

**2011 Leadership Institute:  
José Zapata Calderón**

José Zapata Calderón: [Speaking in Spanish] ¡Buenos Días! ¿Cómo están todos? Muchísimas gracias por la invitación a esta conferencia. Les quiero decir que no soy experto profesional como muchos de ustedes, pero si soy padre de tres hijos que ya han crecido. Soy un esposo casado por 35 años, con la fundación de nuestra familia mi esposa Rosa Calderón, y también somos abuelitos de dos niños – dos nietos, uno de seis meses y otro de cuatro años. Mis palabras hoy vienen de mis experiencias como padre, abuelito, y más de todo como un hijo de padres inmigrantes y como líder y organizador por la mayor parte de mi vida en los campos, en las uniones, en escuelas, en colegios, y en varias comunidades.

And I will stop here, because I know that there are many of you who do not understand Spanish. And I began my presentation by thanking you for the invitation to speak at this conference. In the beginning, I also let you know that I am not an expert like many of the presenters that you will encounter in the many workshops available at this conference; but I wanted you to know that one of my first jobs after graduating from the University of Colorado way back in the early '70s was with the Colorado Migrant Head Start program.

Today, I'm a father of three sons who are grown up. I'm a husband, married for 35 years – we just had our 35<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary – [Applause] to a loving wife, Rose, who is really the solid foundation of our family. We're also grandparents of two grandchildren: Antonio Guillermo, who is six months old, and Joey, who is four years old.

I also let you know, even those of you who have heard me before – and I thank Yvette; I thank Victoria; I thank all of you for giving me this space to really share my voice. I let you know that I begin most of my presentations in the language that I was brought up with in my childhood years. You know, I've done this in some of my classes, and I spoke in Spanish in one class for 35 minutes the first day of class and I had a student who walked out and reported me to the president of the college. [Laughter] And we had to bring her back and explain that, you know, you can't handle 35 minutes of being excluded when there are so many children who start in the first grades and don't know a word in English. [Applause]

I was one of those students who didn't know a word, and actually hid from school until a teacher that I will let you know about began to understand that there was nothing wrong with me psychologically or mentally, that I just didn't know English. As I related in Spanish, this is a way, for a moment at least, to present an example of a resource that can be used as a form of oppression or liberation. The question of "What does it take to be a leader today?" is a theme of this conference, and for a moment here we were able to experience empowerment for those who understood me, and exclusion, oppression, for those who could not understand me but who were also being left outside the possibility of being able to participate. And if one is not able to participate, it is very difficult to be able to develop one's highest possibilities of leadership.

When we speak of leadership development, we need to take into consideration the question of "Who has the power to define a culture?" The power of one individual or group can be used either to oppress or to unleash the capacities of others. At the same time, the power of a word or language as part of diverse cultures can be used to create a foundation for understanding. In my case, there would have been no way of my being able to reach the highest possibilities of leadership.

And soon, there are going to be some pictures that my son came up with on some of that development, of where I was born in Madera, Chihuahua, being brought here at a very young age by my grandparents. I grew up with my grandparents. But if there had not been a teacher in the first grade who saw my potential, I would not be here today. And this teacher was like many of you: a caregiver. And we know today, as Ross Thompson and Abigail Raikes point out in their study of school readiness, that the capacity of children is not simply a matter of qualities inherent in the child, but that it is significantly influenced by the relationships and social contexts that shape our social-emotional development and cognitive growth.

When I was brought to this country by my grandparents as a child, others rarely took the time to see the world through my eyes or to learn about me, my culture, and my family. Therefore, they often perceived me as mute or as having psychological problems. And this teacher, I really have to thank her. Mrs. Elder took steps to learn about my world, visiting me and my grandparents in our home. She saw that we lived in a one-room house, a converted gas station that had no indoor bathroom, no appliances, and a wood stove.

Mrs. Elder responded to our situation with empathy, sacrificing her afternoons to stay with me after school. This was before bilingual education. What's more, in seeking to create a similarity between us, she began our lessons by asking me to teach her Spanish; thus we became teacher-student and student-teacher. And I'm sure – and I know that if Mrs. Elder had not created this equitable environment, then what you would see before you in terms of my development, of being able then to eventually get a Ph.D, would not be a reality today.

To know – today we know that it is advantageous to be multilingual. As reported in an article by Fred Genesee, "Research has shown that children who are fluent in two languages are better at problem-solving, demonstrate greater creativity, and express more tolerant attitudes." [Applause] But this reality has a lot to do with how one feels about one's self. It was not until the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, when I was able to shine with knowledge of another language in a required Spanish course, then I got straight A's and everybody was coming to me asking me to explain these words. Because of what my grandparents had taught me not to forget, not because of the schools, now my self-esteem was lifted when other students would come and ask me for help in sounding out words.

Let me say here that it is important for all of us to bring to – to center-stage in our storytelling those individuals who often have been left out of history, often because of their skin color. And, you know, one of my greatest heroes is Kenneth Clark – and I know a lot of you don't know who Kenneth Clark is. In

my classes – I ask my students in my Race and Ethnic Relations class and no student knows who Kenneth Clark is. But, you know, Kenneth Clark, with the help of his wife Mamie, ended up studying the low self-esteem of black children. He studied the responses of more than 200 black children when they were given a choice of white or black dolls. Their findings, that showed a preference of the children for white dolls, led to a conclusion that segregation was psychologically damaging, and played a pivotal role in the Brown vs. Board of Education Supreme Court decision that outlawed segregated education. And I believe today that if it hadn't been for Kenneth Clark, that ruling would have not come as soon as it came; and we also thank Thurgood Marshall. [Applause]

Self-esteem is related to our children having role models such as Mamie and Kenneth Clark. Every young child should know who Mamie and Kenneth Clark are. But they also need to have role models for our parents, like Cesar Chavez, who I worked with in the 1970s; Dolores Huerta; Annie Dodge Wauneka; Chief Joseph; Martin Luther King; Rosa Parks; Sojourner Truth; John Brown; Fred Korematsu; Pete Volasko; and so many others. Our development of leadership, then, needs to begin from seeing the potential in others. It is being able to put one's self in the environment of others and to be able to see the world as much as possible through their eyes.

As Barbara Stroud, in her article "Honoring Diversity Through a Deeper Reflection," proposes – she proposes that responsive caregiving creates the foundation for a secure attachment, instills feelings of nurture and – and support, and facilitates healthy social-emotional development. It is – it is important to note...

You know, I just finished reading the biography of President Obama, and it's important to note here how President Obama took a lead in developing his leadership skills. When pondering what to do after college, he read about the sacrifices of ordinary people in the Civil Rights movement and he imagined himself in their place, something I did when I was at the University of Colorado. He imagined being a student non-violent coordinating committee worker convincing a family of sharecroppers to register to vote, or as an organizer of the Montgomery bus boycott. In doing so, he reflected on what it would be like to be one of them. To move beyond reflection to actually creating social change, not just thinking about it – but like a doctor diagnosing the problems, and then doing something, prescribing, and then implementing.

The beauty of putting thoughts into action is that we don't know what is going to happen. This is the aspect that Paulo Freire, in his book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," stressed, that we as human beings have the capacity to do what no one else has to do – the capacity to do, and that is to create culture. But that in most cases, we do not find our word, our voice, and that's why I'm so thankful of you giving me this space for my voice. But if we don't use that voice, we end up no different than objects that we create or objects that are domesticated.

It was this thinking that Obama took with him when he went to Chicago as a community organizer. And when his fellow community organizers became tired and they wanted to quit – like many of us when we get to that point where we say, "I can't do this anymore" – Obama had them look out the office window,

while asking: "What do you suppose is going to happen to those boys out there? You say you're tired, the same way most folks out here are tired. Who's going to make sure those boys get a fair shot?" And in asking these questions, he challenged the organizers to place themselves in their world.

Decades later, I don't think it was any coincidence that storytelling and listening to the stories of others became the cornerstones of Obama's 2008 presidential campaign. Through – through storytelling, campaign organizers – I was one of them – traveled door-to-door and recruited thousands of new leaders. We trained these new leaders to use their life histories and those of their communities to reach out to the voting public.

So by learning to understand others' perspectives, language, and culture, Barack Obama not only improved democratic participation but also became better able to understand himself, his family's history, and the language, culture, and perspectives of community members with whom he worked with. His experience became a lesson for campaign organizers in the value of understanding the language and culture of those they sought to win over.

It is a lesson for us, especially those of us who are parents or those of us who are working with children and families or heading up entire programs. We can be better leaders, and train new leaders, by comprehending and appreciating each other's life stories, to understand our differences in order to find our commonalities. Although in academia stories are not often accepted as data, in many cultures, particularly in the culture of indigenous communities, stories have been a way of passing down the history of a people, particularly when those histories were often excluded by those who control the power of the word through their ownership of property or social capital.

Gloria Anzaldua, who not too long passed away, wrote about the importance of telling and preserving stories as a means of historical survival in her book, "Borderlands." This was part of her childhood. It was part of my childhood. I remember my mother loved to talk. This is my grandmother, and she used to tell stories. I remember learning that this was the way to pass on the history of our family from one generation to another. As leaders, as caregivers, as supervisors in our program, telling our stories and drawing out each other's stories on an equal level can be the foundation of breaking down unequal power relations and placing each other on an equal footing.

More than ever in this time period, we all need to look through – you know, we need to look out through our windows at those families without jobs; those families without homes; the status of immigrant children, who comprise one fourth of all U.S. children, and their parents, who contribute over 70 billion dollars to the economy. And they say without their remittances that are sent to places like El Salvador, that country would fall. Those children of parents of all nationalities, who are our future leaders... And we need not turn our backs, but be courageous and commit ourselves to long-term transformational change.

What I'm telling you today is, to be a leader, we need to start with passion, and it has to be long-term and go outside the level of it just being a program, but that it is about creating social change. Otto

Scharmer, in his book "Theory U: The Future as it Emerges," proposes that our leadership-building has to begin from dealing with our blind spot. We have to start with ourselves, and we have to sit down in the morning and ask the question, "Who am I, and what has brought me here today?" This is a model that Barbara Stroud proposes is: "An opportunity for nurturing self-understanding and reflection." It is a way of building trust with our families, developing a shared language that builds on Stroud's idea that diversity means that everyone sees the world in different ways.

The significance of this part of my story, as related to the theme of this conference, is that my grandparents, early on, were leaders in teaching me the fundamentals that would last my lifetime. They never went to college. It was no coincidence in my later years in college I wrote about and helped build multi-racial coalitions that sought to overcome historical inequities. It was this early influence of my grandparents, coupled with my experiences in college, that led me to catch a bus upon graduating from the University of Colorado in the early '70s and to travel to Delano, as you saw in some of the pictures, to experience the farmworker movement of Cesar Chavez.

My visit to the National Headquarters of the UFW in Delano changed my life. I had planned to go on to law school. And upon arrival at 40 Acres, I remember speaking – Cesar speaking to hundreds of organizers, many of them strikers and students, asking them the same question that Obama asked those organizers.

He said, "What are you going to do with your life? You have a choice. You have only so much time in your life, all of us do – only so many minutes, so many hours, so many weeks, so many months, so many years. The last hour we've been here, we'll never relive again. And you can easily throw your life away on drugs," he said, "on changing channels when the problems appear or seeking material gain and selfishness. Or," he said, "you can use your life in service to others; empower others in building a more just and equal society. If you do this," he said, "I can assure you, regardless of what you decide to become – a caregiver, a lawyer, a doctor, a teacher, a community organizer – I can assure you that when you grow older, if you've used your life in this way, I'm sure that you will look back on your life and say, 'My life was really meaningful.' "

I heard Cesar say these words when I was in my early 20s. Today I'm in my 60s – a lot of us say, "the youth of my old age" – and I can honestly say from my own experience that what Cesar was saying at that time is true. Since that time, I have used every day of my life, every minute, as he proposed. And if I – by some chance I were to be at the end of my life tomorrow, for whatever reason, I can truthfully tell you that my life, I could say, has been very meaningful.

Brothers and sisters, this is the importance of bringing to center-stage those who have been left out of history. Both the leaders in the communities, who have made our communities – and we need to know who they are, who our toddlers and their families are, and that we have generations of exemplary individuals and communities that have contributed to the rich history of whatever gains we have made in reducing race, gender, class, and sexual inequalities. It brings to the forefront, then, the significance of the roles that caregivers, mentors, teachers, parents, grandparents, and the programs represented here

can play in a child's development, in the self-esteem of the children and families that we interact with on a daily basis.

It brings to the forefront the programs that all of you work with – the Birth To Three, the Early Head Start, the American Indian/Alaska Native program, the Migrant and Seasonal Head Start programs – and that the role of building trusting relationships can play in the future of young lives. The role of caregivers, those who sacrifice and do those little things that no one knows about, these are the real leaders that we need to bring to center-stage, but that to me are higher than the highest mountains. This is connected to the many studies that show the importance of one's environment and the caregivers around us in helping to determine the extent of a child's learning.

Alison Gopnik, author of the book "Philosophical Baby," emphasizes how significant the early years of a child's life are, how important the caregivers are in this time – period of time, and how it can affect the rest of their lives. "The children," she says, "are the greatest scientists on Earth. Their job is literally just to learn." That they're good at exploring; and they like to look at things that are unexpected; that they have fantastic learning abilities; but that they also do depend on caregivers; and that they are designed to be taken care of by a village. And whether those optimal possibilities can be a reality for our little ones in the future has a lot to do with your engagement, the engagement of our communities in ensuring that the resources that are needed and the skills that are needed to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of children, parents, and families is assured.

It also has to do with all of you here as bridge-builders. I call you bridge-builders because you are bridge-builders to school readiness and school transformation to ensure that not only are our preschool children ready for our schools, but with the work that you've done – and this is where we need to continue transforming the schools – so that our schools are ready for the children whose lives you have changed. [Applause]

This is a – I urge you to read this book. I just finished it and it was really interesting. This is an important point that stands out in Malcolm Gladwell's book "Outliers: The Story of Success." In his book, Gladwell describes how Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, as a teenager, was a misfit and his mother thought that he would never amount to anything. And it was by sheer coincidence that he ended up living next to a professor who invited him to a nearby college to observe the use of computers. Gates got so interested in the computers that he stayed late at night working with the computer programs.

Ultimately, the professor gives him the keys to the building so that he could work on the computers, and Gates began to spend the nights at the computer desk and not getting much sleep. And, you know, his mother thought, "This kid's not going to amount to anything because all he does is sleep and doesn't want to go to class." Many years later, however, when he was 19 and the professor was looking for someone who could develop a program, he remembered Gates. And from there, it's all history.

The significance of the story for me, and for our purposes today, is to ask the question: What if Gates had not met this professor? What if this professor had not given him the keys? The lesson from this

story about how our programs are so vital in ensuring the resources that are necessary to confront the structural inequities that our children and families are faced with every day in their communities is there; and we have to ask the questions: What if we were not there? What if the resources were not there? What if there were no keys?

Our toddlers and our children have unlimited capacities, but again there is the need for resources and for the support that can unleash these capacities. Some of the greatest minds of our time, you know, have raised these questions. Einstein, for example, emphasized the importance of imagination and curiosity at an early age; and he said, "The important thing is not to stop questioning." Buckminster Fuller went as far as to say something that Gopnik's research sustains, that "all children are born geniuses." However, he proposes that 9,999 out of every 10,000 are swiftly, inadvertently "de-geniused" by grown-ups. [Laughter and applause]

And that is the beauty of all of you here, where you're beginning from the acknowledgment of the capacities of our infants, our toddlers, our children, and how imagination, research, practice, and experience can be shared, taught, and learned to allow for the highest level of potential for those who will be our future.

In this context, the Oneonta Rivers Coalition in the state of Washington is an example in promoting easily accessible, comprehensive early education systems by: 1) "building on the language, culture, and world view of the families and communities we serve," they say; and 2) creating schools that are ready for children and children who are ready for school. Also in this context, the Oneida Early Head Start program is an example of reaching out to our highest potential by hanging up signs letting the clients know that the environment there is one that is a safe place for LGBT community families, and by changing the application that only asked for mom and dad names to "Parent 1" and "Parent 2."

These practices, I know, are hard, but they should be compelling for all of us. Because in terms of caregiving, it is not only important to understand the culture of the children or the families that we work with, but it is also just as important to be aware of the sources of certain perspectives of culture-making and their foundations. In my early school years, for example, I remember that there were the teachers – there were the teachers that told us that Mexicans were lazy, that they weren't willing to work, and without any incentive to go to school. At the same time, they taught us about the good Spanish people. I was – I turned out a good Spanish person. [Laughter]

And this is another price I had to pay for learning English. The beginning of this was when my name was changed. My birth certificate reads "Jose Guillermo Zapata Calderón." By the time that I graduated from high school, my diploma read "Joe William Calderon." [Laughter] And I'm sure they would have changed Zapata, but it would have been sort of weird: "Joe William Shoes Calderon," you know? [Laughter]

The result of teachers defining Mexicans as "those migrants who come every year and live in those dirty camps on the outskirts of town" is that many of the Latinos in the school did not want to be called "Mexican." Part of living in two worlds – the world at home and the world at school – is that my

grandparents were very proud to be Mexican, and throughout my many years at school they were consistent in ensuring that I knew the beauty of the history and the culture. As far as what the teachers taught us about Mexicans being lazy, I knew otherwise.

As I moved from elementary to high school, I learned how hard my parents worked by working alongside of them in the fields. You know, my parents never learned English. They both died. But they raised me and they worked hard. We would work from sunup to sundown like squirrels in order to save for the winter. My mother would be up before the sunlight to start the fire in the stove and to cook breakfast. Then she would be with us working the same long hours, and come home at sundown to cook dinner and wash the dishes.

When I tried to help my mother by washing the dishes or making tortillas, my father would call me a maricón. [Laughter] I didn't know that this was a derogatory term that was later used against anyone labeled as being from a different sexual orientation. All I knew was that this type of work was something that I was not supposed to do. I became a professional at chopping wood, vaccinating sheep, thinning beets, weeding onions, and stacking hay; but I didn't know a thing about sewing, washing clothes, or cooking. These tasks were considered "women's work," and men were not supposed to do them. Anyone – anyone who went outside these roles was considered different. Hence, it is important to understand the cultures of the people we are working with, but it is also important to develop a foundation for caregiving that is inclusive.

The development of critical thinking in the infancy stage is not just an issue in our work with children at the infancy stages, it is also an issue related to how we work with our parents and families. Just as there is a need for a new way of thinking toward caregiving and empowering with our children, there is a need for a new perspective on how we are part – part of developing the optimal capacities of parents and family.

As an ethnographer, I like the research methodologies of Randy Stoecker as presented in his book "Research Methods for Community Change." It is based on our being a student-teacher and, in turn, being a teacher-student, where both the learner and the teacher are at equal levels. It is a method I have used for many years when I have taken my students to work with farmworkers in the San Joaquin Valley or with the day laborers in the Pomona Day Labor Center, or on the street corners of the Inland Empire in Southern California. It is based on the idea that we all have different methods of using science to reach outcomes, and that we have to be open to how our families produce knowledge and find solutions to their problems.

You know, my grandfather, Joaquin, could not speak English and he was a farmworker, but I remember that the farmers – farmers used to come to the house and pick him up whenever a cow was sick or a mare was having troubles in birthing. This would happen a lot during the winters, and I never understood it. You know – this would happen in the winter when there was no work in the fields. I did not realize until many years later that my father had worked on ranches when he lived in Mexico and that he knew a lot about animals. Essentially, he was a veterinarian from experience.



Similarly, at our day labor center, our workers often know more about economic and political borders than the students in my classes. When solving problems, I came to the conclusion that they use science quite often in their deliberations: diagnosing a problem, prescribing a solution, implementing the solution, and evaluating the results. I know that this is a practice that is now being asked of all of you, and can be taken on as a challenge to work together to advance in this society – the importance of maturing those resources for the period of time after birth that we all agree is so essential and – and that can ensure, you know, those resources throughout – throughout a lifetime. This takes a type of thinking and creating that is based on the future.

I like what C. Otto Scharmer – in – in his book, he talks about the concept of "presence-ing" as the need to open our minds, our hearts, and our intentions, our wills, to view things from the source to develop a sense of the future that wants to emerge. It means breaking the pattern of the past, to let go of the old body of institutionalized behavior, in order to meet and connect with the presence of our highest future possibilities.

To finish, brothers and sisters, there are two trends developing right now that I sense. One is about the future as it is emerging, and one that wants to take us back to a time before the Civil Rights movement. On the one hand, there is a trend that has been seeking to build unity among the society's diverse groups and building the types of alliances and partnerships that are necessary to meet the challenges of a growing global economy. This includes ensuring that the resources that are necessary to meet the needs of our children are there. The other trend is one that is seeking to place the burden of the country's economic deficit problems on the backs of our children and their families by cutting our programs – our immigrants and poor people, our working people, through those many cutbacks.

More than ever, we need the voices of our families. We need your voices, we need your leadership, to ensure that such programs such as Medicaid, which provides health care coverage for millions of our children, is not cut. We all know... [Applause] We all know that such cuts would only result in an increase in the number of uninsured children and – and directly affect the families that all of you work with. Families who, in this time period, are just trying to survive. This is a reality. There are 16 million children right now going to bed hungry in the United States. This is happening a couple of miles from here. Hunger is affecting one out of every five households in this country.

I know that at this conference you will be sharing models of equity and that you will be analyzing, observing, and looking at what you might take back in creating new spaces – spaces in our homes, spaces in our programs, with our families – that are examples of the kind of practices, perspectives, and world that we want to live in.

And if there's anything I leave with you today, brothers and sisters, it is that passion to use your lives to create a better world and not stop until that very last day. And I know that you will feel the way I feel today, that if by some chance I did pass away tomorrow I could truthfully say that from the time – especially when I was 22 and I met Cesar Chavez, that every minute, every hour, every day of my life has

been – has been devoted to building a better world, a more united world, a world where we can use the fullest of our energies. And – and so, I – I can say today – that if by some chance I happen to leave this world tomorrow, that I can truthfully say I really used my life well. So in addition to creating those spaces with our children and with the families we work with in our programs...

[Laughter] I think I'm being told something. [Laughter]

It is essential to get involved in building new collaborations to ensure that the priorities of this country are not just about profit for a few, but are about sustaining and ensuring the resources that are necessary for the – for the many. This takes the development of your leadership, service-giving, but to also make sure that we are engaged in the policies that will have a long-term impact on the future of our children and our families.

All of you here represent the great strides that have been made in advancing the optimal capacities of our children and families and in increasing their potential. Various studies indeed show that the cutting of the resources to those advances that we have made will result in more – more cost to the taxpayers in the long run. It does not make sense to spend more money on prisons while the incarceration rates could be diminished – [Applause] – if there were more programs and more funding such as Head Start. For, as many studies show, such as that of Thompson and Raikes, it is programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start that have been successful "in improving the developmental outcomes for young children, particularly those at greatest risk."

It has been 46 years of Head Start and Early Head Start programs. They have been successful in developing leaders in our communities who are about caring – individuals like myself – and parents who are effective as role model advocates. We all know that it is the unleashing of the capacities of our children and families as a form of preventive care – preventive care that, in the long run, is helping to change the paths that in the past have sentenced so many of our children, through no fault of their own, to a life of exclusion, despair, and death at an early age. You know, the average age that farmworkers die at is 49.

Let us all leave this conference with a commitment to be better leaders and to build our future leaders by working together so that our families have the needed resources, so that our children are school-ready, but also so that our schools are ready for our children. Don't stop. [Applause] This will take your leadership in preschool and after preschool. I'm urging you, after preschool, to transform the educational system to provide – to provide the same kind of learning, teaching, and nurturing that the Head Start programs have been shown to provide. [Applause]

And more than ever, brothers and sisters, there is a need to engage the parents, our families, all of us here as caregivers, to not only be part of creating home environments that ensure optimal outcomes for our children, but that also result in the creation of democratic spaces of engagement where the priority of this society is placed on the future: our babies, our toddlers, our children, our families.

[Speaking in Spanish] Sí, se puede.

It can be done. Thank you. [Applause]