This paper looks back at the last 20 years of a research agenda focused on the interplay of culture, language and mathematics teaching and learning, particularly in working-class Mexican-American communities in the United States. While looking back, the aim is to also look ahead and pose dilemmas and questions that are likely to be of relevance to other contexts with immigrant and non-dominant students across the world. I use examples from several research projects to address three broad questions that frame the ideas presented in the paper. In working with teachers, how can we address issues of language, culture and socioeconomic status as they relate to the teaching and learning of mathematics? What are some implications for mathematics education from the research on immigrant parents’ perceptions about the teaching and learning of mathematics? What can we learn from examples of successful participation of non-dominant students in the mathematics classroom?

Through this focus on teachers, parents, and students I underscore the importance of a holistic approach for the mathematics education of non-dominant students. Consistent with a socio cultural approach, I argue for the need to develop stronger communication among the interested parties to develop learning experiences in mathematics that build on the knowledge, the language and cultural resources, and the forms of participation in the students’ communities. In so doing, I also offer some methodological considerations when working and doing research with marginalized communities. At the center of a research and practice commitment to the mathematics education of non-dominant students are issues around the impact of public discourse on education and the role of education policies (e.g., language policy). A key question is, who decides what mathematics and for whom? In short, these are issues of power dynamics that need to be examined.