



Community voices, community action: Latin American Education Network 2013 Community Education Forum Report

Alexandra Arraiz Matute¹ & Derik Chica²

Introduction

In 2008, a report released by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) indicated that Spanish-speaking students were not completing high school at a rate of 40% (Brown & Sinay, 2008). This figure was a cause for alarm among both community members and educators who are concerned about equity in schools. Increased attention led to research efforts investigating the cause for the high incidence of students being pushed out of schools, and the ways in which the schools were failing to engage them in meaningful ways (Gaztambide-Fernandez & Guerrero, 2011; Mantilla, Shugurensky & Serrano, 2009). In these instances, the experiences of youth were taken into account to create a series of recommendations that were passed on to the school boards for consideration. Other initiatives have also listened to the youth and have focused on the development of training materials for teachers to engage students in their classrooms in a way that is not oppressive and avoids perpetuating cultural stereotypes (Pueblito Canada, 2013).

In the fall of 2011, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) and the TDSB called out to various members of the Latin American/ Spanish-Speaking/ Hispanic community to form committees focused on this opportunity/achievement gap faced by students from these communities in the publicly funded education systems. The TCDSB committee, *3Partners in Motion*, consisted of members from the Portuguese-speaking and Spanish-speaking communities while the TDSB committee, *Avanzando Unidos*, was initially focused on planning for April's Hispanic Heritage month.

Throughout the year, members of our community attended several meetings for the formed committees and noticed a lack of collaboration between the various initiatives in our community focused on the education of youth. Thus, in the Summer of 2012, the Latin American Education Network (LAEN) was born in an attempt to bridge these initiatives, foster

1 Alexandra Arraiz Matute is a third year doctoral student in the Curriculum Studies & Teacher Development program in the Curriculum, Teaching & Learning department at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Her research interests include cultural & linguistic identity and their intersections with culturally responsive & relevant pedagogies within a transnational space.

2 Derik Chica is a secondary mathematics and science teacher for the Toronto District School Board. He completed his B.Sc. at the University of Toronto majoring in Human Biology, Chemistry, and Psychology. He also holds a B.Ed. from York University. He is the Latin American Education Network Co-Founder and Co-Chair and is an active advocate for human rights and social justice issues in Toronto. He is currently interested in pursuing a Masters and eventual Ph.D. in issues surrounding Latin American identity in Toronto.

3 The variation in names reflects the different categories used in school board census, Statistics Canada census, as well as an ongoing debate within the community where members choose to identify with different terms (i.e. Alcoff, 2005). For the purposes of this piece we will be using the term "Latin American" throughout.

collaboration and more effectively mobilize community knowledge and resources. After an initial meeting of members who had taken part in both school-board led committees, LAEN emerged with the following vision and mission:

Vision: A strengthened and united Latin American community in Toronto supported by a network of diverse educational initiatives.

Mission: To support and advance educational initiatives through a diversity of community support groups, organizations and individuals.

In the following piece, we bring the results from the second community forum that LAEN organized in late 2013. As the organization has strengthened and began to move forward, one of the greatest areas of work has been to make the community voice be heard in as many and as varied mediums as possible. It is our hope that by bridging the academic world with the community organizing that LAEN has been immersed in, we can create dialogue between the two as well as add to the literature being written about the Latin American community in Toronto. The discussions and conclusions voiced in the 2013 forum highlighted the need for stronger community networks in order to provide more support and resources to community members, including the families of youth currently in the education system.

In order to contextualize part of the forum, we will start by discussing some of the work that LAEN was involved in during its first year after its constitution. This included a first community forum, of which we will give a brief overview, and connect it to the second forum. The majority of the paper will focus the second forum, particularly the main themes raised and conclusions that emerged. We end by elaborating on the implications of some of these conclusions for our community moving forward.

LAEN's first year

After a few months of working together in 2012, a community forum was planned to receive community input as per our vision of community engagement and strength. This community forum would serve to inform the priorities and direction that LAEN as a group should take for the following year. LAEN's 1st Annual Forum occurred on Saturday October 27, 2012 at the North York Civic Centre in Toronto. The event, which was co-sponsored by the TDSB and TCDSB⁴, included information booths from the different community organizations, workshops for parents and youth as well as plenaries.

The Parent Workshop was designed as a panel with speakers from the Catholic Parent Involvement Committee (CPIC) and WoodGreen Settlement Services providing information on Parent Councils, school board structure and settlement resources. The Youth Workshop consisted of two interactive discussions: a member from *ExpresArte* facilitated the first discussion centered around cultural identity(ies) and education. The second discussion emphasized

⁴ This meant that both school boards supported LAEN with some financial resources. However, we did not have any board representatives attend the forum to listen to the community consultation. This changed for the second forum, where we did have some school board trustees attend to listen to the conclusion segment of the forum.

Equity and Human Rights, which was facilitated by two student speakers from the Peer Education Network. Following the workshops, all attendees had an opportunity to dialogue with each other while lunch was provided to them free-of-charge. There was a plenary to summarize the conclusions of the day. At that time we had a skit presented by the Teach 2 Learn youth regarding stereotyping that Latina/o youth feel they face throughout schooling, a presentation from the Hispanic Development Council on an Alternative Curriculum and final thoughts on LAEN's next steps.

Attendance at the 1st LAEN Education forum was unfortunately severely affected by a storm. Through informal approximations taken that day, it is estimated that 60-70 people attended. According to our workshop facilitators, there were approximately 20 attendees at the Youth Workshop and 20 attendees at the Parent Workshop (which included community organizers and educators). Our optional registration processes (including email, registration, phone registration and on-site registration) recorded 51 people present: seven youth, six parents, thirty from organizations, and eight "other" (educators, TDSB/TCDSB Staff, etc.). Organizations that attended included:

- Mennonite New Life Centre
- North York Community House
- Woodgreen Community Services
- Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples
- Hispanic Development Council
- Working Women Community Centre (On Your Mark)
- Jane Finch Community and Family Center
- Student Connections
- Alameda Theatre Company
- TCDSB
- Homework Help
- Asociacion de Profesores Hispano-Canadiense
- Equitable Education Initiative
- Teach 2 Learn
- Avenida Magazine
- SALO (Student Aid & Learning Opportunities)
- Youth Action Network
- Accents Bookstore
- OLAS (Organization of Latin American Students) UofT & OLAS York
- Peer Educators Network
- Consequencias
- Toronto Association of Parents in Catholic Education
- Peel District School Board.

From the results of the 1st forum, it was clear there was a dire need to focus our efforts on parents and youth outreach more concretely in order to support them in structuring committees and working groups that would allow them to focus on actionable plans in response to the challenges that the community faces in the education system. It was also important that LAEN follow up with the discussions that occurred during the workshops and the plenary of the event, and be accountable to the community in how their voices and their recommendations were taken to the boards and acted upon.

It might be helpful here if we explain how LAEN is structured. When LAEN first came to be in 2012 it was envisioned as comprised of 3 committees: Parent, Youth, and Organizations/Individuals. The Organizations/Individuals Committee was the first to be structured with terms of reference that include membership applications and structure, and the election of two co-chairs. The co-chairs outreached to over 50 organizations around Toronto who chose to

become voting members or supporting members of the committee. This helped to both have a clear organizational member structure as well as garner commitments from organizations in their level of involvement with LAEN. Currently, LAEN has 15 voting members.

As part of the mandate to ensure that voices and recommendations are moved forward and acted upon, we have maintained consistent and constructive communication with both the TDSB and the TCDSB. In an effort to place LAEN in a position where we can begin effecting change, we have attended and become voting members of two advisory committees, one in each board. For the TDSB, we have become voting members of the Equity Program Advisory Committee (EPAC) and meet once a month to discuss issues of equity in curriculum and programming in the TDSB. We have also attended and become voting members of the Spanish-Speaking Advisory Committee (SSAC) in the TCDSB. SSAC is a committee that meets quarterly with Board members and trustees in the TCDSB to push forward recommendations from the Latin American community.

In order to increase availability and accessibility of resources and documentation for and from the community, we have developed and maintained an online newsletter that includes the LAEN online drive, School Board Updates, Organization Information and LAEN Updates. The LAEN Drive is a database including anything ranging from opportunities (job & volunteer postings, grants, scholarships, etc.), research/documents concerning our community, event flyers and LAEN minutes. The newsletter is distributed approximately twice a month and is updated almost daily. We currently have 330 subscribers to the newsletter, including parents, youth and individuals working in social services that are interested in being informed of things happening in the community.

After setting up these structures and having gained some ground in relationships with the school boards and other organizations, LAEN took the opportunity to call for another community forum to report back to the community as well as continue to foster dialogue around the work that needs to be done. The following section discusses this forum in more detail.

2nd LAEN Education Forum

LAEN's 2nd Annual Education Forum was on Saturday November 30th at a Catholic Public School, located in the northwest of Toronto. This event was sponsored by the TDSB, TCDSB⁵, Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), Ontario Educators in Catholic Education (OECA), BASICS radio, and Radio Voces Latinas and Mi Tierra Restaurant. The forum occurred within a school that has a reported high population of Spanish-speakers. Childcare, lunch and public transport tokens were provided, and we held a raffle with donations from several organizations in the community (Hispanic Development Council, Centre for Spanish Speaking People, Krudar Muay Thai, Aluna Theatre). As we had received good feedback on the presence

⁵ The TDSB contributed financial resources, the TCDSB did in kind with a permit for the school to host the forum. This year we also counted with the attendance of two school board trustees, Chris Bolton (TDSB) and Garry Tuanan (TCDSB) who came to listen to the conclusion segment of the day. All XX trustees from both school boards were invited to attend.

of organization information booths, we had information booths set up around the gymnasium where the forum was held. Organizations that held information booths this year included:

- Teach2Learn
- Centre for Spanish Speaking Peoples
- WoodGreen Settlement Services
- Hispanic Development Council
- Organization of Latin American Students @ University of Toronto
- Latin American Researchers of Ontario
- Aluna Theatre
- Youth Action Network
- Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education
- Jane & Finch Community and Family Centre
- Latin American-Canadian Art Projects
- Schizophrenic Society of Ontario
- Homework Help
- Hispanic Future Care
- Latin American Studies Department @ University of Toronto
- Working Women
- Parkdale Community Legal Services
- TDSB
- TCDSB

Registration was optional again for privacy and confidentiality reasons. We began the morning by holding a plenary in which we invited a youth and a parent to present their experiences about the TDSB/TCDSB education system in Toronto. They received a small honorarium in recompense for giving us their time and sharing their stories, many filled with struggle, with the large group. After a quick introduction to the day and the work that LAEN had been involved in since the last community forum, the group broke out into workshops. These were divided into 3 groups: parents, youth, and community/educators. Each workshop had a minute taker, a translator and a facilitator, as we learned from the first forum that not all the conclusions/conversations from the workshops were written down, meaning there was nothing to refer back to after the plenary. The parent workshop was facilitated by a new parent from *ExpresArte*; the youth workshop was facilitated by a community member from Student Aid and Learning Opportunities (SALO), a tutoring program for Latina/o secondary youth; and the facilitator for the community/educators workshop was one of the co-chairs of the community/individuals committee of LAEN. After the workshops lunch was provided, and a youth dance group, *EncontrArte*, and a senior dance group, *Siempre Felices*, performed. We then held a closing plenary where each workshop group presented their discussion and recommendations to the other groups.

Attendance

Through informal approximation during the opening plenary, there were 100 people in attendance. 69 people registered and an additional 18 recorded their names at the workshop but did not register. Not all attendees attended the workshops. In the community/educator workshop we had 41 in attendance; in the youth workshop we had 32 in attendance; and in the parent workshop, we had 7 in attendance. It is important to emphasize that because registration

was optional, all numbers are approximate and based on recorded data. The following table summarizes the demographics recorded from those registration forms that were filled out.

Statistics based on registration forms

People Registered*	
In workshops	38% Youth, 9% Parents, 62% Community/Educators
Family size and age groups of children (20% of 1 or more children; 29% 2-3 Children)	26% < 4 Years, 47% 4-8 Years, 26% 10-16 Years
	42% TDSB, 36% TCDSB, 14% YRDSB, 8% Blank
Youth – 26%	33% 8-17 Years, 44% 18-21 Years, 22% 22-26 Years
	55% TDSB, 17% TCDSB, 6% YRDSB, 22% Blank
Toronto Postal Code	45% NW, 17% SW, 17% NE, 1% SE, 1% from Vaughan
Heard about the forum	7% TDSB/TCDSB, 40% LAEN, 52% Community (45% of those heard about it from Teach2Learn)

* n= 69

*Toronto was divided approximately by Yonge St. and an extension of Eglinton Ave.

We now want to move on to discuss in detail the discussions that were had in the three different workshops as well as the conclusions and recommendations that came from them.

Workshops

During our workshops with parents, youth and community members, we discussed the same three specific questions around community participation and the education system. Specifically, the three groups were asked:

- 1) What challenges does our community face in the public education system?
- 2) What can the Boards do in helping us overcome these challenges?
- 3) What can we do to address these challenges?

These questions were meant to generate dialogue around the specific challenges each group identified in their own experience inside the publicly funded education system. We wanted to move past identifying the challenges, to courses of action that could be taken to address these. To this end, we situated the discussion around not only what the Boards could do to look at systemic inequities, but also how the community could use its agency and mobilize resources towards initiatives to mitigate some of the deleterious effects of the inequalities experienced. In this sense, the conversation was meant to centre not only around the negative

effects of discrimination, but also on the empowerment of the community, and the agency of both parents and youth in resisting these microaggressions.

The following section outlines the themes recurring across all three workshops. This triangulation of the data serves to identify issues that were meaningful to organizations, parents and youth in the community. We have separated the themes according to the three questions asked in order to facilitate reading and analysis.

Challenges Identified

For the first question we identified three overarching themes across the three groups: stereotypes/prejudice, lack of support and representation in schools, and language & identity challenges. The way in which each of the three groups identified or experienced each was different, but they all named these experiences as significant challenges faced by the community.

Stereotypes/Prejudice

In regards to stereotypes and prejudice, the discussion included the experience of everyday microaggressions faced in schools as well as in organizational or community services settings (ie, Essed, 1991; Pierce et al, 1977; Solorzano, Ceja & Yosso, 2000). Youth for example, spoke of feeling that teachers held racist stereotypes about Latino/as, including thinking that “Latino/as can’t speak English, don’t keep up with school work”. They also felt that their own cultural capital was not valued, and articulated feeling like there were lowered expectations for them “even though in Latin America the school curriculum is challenging”. Similarly, they also felt that teachers did not know how to support students who learn in different ways, and instead were quick to pathologize them, such as “diagnose youth with ADD” and that instead of supporting them, “they push kids out”. This is consistent with much of the literature around teacher expectation and student engagement in schools.

Community educators and parents held similar views. Parents specifically expressed feeling that they were not respected “as people” by schools themselves. Community educators identified similar experiences to those voiced by parents and youth, but furthermore expressed concern about how these expectations created “self-fulfilling prophecy” scenarios for youth, in which youth internalize the lowered expectations held about them and their lack of opportunities leading to poor future outcomes and student disengagement. Specifically, stereotypes included that Latino/as are not able to perform as well as other students, that they won’t understand or are intellectually inferior, and that they shouldn’t be introduced into ‘regular’ classes for fear of holding back the rest of the class.

Lack of support in schools

A second prominent theme was a perceived lack of support from the school. This theme was expressed in a variety of ways, including a lack or deficient communication between the school and families, and lack of academic support and resources. However, it was also articulated as evident in the lack of representation in schools and school boards.

The youth, for example, listed a variety of ways they struggle to find support in their

schools. They spoke of an endemic problem with communication between the school and certain students. They gave specific examples of this problem being experience as a lack of support on resources available to them (such as scholarships), and no information on how to navigate the school system for youth. Specifically, the youth also spoke about the challenge of navigating the academic vs. applied streams; particularly around a perceived lack of choice and agency. Currently in Ontario, high school students in Grades 9 & 10 are offered courses in academic, applied, or locally developed streams. In grades 11 & 12, students can choose between courses designated 'open', 'college prep', 'university prep', and more options for technical, cooperative and experiential learning opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2011). While the provincial ministry of education theoretically abolished streaming in 1999, researchers have questioned whether this change was more a matter of form than of function (Brown, 2010). In reality, students in Grade 9 'applied' or 'workplace' streams, were less likely to graduate and apply for post-secondary than those in the academic or university prep streams (Brown, 2009 & 2010; Brown & Parekh, 2013; King & Warren, 2010). Furthermore, once students choose courses in Grade 9, it is extremely unlikely they will change streams after that first year (Brown & Parekh, 2013; People for Education, 2013). In addition, these tracks are heavily grouped by social class (family income) as well as race (Krahn & Taylor, 2007; Caro, 2009). This concern around the different streams was articulated in a similar manner to the lowered expectations that teachers have of them, so that students felt that teachers sometimes made choices about the classes students should take based on prejudiced judgments about their abilities. All in all, these factors lead to a detrimental environment in school, one that the students did not feel fostered or encouraged learning.

A critical aspect of this negative environment that many youth pointed to was the presence of police in schools, and the ways in which they felt policed, profiled and otherwise marginalized by the presence of police in their schooling environments. Many experiences around negative experiences with police officers in schools were shared, and a number of the youth also remarked the similarities between their experiences and those of other students of color in schools. This is consistent with some of the literature around police in schools and the concern about connections with unintentional consequences such as the overrepresentation of youth of color in the justice system, and the interactions of police with youth of color (Valdez, Fizthorn, Matsumoto & Emslie, 2000; Ruck & Wortley, 2002).

Parents also spoke about communication between the school and home. They felt this was one of the biggest challenges they faced in their children's schooling. Particular instances mentioned were the methods of communication (such as relying on homework binders, notebooks which are sent home with students every day) and what the teacher chose to communicate about. Community educators also spoke of the challenge of communication as a specific hindrance to parental involvement in schools.

Similarly, access to timely support or adequate resources in schools was another area of concern. Especially important were support services to get to know the education system, both at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Language support was cited as a critical area of need, as were teacher accountability and an importance to understand the history of the Latin American diaspora in Canada. Furthermore, the need for more representation in school staff/faculty and at the school board level was expressed as another area of concern.

Language & Identity

Language has been identified as a challenge for all populations who do not speak English as their first language (Proyecto Latino, 2010). This is the same for the Latin American community, the majority of whom speak Spanish at home, especially if they are recent immigrants. Immigration, of course, brings with it another set of stressors on the family unit, which are compounded by the struggles of language within the public system and pressures to assimilate.

The youth group voiced precisely this concern when talking about the challenges of adapting to Canada as a whole experience. In schools, this is further complicated by pressure to speak English, difficulties getting to know an unfamiliar school system, and trying to navigate a new social structure. The relationship between language and identity is complex and has been well documented in the research literature as an area of constant flux, especially during adolescence (i.e. Baez, 2002; Edwards, 2009; Gerin-Lajoie, 2011; Zulueta, 1995).

Language can also present a different set of challenges for immigrant parents as they adapt to Canada. In terms of their child's schooling, parents at the forum articulated challenges around accessing resources and how being able to advocate for their children is complicated by a lack of knowledge and a deficiency framework that operates in relation to minority populations (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999). Community educators likewise identified language and identity as an area that presents challenges for our community within the school system. Primarily, discussion centered around the experience of not understanding the language, and the strain this put on relationships between schools and families, but also within families themselves. In addition, there is a social stigma associated with not knowing the dominant language and this causes tremendous social pressure for youth in schools, particularly around being labeled ESL and separated from their peers who are in the "regular" classes, causing students to not identify with their peers and feel isolated from the other students.

What school boards can do

The second question posed to each discussion group was around what specific actions the boards could take to ameliorate the challenges faced by the community. This question was meant to foster discussion around the particular circumstances around some of the challenges identified, and ways in which those circumstances could be modified. In this sense, it was meant to elicit concrete suggestions that could be presented to the boards, in contrast with the more generalized challenges that were previously identified. This question generated lively discussion and from the different groups we were able to identify 4 themes that cut across all three discussions: the need for looking at staffing practices and staff training, providing specific resources and support, engaging in improved communication with both families and the community, and supporting research that can help provide more solutions and generate further discussion.

Staffing/Training

The youth group discussion focused on the need for teachers to undergo anti-oppressive training in order to address some of the problematic dynamics that occur in classrooms. In addition, training on anti-oppression would also facilitate understanding of the needs of different

communities and the ways in which these are not being met or respected in schools. This would also help to address many of the micro-aggressions reported by students and mend some of the relationships between racialized students and teachers.

These suggestions were echoed by the community educators group, who mentioned training in areas of equity and anti-oppression as a priority for teachers. In addition, monitoring and enhancing the quality of educational staff would be of critical importance to ensure that this training is not merely a superficial gesture, follow up is needed. Similarly, training should also include some of the work that is known already around the communities facing most marginalization in the school system in order to prepare teachers to more deeply understand the situation of different students in their classrooms. In addition, more attention should be paid to hiring teachers that better reflect the diverse population of students in Toronto. This would include hiring teachers with “relevant backgrounds, culture, language and histories”.

Provide Resources/Support

A second prominent theme arising out of the discussion was the need for schools to provide some of the resources and support that youth, parents and community educators had identified as lacking. These suggestions are meant to address those perceived gaps in services and support.

For the youth group, there was a great need for support around respect and relationships with teachers. To this end, many youth suggested “respecting the community’s space” while also “holding teacher’s accountable for unfair teaching practices.” One suggestion to facilitate this was to form a group to deal with and support student grievances. In order for students to have more access to information and the choices available to them, and to exercise their agency in making those choices, many youth articulated the need for better access to resources and information around scholarships, Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) applications, and having extra support to navigate things like the Ontario University Application Centre (OUAC) websites which can difficult to navigate. This, in conjunction with the above mentioned training would hopefully encourage a more nurturing learning environment with safe spaces specifically for “race focused groups and creative projects” where students would be “encouraged to realize and achieve their dreams as they see them” and reduce instances of “harassment by teachers, principals, cops” and instead “welcome students so they are not afraid to come to school”.

The community educators group also suggested taking a look at curriculum resources, to include more content from Latin American studies and more Latin American themes in the curriculum. This would encompass more Latin American resources and making use of a more grassroots based curriculum, some of which is being worked on already by Latin American organizations within Toronto.

Communication with Parents & Community

A third theme that was recurring throughout the discussions was the need to improve communication between schools, families and the community. This is particularly important for parent involvement, which is a priority area for both boards and schools, and has been shown to have significant positive effects in the education of children and youth. To this end, there

were several recommendations made to facilitate the communication between all parties.

The parent discussion focused around very concrete, tangible changes that could be made in order to facilitate parent involvement in school/board-run events or meetings. For example, people spoke of needing transportation assistance and child minding in order to be able to attend many events. Furthermore, these also needed to be offered at times that were accessible for parents who have work commitments during much of the day. Another point that was made for parents was the need to distribute more information about the current resources that are available to them right now, as many felt they were not aware of many of the existing services and did not know how to find out more information.

Similarly, the discussion in the community educators group centered around strategies for “opening up communication” in order to facilitate and promote parent involvement. From the current situation, members stated it obvious that “more efforts on reaching out and advertising” have to be made, and voiced suggestions such as “communication in other languages”, having “parent volunteers translate during Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA’s)” and using already existing committees—such as the Catholic Parent Involvement Committee (CPIC), Parent Involvement Advisory Committee (PIAC), and the Spanish Speaking Advisory Committee (SSAC)—as an official link between community, parents and schools. In this sense, committees like SSAC could support the development of parent handbooks and making them accessible. Schools can also act like a ‘hub’ for families, connecting them to institutions or organizations that may offer the support that they need if the school is unable to provide it, without delay. This can be facilitated by both strengthening connections with community organizations that work with the Latin American community in Toronto and allowing more access to schools. Community members stated this would allow schools to “promote social integration and contribute to improving the inequality of opportunities” by “promoting extracurricular activities, having settlement workers in schools, providing school orientations” in addition to working with other communities.

Finally, in order to continue to foster conversation and dialogue, the community educators group felt it was important to encourage and engage in continuing research. For example, members articulated that it was important to “participate in the investigation of themes of diversity, schooling, academic results, formation of link between teacher and institutional schooling with family”, as well as “explore work in conjunction with Constituents (Federal and Provincial) and advocating links between organizations and universities”.

Collective Commitments

The third question that the discussion addressed was specifically around community agency and community mobilization. This question, “what can we do to address these challenges?” was meant to move the discussion away from external solutions and instead focus on ownership and empowerment of youth, parents and community educators to face these challenges. The discussion in response to this question centered around community collaboration, building community, parent involvement and communication, and working across the different groups to build community capacity.

Community Collaboration

The discussion in the community educators group centered around uniting voices, members gave suggestions such as having LAEN “participate more actively in CSAC”, and “identify clear objectives of what we want to accomplish”. To this end, attendees felt it is critical to “accept and understand that community advocacy, within individual and collective power, is important, indispensable, and inevitable to improve our life conditions”, “[c]ollectively identify needs, what the real challenges are and how to address them”, especially through “collaboration, compromise, impact, solidarity, progress, positivism, information, and integrity.” Part of this strategy in the future should include increase community outreach through media, TV, markets, restaurants, festivals, etc., and continue to push for more Latino/a representation in positions of power in the city. Similarly, it was discussed that we must work with other communities to support each other and demand higher educational level for our youths. This must be done in conjunction with the school system, ensuring support and sharing the responsibility for education between communities and the system. For example, contacting local trustees to address needs and brainstorm ideas as well as increasing the days and voice of Settlement Workers in School (SWIS).

Parent Engagement and Communication

Another important aspect discussed had to do with facilitating the engagement of parents, teachers and community to ensure familial support and use information networks to get information to parents and students. These networks would not only distribute information on available resources, but also “promote participation between families and friends as well as members of the community”; such as word of mouth, brochures, pamphlets, parent handbooks, websites, all available in Spanish. It is important not only to focus on working with parents, but also work with the youth. One example is tutoring programs that help with academic achievement and resisting detrimental messages youth might be receiving at school. Most importantly though, youth expressed it is the commitment to “clearly represent [their] youth voices” and “get them to believe that it is an asset to have two cultures when the content of curriculum is 93% white people”.

Working with Youth and Parents

Youth similarly spoke of the need to unite and mobilize their agency and resources. Members articulated realizing that they need to “create more spaces for Latina/o youth to meet and support each other” so they can “be our own role models and teachers”. In addition to supporting youth led initiatives and projects from which they can feel a sense of ownership, they also discussed the need for a LAEN youth committee as well as a youth committee for other organizations. Finally, they also identified the need to support existing spaces for youth and help them grow.

Similarly, parents spoke of supporting and learning from each other, such as in the Teach2Learn workshops. It was also important to “form an organization to call out to people”, such as the LAEN parent committee, in order to promote outreach and keep parents united and informed. Part of the work discussed also centered around shifting paradigms of education to share the responsibility with the teachers an “be an example of the change we want to be and the art it is to be a parent”.

Conclusions

There were several points that came from the 2nd annual forum which have given LAEN some priorities and directions as the group moves forward. Through the demographic analysis of attendees, for example, we saw that only 7% of people heard about the forum through their school or through the boards. This suggests that communication with the boards is indeed an issue, as voiced by many participants at the forum. For LAEN's part, this means a responsibility for pointing this out to the school boards, and collaborating more effectively with them on communication. Conversely, we also saw a large portion (45%) of outreach done by Teach2Learn, suggesting that communication through organizations can be more effective⁶, and that there is a need for support from other community agencies in order to communicate events and information to the community.

Challenges that were identified by all groups included experiencing prejudice and stereotypes from teachers and school staff, a general lack of support in schools which manifested in various ways, and struggles with language and identity. Many of these challenges has been voiced at the first LAEN community forum, as well as being described by literature specific to the Latin American youth in education in Toronto (Gaztambide Fernandez & Guerrero, 2011; Mantilla, Schugurensky & Serrano, 2009). This suggests that not a lot (if any) change has occurred since the first report identifying this problematic was published in 2008 (Brown & Sinay, 2008). Therefore it continues to be important to draw attention to this matter at the school board levels, including through the committees of which LAEN is a voting member, as well as through advocating for recommendations to be implemented.

When focusing on support and suggestions that could be given to schools and school boards, the areas that were named most frequently by all groups included changes in staffing and increase in training, particularly anti-oppression training; providing increase resources and support in the various areas; working on opening up communication with parents and the community at large. An important point that came through in the participation and discussions throughout the forum was the importance of community and the support network that can be created in relationship with community organizations that already exist. This was significant as it marked a shift in the discussion from centering the power at the boards level and moving it to the community's level. Partnerships between school boards and community organizations were recommended as an important and under-utilized resource.

Given the existent assets that the community possesses, the discussion then moved towards mobilizing those resources and our community agency to discuss the steps that we could take to face the identified challenges. An important theme that arose was the need for community building and community collaboration, articulated through a sentiment of unity and the strength through that unity. As a community, we also committed to working with parents and youth in order to build on parent involvement and also create spaces for their own projects to take place. This includes providing support to the parent and youth members that

⁶ Many of the youth that attended who had heard of the event through this organization was also part of the youth dance group that performed; suggesting that offering different opportunities for participation might increase attendance.

are interested in forming parent and youth committees to work in LAEN. To this date, we are actively recruiting parents and they have begun to discuss how to best structure meetings to serve their needs. The youth committee has met a couple of times at the time of writing, and have developed priorities that they wish to focus on to develop a work plan for their committee.

The community dialogue had by the community during the 2nd Annual LAEN Education Forum and the conclusions derived from it suggest the need for more collective action in our community and greater involvement of the school boards in this endeavor. While we have started the conversation around collective commitments to actions that can be taken by mobilizing our community resources, it is clear from the magnitude of the challenges identified by all that a partnership is also needed in surmounting these. The 2013 forum opened the door to this conversation, and the presence of a few board Trustees gave encouragement to the timeliness of such conversation. We hope that in presenting the consultation and responses of the community that we can continue to move forward in finding ways to collaborate and improve the educational situation of our youth in Toronto schools.

References

- Alcoff, L.M. (2005) Latino vs Hispanic: The politics of ethnic names. *Philosophy Social Criticism*, 31(4), pp. 395-407.
- Brown, R.S. (2010) *The grade 9 cohort of 2004*. Toronto District School Board Research Report. Organizational Development Department, Research and Information Services.
- Brown, R.S. (2009) *An examination of TDSB post-secondary patterns : 17 year old students, 2007*. Toronto District School Board Research Report. Organizational Development Department, Research and Information Services.
- Brown, R.S. & Parekh, G. (2013) *The intersection of disability, achievement and equity: A system review of special education in the TDSB*. Toronto District School Board Research Report. Organizational Development Department, Research and Information Services.
- Caro, D. H. (2009). Socio-economic status and academic achievement trajectories from childhood to adolescence. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 32(3), 558-590.
- Edwards, J. (2009). *Language & Identity: An introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Essed, P. (1991). *Understanding everyday racism: An interdisciplinary theory* (Vol. 2). Sage.
- Gaztambide-Fernández, R.A., & Guerrero, C. (2011). *Proyecto Latino: Year 1—exploratory research*. Report to the Toronto District School Board. Retrieved December 16, 2013, from <http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/oise/UserFiles/File/ProyectoLatinoReportJan2011.pdf>
- Gérin-Lajoie, D. (2011) *Youth, language and identity: Portraits of students from English-language high schools in the Montreal area*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.
- King, A., & Warren, W. (2010). *Who doesn't go to post-secondary education?* Toronto: Colleges Ontario
- Krahn, H. and Taylor, A. (2007). "Streaming" in the 10th grade in four Canadian provinces in 2000. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-004-XIE. *Education Matters*, 4(2): 16-26.

- Mantilla, D., Schugurensky, D. & Serrano, J. F. (Eds). (2009) *Four in Ten: Spanish Speaking Youth and School Dropout in Toronto*. Toronto: Latin American Research Education and Development Network (LARED) and the Transformative Learning Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.
- Ontario Ministry of Education. (2011) *Ontario schools, kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and program requirements*. Retrieved December 23, 2013, from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/oss/oss.html>
- People for Education. (2013) *The Trouble With Course Choices in Ontario High Schools*. Retrieved January 2nd, 2014 from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/trouble-with-course-choices-in-high-school-2013.pdf>
- Pierce, C. M., Carew, J. V., Pierce-Gonzalez & Wills, D. (1977). An Experiment in Racism: TV Commercials. *Education and Urban Society*, 10(1), 61-87.
- Pueblito Canada (2013) *Our voices in schools: A toolkit for inclusive learning*. Toronto, Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.pueblito.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Our-Voices-in-Schools-Toolkit.pdf>
- Ruck, M. D., & Wortley, S. (2002). Racial and ethnic minority high school students' perceptions of school disciplinary practices: A look at some Canadian findings. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 31(3), 185-195
- Solorzano, D. G., & Solórzano, R. W. (1995). The Chicano educational experience: A framework for effective schools in Chicano communities. *Educational Policy*, 9(3), 293-314.
- Solorzano, D., Ceja, M., & Yosso, T. (2000). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *Journal of Negro Education*, 69(1/2), 60-73.
- Valdez, N., Fitzhorn, M., Matsumoto, C., & Emslie, T. (2000). Police in schools: The struggle for student and parental rights. *Denver University Law Review*, 78, 1063.
- Valenzuela, A. (1999). *Subtractive schooling: US-Mexican youth and the politics of caring*. Suny Press.
- Zulueta, F. (1995). Bilingualism, culture and identity. *Group Analysis*, 28(2), 179-190.