory sees the caregivers of a child as "agents of culture" (Scherba de Valenzuela, 2002). This theory's basic tenet is that whoever is acting as a parent or caregiver to a child is indeed responsible in some part to assist in the building of culture within a child. Socio-cultural theory sees a child's development as occurring within a culture and not an individual process (Scherba de Valenzuela, 2002).

If this idea of caregivers as agents of culture can be viewed as valid, then non-Latino caregivers should have some responsibility and some training in how to share Latino culture with their foster children. By assessing

the training received by non-Latino foster parents we are assessing what these agents of culture know, what they would like to know and how they value knowledge of their foster children's culture. These non-Latino foster parents, whether they are temporary or long term caregivers, are assisting Latino children with their development. If they are assisting with basic needs, educational growth and personal healing, then it stands to reason that cultural growth can also be an area where non-Latino foster parents may assist Latino children.

#### Summary

A variety of literature was presented in this chapter. Cultural competence was put into a community, child welfare agency and foster family context. The idea of how children build identity and how cultural identity is established was outlined. Last, an exploration of the use of socio-cultural theory as a theoretical basis for this research was noted. The stage is set for a further exploration of the cultural competency training needs of non-Latino foster parents.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

Chapter Three documents the steps used in developing the project. Specifically, the purpose and design of this study, sampling, data collection, and measurement are discussed. This study's specific procedures and data analysis are outlined. A brief discussion of how the researchers sought to protect the human subjects involved is also discussed.

#### Study Design

The main purpose of this study was to assess the cultural training, attitudes and training needs of non-Latino foster parents who care for Latino foster children. Working in conjunction with the San Bernardino Foster Parent Training facility, this study has performed a specific type of needs assessment. In this needs assessment the goal was to take a look at the training given to foster parents that provides cultural information about dealing with Latino foster children.

A combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods was used. This combination of research methods was chosen for several reasons. Certain

quantitative statistical types of analysis were desired to provide the county training facility with some data that were easily quantified. Also, the quantitative method allows for easier replication which the county or the researchers may choose to do at a later date with more detail.

The qualitative aspect of this research fulfilled the desire for a personalized and open-ended analysis of non-Latino foster parents' feelings and opinions. Data was collected in the words of the non-Latino foster parents. This can be a powerful means of data collection that can provide individualized insight into the issues at hand.

There are drawbacks to both methods. The use of quantitative information collection in this instance can provide only a surface view of the feelings of the foster parents. On the other hand, the use of qualitative methods is personalized but then more time consuming to analyze and perhaps more open to researcher interpretation than is quantifiable data. It is the opinion of the researchers that the use of both methods can provide two types of data that have provided quantifiable and reproducible data as well as personal and relevant data in the words of the foster parents. This can allow for a well-rounded data set.



## Sampling

The population for this research project was non-Latino foster parents who are currently or who have ever taken care of Latino foster children. The sample was obtained from San Bernardino County under the direction of the Foster Care Training Facility. The researchers sent out approximately 105 surveys. It was hoped that approximately 40-60 responses would be returned.

This project underwent human subjects review through San Bernardino County. Approval from the California State University San Bernardino Department of Social Work Institutional Review Board Subcommittee was granted.

## Data Collection and Instruments

The data collected consists of four quantitative questions and four qualitative questions. The quantitative questions cover the areas of previous Latino cultural training, the perceived helpfulness of this training, desire for future training and the foster parent's perceived value of culture in the life of a Latino foster child, respectively.

Question one is nominal in its measurement and is a yes or no response to the question of previous Latino cultural training. Question two measures the perceived

helpfulness of this training from the view of the foster parent and is measured on an ordinal level ranging from very helpful, helpful, sort of helpful and not very helpful. The third question is nominal in measure and requires a yes or no answer in regards to foster parent's desire for more Latino cultural training. The final quantitative question asks respondents to rate the importance of their understanding of Latino culture as it relates to the relationship between foster parent and child. This is measured on an ordinal level.

The qualitative data gathered fell under four categories. Regarding the first qualitative question, the foster parents were asked if they have any responses that they would like to share about their perceived importance of Latino culture in their Latino foster child's life. The second portion was specific towards culturally relevant activities that foster parents engage in with their Latino foster children. This question was for information purposes (examples for future foster parents) as well as to determine if cultural training influences the everyday lives of these transcultural foster families. The third set of qualitative data was improvements suggested for the foster training program to increase Latino cultural competency. The final set of qualitative data asked for

the foster parents to address any personal recommendations that they might have to better personally care for their Latino foster children.

This survey (see Appendix A) was created for this project as a self administered survey, and was sent to foster parents who met the research project's criteria. It was developed to assist in a specific area of foster parent training that is relevant to Latino foster children. It was hoped that the questions asked would allow for a form of needs assessment to provide San Bernardino County with culturally relevant training information. Also, it was hoped that the personal recommendations and thoughts of foster parents will be addressed. It is the researchers' belief that this survey will provide insight into attitudes and levels of perceived cultural relevance in the minds of non-Latino foster parents caring for Latino children.

#### Procedures

Data was gathered through the use of mailed surveys that were self administered by the non-Latino foster parents. Letters explaining the study and requesting participation accompanied the survey. Data collection occurred at San Bernardino County under appropriate

supervision. Due to the researchers' different field placements in separate counties, it was the primary responsibility of the researcher placed in San Bernardino County to collect the data as it was mailed back to the county.

After receiving county authorization to proceed, as well as the approval of the Institutional Review Board of California State University at San Bernardino, the researchers sent out one hundred and five surveys. The surveys were distributed through the United States Postal Service. Approximately two weeks were allotted for receipt of survey, completion of survey and return. The researchers sent out written reminders to participants approximately five days after the initial sending of surveys. Approximately two weeks after reminders were sent out it became apparent that the response rate was very low. Only twelve surveys were returned through this first mailing.

The list provided to the researchers did have a number of obsolete addresses and sixteen surveys were returned due to the foster parent no longer living at that address. To reach these foster parents who did not receive a survey the researchers chose to attend a San Bernardino County foster parent mandatory meeting approximately three

weeks after the initial mailing of surveys. At this meeting, the researchers handed out more surveys to those who had not received a survey and were eligible. A colored box was left at the meeting site for participants to leave completed surveys in. For those who did not want to complete the survey at the meeting, prepaid, self-addressed envelopes were handed out. Two surveys were left in the box at the end of the meeting and two more surveys were sent by mail after the meeting.

#### Protection of Human Subjects

The human subjects in this research project were adults over the age of 18, county retained, foster parents. San Bernardino County requires that certain protective measures be taken such as limits on identifying data and destruction of all surveys before the end of the school year. These guidelines were followed.

#### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was very helpful in the analysis of needs assessment data. The researchers used some of the quantitative data that was collected to develop some graphs and frequency distributions. This kind of descriptive analysis helped to translate foster parents' experiences and beliefs into a helpful cultural

addition to the foster training process. The qualitative questions were analyzed via content analysis and their identifying themes.

#### Summary

This study involved the use of self-administered surveys mailed out to appropriate non-Latino foster parents who care for or who have cared for Latino foster children. A mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions were be used. This research was performed under the approval and guidance of appropriate San Bernardino County supervision to provide an ethical, responsible and protective study that will hopefully benefit non-Latino foster parents and the Latino children they care for.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

To assess the cultural competency of non-Latino foster parents caring for Latino foster children, both quantitative and qualitative questions were asked. The quantitative questions provided a description of the population sampled. Answers to the qualitative questions determine the need for cultural awareness, the experiences and attitudes toward foster parent training and suggestions and ideas on cultural sensitivity.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The sample population consisted of 105 foster parents. Out of the 105, only 16 responded. The typical respondent fell between the ages of 57 and 74 and the majority, ninety four percent, was female. The respondents' ethnic background was fifty percent Caucasian, thirty one percent African American and six percent Asian. Out of the 16 respondents, 4 respondents, or twenty five percent, were not currently fostering a Latino child. Those who are not currently fostering reported that it had been anywhere from 1 to 5 years since they had last fostered a Latino child.

## Perceptions of Training and Culture

The respondents were asked several questions on past training, the usefulness of the training and on their view on the importance of cultural awareness. The first question asked determined if they had ever received foster parent training. Eighteen percent reported that they had received training, fifty six percent said that they never received training and twenty five percent did not know or did not remember ever receiving training. The second question determined, of those who had received training if they found it helpful. Out of the three who had received training one found it very helpful while two found it helpful.

Question 3 specifically asked the foster parent if they felt that training on Latino culture would be useful. Respondents were evenly split on this question, fifty percent said yes and fifty percent said no. Question 4 determined if the foster parent felt that understanding the culture of the Latino foster child was important. Forty three percent of the foster parents felt that it was very important, thirty one percent thought that it was important, one percent felt that it was somewhat important and three percent felt that it was not very important.



A test was done to measure if there was a relationship between perceived importance and number of years fostering children. The chi-square was not significant because  $P = .700$ . There is no statistical relationship between attitudes toward importance of culture and having received foster parent training ( $\chi^2 = .148$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $P = .700$ ).

#### Perceived Importance of Understanding Latino Culture

To gather qualitative data on attitudes and perception of importance of culture, the first of this study's four qualitative questions asks non-Latino foster parents to address the statement presented in question number four of the survey (See Appendix A). It should be noted that all sixteen responses were analyzed by the researchers and each individual answer was divided into separate subsections to more easily dissect the data. This question asked respondents if they have any thoughts/opinions about their perceived level of importance in regard to their Latino foster child's culture.

Nine of the sixteen people surveyed left this question blank and three simply stated "No" or "None". Of the four people who wrote answers, there was no running

theme or category by which to define the answers. One person stated that they "have Latino friends that we share time with and that helps me with the knowledge and culture area". This person seems to feel that she does indicate that knowledge of Latino culture is important to her and that she seeks this knowledge through her Latino friends.

Another respondent stated that they felt that knowledge of Latino culture would be important only if "there was a language barrier". One respondent simply stated that her "husband speaks Spanish fluently". This may be the respondent's attempt to provide the researchers with added information and to explain that she and her family have some exposure to a form of Latino culture through language.

The last respondent to answer question five was very expressive about their perceived importance in regard to Latino culture. She stated that she felt "understanding their culture would help me make the transition into my home easier on my Latino foster children". This indicates that she does place an importance on knowledge of Latino culture and believes that knowledge of Latino culture may help foster children in the transition into a foster family. This same respondent also identified that the Latino children in her care "love menudo even if it is out

of a can" and that she made tamales for the children for Christmas as her attempt to provide the children with familiar foods and rituals.

#### Cultural Activities

Question number six on the qualitative portion of the survey asks non-Latino foster parents to describe any kinds of Latino cultural activities, if any, that they engage in with their foster children. This question was intended to try to find out if non-Latino foster parents chose to engage their Latin foster children in a culturally relevant manner.

Four of the respondents left this question blank. A total of three respondents stated that they do not engage in any Latino cultural activities with their Latino foster children. One person wrote that she chooses to engage her foster children in "multicultural activities" that are "nonspecific to any one culture or ethnicity" that she feels will "greatly assist her (the foster child) in becoming a well rounded child". This respondent did not specify what "multicultural activities" consisted of.

Two respondents believed that the use of the Spanish language in their home is a way in which they promote Latino culture. One of the respondents stated that they

specifically encourage both the "English and Spanish languages so we can understand each other better and easier for the child to adjust". This person indicates being an active participant in the process of adjustment for a Latino child in a non-Latino home.

Holidays and foods were also identified by non-Latino foster parents as cultural activities that they promote. Two of the respondents state that holidays such as "cinco de Mayo" are celebrated in their homes to promote Latino culture. It should be noted that Latino language, food and holidays vary by specific countries, regions and such and that foster parents may need to specify with the children or the family of origin as to what individual culture they belong to.

The preparation and types of food served in the home were identified as cultural activities by three respondents. One respondent stated that they "teach and serve Latino foods". Another person stated that their "cooking at home" reflected a Latino influence for their child, as well. They did not specify what kinds of foods.

Three of those surveyed believed that their foster children were too young to understand their Latino culture. One simply stated that the child was "a baby" while one specified that their Latino foster child was 16

months old. Linguistically and developmentally this may not be so true, as young children often absorb different languages and sounds at a very young age.

Three respondents identified relationships with their own family and friends and relationships with the foster children's family as sources of cultural activities. One person stated that she has "four grandchildren that are  $\frac{1}{2}$  Latino and we do attend their family gatherings". Another stated that her "closest friends are Latino and we attend all functions". The last respondent in this category stated that weekly visitations with the Latino foster child's family allow for culturally relevant experiences.

Last, school was identified by the foster parents as an area that provided Latino culture to the children. One stated that the child is in school for five days a week in a school that is "90% Latino" and that she feels that the child doesn't "need any extra in their Latino culture". The other respondent who felt school was an important source of cultural influence also stated that the child attends a school that consists primarily of Latino children.

## Suggested Improvements in the Foster Care Training Program

Question number seven of the survey asks foster parents, how could the foster care training program make improvements to their program to address the cultural background/needs/beliefs of your foster children? This question was designed to provide a useful compilation of suggestions for improvement for the San Bernardino County foster parent training program.

Three respondents believed that improvements should be "multicultural" in nature. There were suggestions made about annual workshops that involved issues of diversity and developing a multicultural training program "in which all backgrounds are emphasized would help not only my but all foster children". Another suggestion was that trainings should involve issues of prejudice.

Three stated that they believed that there were no improvements needed in the cultural competence training portion of foster parent education. Two respondents left this question blank. Two respondents were unsure about improvements and one of these respondents stated that they "don't know...you tell me".

Two other respondents stated that they would like to see more of an exchange of cultures in their foster

training. Suggestions include "more people" in their trainings of Latino descent to speak with and learn from. Another stated that trainings should involve bilingual training for both Latino's and non-Latino's to better address language as a barrier and also a bridge for improving foster child and foster parent relations.

One respondent would like to know more about "special Latino events" in their foster parent cultural competence trainings. Another would like to know about food and cooking for Latino children. Both answers indicate a desire for culture specific trainings which could extend beyond Latino cultures into many different cultural areas.

One respondent stated that they had training in basic cultural competency but they believe that it is more important for Latino children to learn "American culture at this time" to also learn "to speak English and how things are done here". One person stated that the training on cultural competency is adequate and that it is "fine" as it is.

#### Foster Parent Improvements

The last question in the qualitative portion of this survey asked foster parents to "Please share any suggestions you would make to improve your ability to

foster a Latino child..." Six respondents left this question blank. Two responded that there were no suggestions that they had to improve their ability to parent a Latino child. One foster parent stated that Latino foster children in her care are treated the same as "all the rest" and that she shows them "lots of love".

Three respondents stated that language was an area that they would choose to improve their ability to foster Latino children. They indicated that language barriers exist in their dealings with Latino foster children and that foster parents learning some "Spanish" and foster children learning some "English" would assist in their ability to parent Latino children.

Two parents stated that they would improve their ability to foster a Latino child by learning more about Latino cultures in general. Specifically, "dances" and "cooking and/or food" were identified as areas where personal knowledge was desired.

One respondent stated that she would like to "read" some information about Latino culture and also "ask friends" about their Latino culture and experience. Another stated that learning about "prejudice" would help her improve her ability to parent a Latino child.



The last category for this question was suggested by a foster parent who wrote quite a bit on this question. She shared that she had a set of Latino siblings in her care. The eldest daughter always tried to take care of the other children and would be offended if the foster mother tried to take over the responsibility of hair braiding or clothing the younger children. This foster parent believed that if she had training on Latino family dynamics that perhaps these clashes would have been avoided. This case might have been an issue of family culture where the eldest child had more responsibility or a case of a parentified child rather than a Latino cultural issue. However, this brings up the point that every child is different and every foster child comes from it's own individual family culture that foster parents must deal with and understand if they are to adequately act as a caregiver for the foster child.

#### Summary

This section looked at the results obtained from the receipt of sixteen surveys. These surveys contained both qualitative and quantitative information from non-Latino foster parents who care for or who have cared for Latino foster children. The results from this small study

provided the researchers with some information on topics such as what kinds of activities non-Latino foster parents engage in with their Latino foster children, if any. Culturally competent training for foster parents was also a main area explored.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

This study attempted to conduct an assessment of the training needs of non-Latino foster parents. This small sample indicated there are inconsistencies in the receipt of annual required training, that the majority of foster parent requirements did do not attempt to engage in their foster child's cultural activities and that the few foster parents who did engage in cultural activities are very aware of culture in relation to language and customs.

#### Discussion

According to a Department of Children's Services representative who preferred not to be named, foster parents must receive annual training (interview, 2004). Training is required for renewing the foster parent license. The findings suggest that of the twelve respondents who had been foster parents for more than 5 years only three stated that they had received training. Two conclusions may be drawn from the results, one is that many foster parents are not being provided with the required annual training, or two, that the foster parents

are not complying with the requirements and perhaps are being overlooked by the Department of Children's services.

This is a significant finding because it indicates that there may be discrepancies in policy implementation. Some foster parents receive required training while others do not. It appears that foster parents are not being provided or are not taking advantage of the tools to foster culturally different foster children.

A second significant finding was that out of the sixteen respondents only six foster parents practice cultural activities with their Latino foster children. Seven respondents either do not engage in any activities or did not respond to this question. A blank response could indicate that these foster parents do not practice any activities related to culture. Of those seven respondents, four indicated that they did not believe that culture was important and three did not think that cultural training was necessary.

These findings imply that the majority of the 16 non-Latino foster parents who responded do not think culture is very important in relation to their foster children. Therefore, Latino children maybe entering households that are indifferent to their culture and their persona. This provides an explanation to Vonk's finding

where she mentions the difficulty in race and cultural identity that children experience in transracial homes (Vonk, 2002). Consequently, this fact makes transition very difficult for children.

A final important finding that assesses the cultural competency of non-Latino foster parents, in regards to language and customs, is that of those who do engage in the foster child's culture thirty seven percent are very aware of the importance of cultural activities and how it can positively affect the child. All the respondents had similar things they engaged in, ranging from celebrating holidays and the preparation of foods to the use of language and keeping contact with the foster child's friends and relatives. This was a positive finding for this study in regards to the guiding socio-cultural theory. A key principle of the theory states that a child's development takes place within a culture, therefore the caretakers take an active role in the cultural development of the child. These few foster parents are examples of "agents of culture" outlined in Vygotsky's theory (Scherba de Valenzuela, 2002).

### Limitations

A limitation that presented itself from the beginning of this was the lack of surveys returned. Out of 105 surveys that were sent out, only 16 were returned. This was greatly due to the fact that many of the addresses that the Department of Children's Services had on file were not correct. About ten surveys were returned with an "undeliverable address" notice stamped on the envelope. Also, the researchers did not provide an incentive or returned surveys. A reasonable incentive could have motivated foster parents to send the survey.

Unfortunately, many of the questions that required written responses were left blank. It can be assumed that providing a scaled response or "fill in the blank" option might offer more responses as these types of questions are easier to complete. Of those questions that required written responses in the demographics section, many had to be categorized as "missing" data as the researcher failed to specify whether the question was in relation to the foster parent or the foster child. For example, when asked about their age, many responded by writing in the Latino foster child's age. The same misunderstanding occurred in the question that asked about their ethnic background

## Recommendations for Social Work Practice, Policy and Research

Being able to provide training and keep track of all the non-Latino foster homes in San Bernardino County is a very demanding task. However, as this study has shown, with a look at the few non-Latino foster homes that have fostered Latino children, the number that have been trained in this sample is small. Unfortunately, those affected by this deficiency are the Latino children entering these homes.

In terms of adequately monitoring services to all foster parents, there needs to be a policy where the Department of Children's Services are required to have quarterly up dates of foster homes addresses and phone numbers. This could help to lower the number of foster home providers that may not receive annual trainings.

Another recommendation regarding training participation is that there should be more than an annual training. The fact that many foster parents have not received training in years could be due to the fact that the annual training date does not accommodate their schedule. Having more than one training a year could invite more foster parent participation and therefore more culturally aware foster homes.

The foster parents who participated in this research stated that they would suggest some improvements to the foster care trainings. Three foster parents indicated that incorporating issues of language barriers into the trainings would be helpful. Another three foster parents would like to learn more about Latino cultures in trainings, personal interaction with Latinos or just reading literature about Latino culture. One foster parent suggested that Latino family dynamics be included in foster trainings.

There is much more research to be performed on this subject of culturally aware foster homes. It is recommended that further research be done in San Bernardino County with a larger sample size. Perhaps including the non-Latino foster parents who work with private Foster Family Agencies versus only using County foster homes would make the sample size considerable larger. Including focus groups and interviews in the research process might provide more insight into the benefits and barriers cultural competence

Future research needs to be done to study foster parents' cultural awareness of other ethnicities. A multi-ethnic study would help to determine if training should be conducted across all cultures or if every



culture should be generally discussed. Such studies would provide the necessary information to make transitioning into a foster home more amiable to both foster parent and child.

These recommendations would require further research, policy revisions and new policy implementation. Although, this would be time consuming and very demanding, it will grant future foster children the right to temporarily live in homes that can adequately meet their needs.

### Conclusion

The journey towards discovering foster parents cultural competency training needs has added to this research on different levels. First, on a macro level, the research has shown that there may be discrepancies in policy and implementation when it comes to training attendance. Unfortunately, foster parents do not always attend trainings and so missing out on information given on culture.

Second, there seems to be a lack of cultural practice in most of the foster homes who responded. Whether this is due to a lack of training participation or to personally held beliefs, this is still to be determined and left for future research. Lastly, on a micro level, the research

provided evidence that those homes that do participate in cultural engagement, use tools such as foods, celebrations and relative contacts to provide the child with a comfortable culturally competent environment.

Hopefully this research can help open the doors so that more research like this can be replicated with a more in depth assessment of the cultural competency needs of foster parents. The reality is that many foster children are entering homes that are of a different culture than their family of origin. County child welfare agencies and foster parents ideally need to unite to begin moving down a path of cultural competency and respect for the culture of the foster children who depend upon them.

APPENDIX A  
QUESTIONNAIRE

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender (please circle one):      FEMALE                      MALE

Ethnicity (circle all that apply):

Caucasian

Asian

African American

Other (please explain) \_\_\_\_\_

How long have you been a foster parent? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you currently fostering a LATINO child? (Please circle one)

YES

NO

If you are not currently fostering a LATINO child, how long has it been since you have fostered a LATINO child?

\_\_\_\_\_

### **Foster Parent Cultural Training: Needs Assessment Survey**

1) During your foster parent training, did you receive any training that was designed to specifically address the needs of LATINO foster children?

☐Yes      ☐No      ☐ Don't Know/Don't remember

2) If you chose YES, did you find this training helpful in caring for your LATINO foster child?

☐Very helpful  
☐Helpful  
☐Sort of helpful  
☐Not very helpful

3) Could you use more foster parent training in LATINO culture?

☐Yes      ☐No

4) Complete the statement by marking the box beside the phrase that you feel best completes the following statement...

"I believe that understanding my LATINO foster child's culture is...

☐Very important  
☐Important  
☐Somewhat important  
☐Not very important

5) Do you have any thoughts/opinions about the statement above that you would like to share?

6) Could you describe what kinds of cultural activities you and your foster child engage in, if any, that promote LATINO culture?

7) How could the foster care training program make improvements to their program to address the cultural background/needs/beliefs of your foster children?

8) Please share any suggestions you would make to improve your ability to foster a Latino child...

APPENDIX B  
INFORMED CONSENT

## Informed Consent

This study in which you are being asked to participate is being conducted by Myriam Aguilar and Amanda Robles, MSW students at California State University, San Bernardino. The purpose of this study is to assess the cultural competency training need of non Latino foster parents who foster Latino children. The researchers want to know if the training provided by the Department of Children Services is sufficient for non Latino foster parents to meet the cultural needs of Latino foster children.

The study will be conducted through a self administered survey. The survey should take about 10 to 15 minutes to fill out. All returned surveys will remain anonymous. No names or personal signatures are required.

Upon completion of mailing the surveys the researchers will destroy all records in their possession that contain the names or identifying information of all participants.

Your participation is voluntary and if at any time you would like to withdraw from the study you may do so without penalty. Refusing to participate in this study will have no effect whatsoever on the relationship that you as a foster parent may have with the County of San Bernardino. There are no foreseeable risks in this study under the survey. All information will be kept confidential. All respondents' names, their agency, or their results will not be known to anyone. DPSS will be provided with a copy of this study's results. The results of this study will be shared with DPSS to evaluate the effectiveness the training provided to foster parents.

This study has been approved by the Department of Social Work Sub-Committee of the California State University, San Bernardino Institutional Review Board and the Department of Children Services. If you have any questions about the research, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Nancy Mary at (909)880-5501. If you choose to participate please make your mark on the line below and keep all extra copies for your future reference.

By the mark below, I acknowledge that I have been informed of and understand the nature of the study.

MARK \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_



APPENDIX C  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

## Debriefing Statement

The survey you have just completed will be used to assess if the training provided by the Department of Children Services is adequate in meeting the needs of Latino foster children. The results of this study will be used to provide the department with recommendations on how to strengthen or modify the trainings pertaining to cultural competency. This study was conducted by Myriam Aguilar and Amanda Robles, graduate students at California State University, San Bernardino. Any concerns about this study may be addressed to Dr. Nancy Mary, Project Advisor at (909)880-5501.

In return for your participation, you may feel free to request the results of the research after June, 2005 by contacting Sally Richter at (909)387-1378 and referring to this study.

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## ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES PAGE

This was a two-person project where authors collaborated throughout. However, for each phase of the project, certain authors took primary responsibility. These responsibilities were assigned in the manner listed below.

1. Data Collection:

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%

2. Data Entry and Analysis:

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%

3. Writing Report and Presentation of Findings:

- a. Introduction and Literature

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%

- b. Methods

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%

- c. Results

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%

- d. Discussion

Team Effort: Myriam 50% Amanda 50%