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# Conceptualizing Parent Involvement: Low-Income Mexican Immigrant Perspectives

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CONCEPTUALIZING PARENT INVOLVEMENT:  
LOW-INCOME MEXICAN IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education  
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**SETON HALL UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
**OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**


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## Abstract

The purposes of this study were to (a) investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents about their parental involvement and the family-school connection, (b) identify the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement, and (c) identify the ways that Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education. To accomplish these goals, I conducted qualitative research with a sample of English-speaking Mexican immigrant parents of middle school students. The site for this study was Midland Middle School, a large middle school located in a small, densely populated city with a high concentration of Mexican immigrants.

The results of this study indicate that the low-income Mexican immigrant parents in this study provide a strong foundation of support for their children's education and that they have a specific conceptualization of parent involvement that diverges from the expectations of school personnel and the parent-involvement policy that is aligned with mainstream parent involvement research. Additionally, there are specific influences on the low-income Mexican parents' approach to involvement in their children's education.

These results, although specific to the particular site and participants of the study, provide important empirical data that may contribute to a model for understanding Mexican American parental involvement. Further, this model may be theoretically transferrable to other immigrant populations and English language learning populations. This study illustrates the need for further research on how policy and program implementation is understood by low-income Mexican immigrant parents as well as other disenfranchised populations.

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The participants in a qualitative study hold a special place for a researcher. Without them, this work would not have been possible. It was an honor to have the opportunity to work with them.

Finally to my William, who was with me each step of this journey. We stood side by side on our distinct quests through graduate school. His dedication and perseverance has inspired me more than he will ever know.

## Dedication

I wish to dedicate this study to my parents, Richard and Alice Crane.

It is with the love and support of one's parents that all things are possible. The spirit of that love remains with me today.

It was always your dream for me to go college. Well, I guess I've finally finished.

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

One warm spring afternoon, as I walked my students downstairs for dismissal from the school where I teach, I noticed a group of Hispanic men who looked to be in their mid to late thirties standing on the sidewalk watching the door. As the bell rang and I dismissed my class out the exit door that we shared with the sixth through eighth grade students, out came middle school students to meet these men, elated to see them. One of the men asked a child, presumably his son, “¿Como le fue papi?” (“How did it go, Buddy?”)

Once I noticed this, I saw this story repeated day after day at dismissal time. These men never entered the school and there was little interaction with the school personnel. In fact, I had been working at the school for more than ten years, and I did not know any of them. They were there every day, on time to pick up their children from school; a school whose student make up of the school is over 90% Hispanic with most of these families coming from Mexico. I began to wonder whether this scenario was happening at schools across the nation. What conceptualization do these Mexican American parents have about parent involvement and the family-school connection?

Researchers looking into issues involving parental involvement have found that there are certain groups of parents, specifically low-income and minority parents, that are not involved in their children’s education at the same levels as their White middle-class counterparts. These findings have served to inform the current policy discourse surrounding parent involvement in U.S. public schools. My experience as a teacher has been that members of this population are perhaps not present in school in the ways that

some educators think that parents should be. On the one hand, most Mexican American parents attend parent teacher conferences and other school events. Their level of involvement, however, seems to stop there. They are not involved in volunteering, serving on committees or decision-making activities that according to some researchers can affect the school and subsequently their children's education (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). I began to question: What does involvement mean for these parents? What influences the parent involvement choices they make? How are they involved in their children's education at home? Are they involved in ways that are perhaps not recognized by educators and many researchers alike? I began to realize that perhaps in the larger discussion of parental involvement, the Mexican American parents at my school as well as Mexican American parents at schools around the nation may often be misunderstood.

Researchers have identified parental involvement in children's education as a critical factor in the success of students. Researchers found that there is a positive relationship between certain types of parent involvement and student achievement (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 1994). Parents can have an important, positive influence and impact on the school's ability to provide quality education when they are valued, their contributions are sought and integrated into school decision making, and they collaboratively plan and deliver services aimed at higher student achievement. Research on parent involvement further documents a specific need for minority family involvement in education (Chavkin, 1989; Comer, 1986; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). Minority parents, however, are less overtly visible participants in their children's

education since they are less likely to participate in traditional parent-school activities promoted by schools (Comer, 1986). The lack of their presence is often misinterpreted by many educators as a lack of interest in their children's education. The reason for the infrequency of minority parent involvement is not clear but might result in a stereotypical view of minority parents and the erroneous assumption that they don't care about their children's education (Chavkin, 1989). In fact, typical parent-involvement programs tend to increase education inequity because educators favor parents who are already involved with their children's education (Carvalho, 2001; Lareau, 2003; Lopez, 2001; Toomey, 1986). Programs designed to involve parents in their children's education to a greater extent tend to benefit those families who are already cognizant of academic culture and naturally perform the role expected by the school. These programs, therefore, create an automatic disadvantage for families who are unfamiliar with school culture and are not prepared to meet its expectations (Carvalho, 2001). However, some studies challenge the belief that minority families are not interested in their children's education. Minority parents, including Latino parents, have been found to demonstrate high interest and responsiveness in the support of students' academic achievement (Goldenberg, 2004; Lopez and Vasquez, 2006; Valdes, 1996; Williams and Chavkin, 1985).

In schools with large populations of families who do not speak English, researchers have found that language can pose barriers to family involvement. One handicap in parental support for their children's education is their level of education or their fluency in English. Although language is a barrier to parent involvement, there are additional barriers to parent involvement in education that result from educators' expectations that differ from parents' expectations. Specifically, in the middle grades,

parents feel they are not able to help their academically weak children without special guidance from teachers about how to help (Goldenberg, 2004). Additionally, there is less investment by middle-grade teachers in informing parents about how to help their children at this level (Chavkin, 1989). Due to factors including language barriers, the parents' level of education, and confidence with academic material, Latino family members often feel unable to assist their children in ways that are validated by their teachers (Goldenberg, 2004).

Increasing numbers of immigrants to the United States resulted in sizeable numbers of persons for whom English is their second language. This drives the concern for increasing Latino parent involvement in U.S. public schools. Of the 53 million children ages 5-17 years, 11 million children speak a language other than English at home (Kominski, Shin, and Marotz, 2008). Spanish-speakers are, by far, the largest language minority group in the United States, comprising more than 10% of the total U.S. population and 60% of the language minority population (Shin & Bruno, 2003). Further, the Mexican-born population in the United States was 11.5 million in early 2009, and this number is not significantly different from that of the previous two years (PEW Hispanic Center, 2009).

What captures the attention of many educators and policymakers toward the need to increase Latino parental involvement and ultimately Latino student success is the low educational attainment among Latino students. In fact, according to the PEW Hispanic Center, 39.2% of Hispanics have less than a high school diploma compared to 15.1% of the total population that has less than a high school diploma. Further, 22.5% of Hispanics without a high school diploma are native born (PEW Hispanic Center, 2008). Thus, the

continuous increase in the Latino population in the United States coupled with gaps in academic achievement, urges everyone to recognize and address the educational circumstances of this particular group (Lopez, 2001). As a result researchers, policy makers, and educators have sought to apply parent involvement models as a means to mitigate poor school performance among Latino children.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purposes for this study were to (a) investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents about their parental involvement and the family-school connection, (b) identify the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement, and (c) identify the ways that Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education. There are several factors that may influence the level and types of parent involvement, including barriers such as economic pressures, English proficiency, and level of education. Further, parents who were born and educated outside the United States may have a different understanding of their role in connection with their children's school.

Although researchers have established the connection between parent involvement and student achievement, much of this research is based on traditional, preconceived notions of parental involvement that often does not include diverse families. While many quantitative researchers have identified a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, there are certain limitations to these studies. Additionally, there is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding the literature claiming that parental involvement causes greater student achievement. The empirical data have at times been incorrectly interpreted to mean causation. These interpretations

drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and local level. Further in the larger discussion of parental involvement, minority parents, specifically Mexican American parents, are often overlooked. A better understanding of the ways that Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education can be used as a foundation to improve family-school communication to improve teaching and learning at this site. Furthermore, the findings of this study will support the development of a more comprehensive theory on Mexican American parent involvement. In addition, the results of this study may be theoretically transferrable to other Latino immigrant populations and language minority populations.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education?
2. What are the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement?
3. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents understand parent involvement and the family school connection?

### **The Study**

Qualitative research allows a researcher to explore and understand a situation in depth. I wanted to explore how low-income Mexican-born parents understand parental involvement and the family-school connection. Further, I wanted to investigate their understanding of the barriers and influences on their parent involvement choices. Finally, I wanted to identify the ways that these parents are supporting their children's education.

Therefore, I used a qualitative design to attempt to describe the conceptualization of these low-income Mexican immigrant parents about their parental involvement experience in their children's middle-school education and the influences on their parent involvement choices. Additionally, I attempted to uncover the ways that these parents support their children's education that might not readily be recognized by school personnel.

I asked Mexican-born parents of middle school students about their parental involvement experiences, their expectations of what parent involvement comprises, and the influences on involvement in their children's education. Further, I asked them about the ways that they support their children's education. In order to accomplish this, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with either the mother or the father or both the mother and father together of ten participating families. The participants were English speaking, Mexican-born parents of students who had just completed the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade who had attended Midland Middle School during the 2010 – 2011 school year.

The semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to express their ideas about parent involvement in their own words. In the discussions, I attempted to engage the participants in conversations about their conceptualization of parental involvement and the family school connection, their conceptualization of school support, influences on their involvement choices, and their support of their children's education. The details of the methodology that I employed to obtain and analyze the data for this study are discussed in Chapter Three of this study.



## Significance

Parental involvement has increasingly received attention as a viable tool for student achievement. In fact, there is some agreement in the efficacy of parental involvement as an effective tool for school reform (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Further, the promise of parental involvement is touted by educators, policymakers, and practitioners alike as a key mechanism for educational change and improvement, particularly in schools that enroll a large percentage of children of color (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). Research on parent involvement further documents a specific need for minority family involvement in education (Chavkin, 1989; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Lopez and Vasquez, 2006). Although many quantitative researchers have identified a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, there are certain limitations to these studies. Additionally, there is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding the literature claiming that parental involvement causes greater student achievement. The empirical data have at times been incorrectly interpreted to mean causation. These interpretations drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and local level.

This descriptive study provides a better understanding of low-income Mexican immigrant parents' conceptualization of parental involvement. The results of this study indicate that the low-income Mexican immigrant parents in this study provide their children with a robust foundation of support that draws from their personal funds of knowledge. Additionally, there are some specific influences that may affect low-income Mexican-immigrant parents' involvement choices. Further, low-income Mexican

immigrant parents have a specific conceptualization of their role in parent involvement and the family school connection that does not completely align with the current landscape of mainstream parent involvement research, policy, or the attitudes and beliefs of many educators. The findings of this study provide empirical data to support important information about how low-income Mexican immigrant parents who can speak English and have been living in the United States for many years conceptualize involvement in their middle school children's education. The conceptualization of parental involvement held by these parents may be very different from other parents, specifically White middle-class parents, based on several factors which can include culture, parent's level of education, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status. These findings can be used as a foundation to improve family-school communication and to improve teaching and learning at this site.

Further, although the findings of this study are quite specific, they provide data that add support to the development of a more comprehensive theory of Mexican American parent involvement. Additionally, this model may be theoretically transferrable to other Latino immigrant populations and English language learning populations. Educators, policymakers, and researchers may be able to apply this model to improve the design and implementation of parent involvement programs at the local level. Further, this study illustrates the need for further research on how policy and program implementation is understood by disenfranchised populations. The results of this study will provide information on factors that these families consider important and influential in their participation in their children's education. These factors are important to educators and policymakers who work with this population. The information derived

from this study will serve as a foundation for the design of programs that are sensitive to the needs of ethnically diverse families. This study will add to the extant body of qualitative literature on this subject by providing culturally specific data on parent involvement for Mexican American families. Further, this study will serve to inform parent involvement policy decisions and administrative practice, specifically in schools with a growing Mexican American population as well as other Latino immigrant populations and other language minority populations.

### **Definition of Terms**

I chose to use the term **parental involvement** in this study, rather than **family involvement** to eliminate confusion and to limit the range of inclusion for participants. Some of the parent involvement literature dates back three decades. The older parent involvement literature generally uses the term **parent or parental involvement or parent or parental participation**. More recent literature on the topic uses terms like **family involvement or family-school connection** (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). These terms are meant to be more descriptive and inclusive of different types of families.

As indicated in the review of literature in Chapter Two, the term **parental involvement** is quite confounding in the literature. Gerardo Lopez, a qualitative researcher who studies Mexican American parental involvement, says that parental involvement is a definition that varies greatly depending upon the school setting and context. While there are varying definitions among researchers, I have chosen to adopt his definition which is that the term **parent involvement** refers to numerous behaviors and attitudes that support their children's education (Lopez, 2001).

Although there are many influences within families and many definitions of what comprises a family, I have specifically chosen to study primary caregivers and not include other family members. It has been my experience in working with this population that the Mexican American children in this study's district tend to live with at least one parent. In fact, since the parents are immigrants themselves, grandparents and extended family members are sometimes not present in the United States. I will detail further in Chapter Three of this study the recruitment and selection process that I used to purposefully sample participants. **Parents**, therefore, are defined as the primary caregivers residing with the child.

While there is some confusion in the general population about the use and meanings of the terms **Hispanic** and **Latino**, the terms are generally interchangeable. They are used interchangeably throughout the literature. **Hispanic and Latino Americans** are, therefore, Americans with origins in the Hispanic countries of Latin America or in Spain, and in general all persons in the United States who self-identify as Hispanic or Latino (Humes, K., Jones, N., Ramirez, R., 2010).

**Mexican Americans** are defined as Americans of Mexican descent. This term can include naturalized U.S. citizens who were born in Mexico. The term may also include persons born in the U.S. of Mexican descent. As has been elaborated in the purpose of this study, I intended to look specifically at participants who were born in Mexico and whose children are attending a U.S. public middle school as they raise their children in the United States. I have chosen, therefore, to use the term **Mexican-born or Mexican immigrant** to describe the participants in this study. It is not my intention to differentiate between the documented or undocumented status of any of the participants

in this study. Therefore, the use of the terms documented, undocumented, legal, or illegal do not appear in this study, unless the information was specifically provided by the participants themselves.

The results of this study indicate that influences on parent involvement can be categorized in two main ways: **structural barriers** and **subtle influences**. **Structural barriers** are those barriers that may be caused by the actions or inactions of the school personnel or may result from outside forces or actors that can be identified such as conflicts with work schedules or lack of transportation. **Subtle influences** are forces that produce effects on one's actions, behaviors, or opinions. Subtle influences are not caused by the actions or inactions of the school personnel. They may be psychologically-based and therefore difficult for educators and researchers to discern or understand.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There is agreement among many researchers in the efficacy of parental involvement as an effective tool for school reform (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The promise of parental involvement is promoted by some educators, policymakers, and practitioners alike as a key mechanism for educational change and improvement, particularly in schools that enroll a large percentage of children of color (Delgado, Gaitan, 1992). The current rationale for parental involvement has been framed in the literature as a resource for improving individual student success, minimizing inequality by counteracting minority group failure, raising educational standards, insuring individual and national economic competitiveness and, moreover, building family and community relations (Carvalho, 2001).

Although many quantitative researchers have identified a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, there are certain limitations to these studies. These data should not be misinterpreted to mean causation since no causal relationship between parent involvement and student achievement has been identified. In order for data to be useful to researchers, policymakers and educators in the implementation of programs whose aim is to bring about positive change in a population, there needs to be a causal relationship, which has not been established in the parent involvement data. The distinction between correlation and causation is important since there are no studies that support a causal relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, yet interpretations of the parent involvement literature drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and

local levels. Further, the topic of parent involvement has been embraced by the popular media and subsequently a wider audience than a solely academic one. The notion that greater parent involvement can bring about greater student achievement has been promulgated in the non-peer reviewed journals and the popular media. When this notion is applied to certain populations, specifically low-income and minority populations, the idea nuances deficit notions in these populations; we can mitigate a gap in achievement, if we can involve certain populations of parents in specific involvement behaviors.

Interpretations of parent involvement data have led to the development of parent involvement policy at national, state, and local levels. Not all empirical data applies equally to the range of socioeconomic and cultural differences that are found in many of our public schools in the United States, specifically in our urban centers. The mainstream parent involvement literature that drives development of parent involvement policy has operationalized a definition of parent involvement that fails to include the voices of minority families.

Further, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) outlines a system of school, district, and state policies for developing research-based programs that involve parents in ways that contribute to student achievement and success in school. These guidelines must be met to qualify for and maintain federal funding (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). There is a lack of consensus, however, as to how parent involvement is defined and subsequently what behaviors constitute parents' involvement in their children's education.

The overriding implication in the mainstream parent involvement literature is that if one were to apply those same principles to different populations, perhaps one would

cause changes in that other population. Researchers have documented a specific need for minority parental involvement (Chavkin, 1989; Comer, 1986; Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Lopez, 2001). While many of these researchers have sought to provide a voice for different minority groups in the parent involvement discourse, notions that parents need to be involved or need to increase their levels or types of involvement are based on the notions that are implied by the mainstream literature: that we can improve lower student achievement by applying specific models of parent involvement.

Minority parents seem less visible participants in their children's education since they are less likely to participate in traditional parent-school activities (Comer, 1986). The reason for the infrequency of minority parent involvement is not clear but may result in a stereotypical view of minority parents and the erroneous assumption that they do not care about their children's education (Chavkin, 1989; Valdes, 1996). Research also suggests that Latino parents are "not involved" at the same rate as their White, middle-class counterparts (Lopez, 2001). On the one hand Latino parents in general tend to be less likely to engage in various home "learning activities" than parents of other races or ethnicities (Crosnoe, 2006). However, what constitutes a "learning activity" is not clear and may be based in a priori assumptions and biases of a researcher. Further, what constitutes involvement is often based on assumptions of what policy and school personnel consider to be acceptable demonstrations of involvement. Although researchers have found that Latino parents are not involved in certain types of activities or at the same levels as their White, middle-class counterparts, there are other substantial forms of parent involvement that parents engage in that remain unnoticed or



misunderstood by the mainstream parent involvement literature. Children from Mexican immigrant families, for example, have been found to be much more likely to emphasize school achievement than those in White families (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

There is often a cultural gap for minority parents who are unfamiliar with the educational system and are therefore unsuccessful at navigating it. Ethnic and language diversity create discontinuity between the types of socialization, child rearing, and skill development natural in certain cultural groups and the background or home preparation required of children in order to prosper in mainstream American public schools (Wong Fillmore, 1990). School-based conceptualizations of parental involvement, on the other hand, are most often dictated by school norms, which ultimately define the roles and expectations for parents at the expense of parental insights and perceptions (Lopez, 2001).

Rapid growth is the overriding characteristic of the Hispanic population in the United States. Over the past 25 years, there has been a demographic shift in this country, evidenced by the rapid increase in the number of Latinos in the general population. That growth comes in many forms according to nativity, country of origin, and other factors. As a result there is an emergence of new settlement areas where the Hispanic presence was once sparse but is now briskly increasing. (Pew Hispanic Center, 2009). This change in demographics has placed an enhanced demand on educational institutions to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Lopez, 2001). What happens to Latino children in U.S. public schools is of great importance to educators and policy-makers as immigration continues to occur with increasing speed

The Mexican-born population in the United States, which had been growing in the previous decade, was 11.5 million in early 2009, and this number is not significantly different from the previous two years (PEW Hispanic Center, 2009). “These numbers go a long way toward capturing the future of American society--how immigration from Mexico will, in the coming years, profoundly alter, transfer, diversify, and enrich everything about the United States, from its economy to its cultural fabric to the essence of what it means to be an American” (Crosnoe, 2006, p. 1).

Driving the concern of many educators and policymakers is the low educational attainment among Latino students (Crosnoe, 2006). According to the PEW Hispanic Center, 39.2% of Hispanics have less than a high school diploma compared to 15.1% of the total population that has less than a high school diploma. Further, 22.5% of Hispanics without a high school diploma are native born (PEW Hispanic Center, 2008). Thus, the continuous increase in the Latino population in the United States, coupled with their low performance in school, compels everyone to recognize and address the educational circumstances of this particular group (Lopez, 2001). A number of theorists have specifically singled out the Latino family--indeed, the culture in general--as primarily responsible for the problem of low achievement among Latino youths. Some scholars have argued that Latino families do not value education and do not foster independence and individualism, which are framed as prerequisites for achievement (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995). Crosnoe in his 2006 study on Mexican-born children suggests that we consider the following sequence:

- (1) improving the prospects for the Mexican-immigrant population  
is best served by improving the educational prospects of the

children in this population; (2) making such improvements must be taken up by social policy, on the large and small scale; and (3) such policy must be constructed on a solid foundation of knowledge about what helps these children in the U. S. educational system (p. 3).

For Mexican-born children in the United States, the fact is that school success has been elusive. American schools are still not meeting the needs of this group (Valdes, 1996). To this day, Mexican-origin children continue to fail in American schools in large numbers by most available measures including dropout rates, standardized test scores, and college enrollment (Valdes, 1996).

### **How This Study Fits into the Literature**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a more specific review of the extant literature related to specific topics that are germane to the study of parental involvement in Mexican immigrant families. The current rationale for parental involvement has been framed in the literature as a resource for improving individual student success, minimizing inequality by counteracting minority group failure, raising educational standards, insuring individual and national economic competitiveness and, moreover, building family and community relations (Carvalho 2001). A large body of both quantitative and qualitative research, which spans more than three decades, exists on the subject of parental involvement. Much of the extant body of literature on parental involvement points to the positive effects of parental involvement. Although much of the quantitative research links family involvement to student achievement, a more specific body of qualitative research discusses Latino families' involvement in children's

education. While many quantitative researchers have identified a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, there are limitations to these studies. Additionally, there is a great deal of misunderstanding surrounding the literature claiming that parental involvement causes greater student achievement. The empirical data have at times been incorrectly interpreted to mean causation. In order for data to be useful to researchers, policymakers and educators in the implementation of programs whose aim is to bring about positive change in a population, there needs to be a causal relationship which has not been established in the parent involvement data. These interpretations drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and local level.

While certain types of involvement generally have positive influences and effects on middle class students, there is an emergent body of research that both critiques the popular stance of the positive effects of parental involvement and questions the effectiveness of traditional parental involvement programs on ethnically diverse families. This literature searches for the voices of ethnically diverse families that are much less present in the mainstream parental involvement discourse. Yet, despite the plethora of studies on parental involvement, there exist few conclusions in the quantitatively synthesized literature about what works for specific groups (Comfort, 2004). Qualitative studies that target specific cultural groups' experiences add culturally relevant information to the body of research on the topic.

Parental involvement became a widely researched topic in education research throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As a result, there are volumes of research that were published over the course of these decades. In this study, I looked at the relationship

between public schools and one specific culture: Mexican immigrant families. This review of literature, therefore, incorporates both quantitative and qualitative empirical research that has been published in peer reviewed journals. In proposing the study, I looked at the broad landscape of literature for references to the historical context as well as the theoretical foundations that inform the empirical research. After I began data collection and data analysis, certain themes evolved out of the participants' responses. I looked back at my research questions that guided the study. I then categorized the initial findings according to each of my three research questions.

1. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education?
2. What are the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement?
3. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents understand parent involvement and the family school connection?

I looked at the literature again, focusing more specifically on themes that emerged from the data from this study, looking specifically for areas in which the results of this present study converged and diverged with the extant literature. This review of literature then focuses more specifically on the quantitative and qualitative research that is relevant to Mexican immigrant families.

Qualitative research characteristically yields multifaceted findings that can guide us to participants' strengths as well as the relationships among variables that may be outside the focus of the study (Nicholson, Evans, Tellier-Robinson, & Aviles, 2002). A review of the literature reveals that the concept of parental involvement, while amply

studied, is complex in nature. The qualitative literature does not lack in ethnic participants. These data, in fact, demonstrate awareness that there is a lack of understanding between ethnic parents and school personnel that needs to be studied in more culturally specific terms. Much of the extant literature has categorized participants in broad terms that include minorities or Hispanics and Latinos. Even the studies that have looked specifically at Mexican Americans have categorized participants too broadly since factors like socioeconomic status, acculturation, level of education, and level of English proficiency can affect the experiences of members of the same ethnic group in different ways. This present study explores factors that affect these participants at a micro level that has not been presented in the extant literature.

Given the specific nature of this study, this paper discusses the theoretical frameworks that inform the qualitative parental involvement studies that are prominent in the literature, the correlation between parental involvement and student achievement that has been reported in some of the literature, and the confounding definition of parental involvement in the literature. Also discussed are the barriers to and influences on Latino and Mexican American parental involvement, how Mexican immigrant parents have been found to support their children's education, and Mexican American parents' understanding of parent involvement that have been discussed in the qualitative literature. My purpose is to review the extant body of literature and to present a narrow and in depth focus on the literature that relates to the purposes of this study.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

To discuss the parental involvement literature one must be cognizant of the main theoretical frameworks that serve to inform that literature. A review of the research

shows that French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural and social capital (1986), along with American sociologist James Coleman's focus on social capital (1988) are common theoretical underpinnings of the qualitative literature that discusses minority parental involvement as well as the literature that critiques the more popular parental involvement models. In addition, the deficit hypothesis is a divergent theory that has served to inform much of the mainstream literature related to parental involvement. Funds of knowledge emerged as a theoretical framework in the 1990s to document the competence and knowledge embedded in the life experiences of under-represented students and their families (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg, 1992). This framework counters the deficit perspectives common in depictions of Latino and low-income families (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Further, Epstein's model of parental involvement, while not a theoretical underpinning but rather a model, is prolific in the literature. This model is based on the social connections within organizations. It was developed by Epstein as an outgrowth of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which explains how everything in a child grows and develops through overlapping spheres of influence.

Pierre Bourdieu wrote about the interaction of three sources of capital: economic, social, and cultural, while Coleman focused on the role of social capital in the creation of human capital. Coleman's model has structural-functionalist roots going back to Durkheim. Bourdieu's conceptualization is grounded in the theories of social reproduction and symbolic power (Dika and Singh, 2002). These theories attempt to explain how the culture is transferred from one generation to the next. In *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* (1977) Bourdieu and Passeron define education as "the process

through which a cultural arbitrary is historically reproduced...the equivalent, in the cultural order, of the transmission of genetic capital, in the biological order” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977, p. 32). He later defined cultural capital as “the cultural experiences in the home that facilitate children’s adjustment to school and academic achievement, therefore transforming cultural resources into cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1987).

According to Bourdieu, lack of elite culture generally means that there is a lack of emphasis on education. His theory suggests that there is nothing passive about the transfer of cultural capital. Schools draw unevenly on the social and cultural resources in the society. They use particular linguistic structures, authority patterns, and types of curricula. Children of higher socioeconomic standing enter school already familiar with these arrangements. The cultural experiences in the home, dependent on social class, differentially facilitate children’s adjustment to school and subsequent academic achievement. This transforms elements of family life, or cultural resources, into what Bourdieu calls cultural capital.

This theoretical foundation supports the critique of the current state of parental involvement policy and the popular parent involvement theories that carry a middle-class bias in terms of the ideology of education for upward social mobility (Carvalho, 2001). Bourdieu refers to what he calls “the field.” He says that social space is a field of forces and struggles between agents with different means and ends (Bourdieu, 1987). He goes on to say that the field is characterized by the "rules of the game," which are neither explicit nor codified. Education researchers have interpreted the field to mean school.

Coleman's interpretation of social capital is the most frequently cited in the educational literature related to social capital (Dika, and Singh, 2002). Coleman



highlights the supports of social networks. Particularly, he emphasizes intergenerational patterns and how the parents and their children's friends are social structures that facilitate the emergence of effective norms. Coleman's later work (1992) continues to focus on the role of parental involvement in developing social capital. Coleman sees social capital as social control, where trust, information channels, and norms are characteristics of the community. Thus, Coleman's work supports the idea that it is the family's responsibility to adopt certain norms to enhance children's life chances, whereas Bourdieu's work emphasizes structural constraints and unequal access to institutional resources based on class, gender, and race (Lareau, 2001). Researchers have found that cultural capital and class standing affects parents' behavior in relation to school (Lareau, 2001).

Bourdieu's theories of cultural reproduction and of cultural and social capital were developed as alternative explanations of unequal academic achievement to skill deficit and human capital theories. Bourdieu and Passeron differ from the deficit hypothesis wherein Coleman's earlier work called minority children's background knowledge and home experiences a serious educational deficiency, referring to what he called their educationally deprived backgrounds (Coleman, 1966). While highly controversial, the theory suggests that student background and socioeconomic status are much more important in determining educational outcomes than are measured differences in school resources. Not to be confused with Bourdieu's cultural capital, according to Coleman, social capital is defined as "the resources that reside in the social structure itself—norms, social networks, and interpersonal relationships that contribute to a child's growth" (Coleman, 1987, p. 36). In 1987 he wrote that "the social capital in American

families and neighborhoods available for raising children has declined precipitously over the past 25 years because of changes in society (Coleman, 1987, p. 37). The deficit hypothesis, based on earlier language studies, for some time became the primary basis of compensatory education programs. The deficit hypothesis basically blames the influences of the social environment for the perceived lower verbal functioning of disadvantaged children. Supporters of compensatory programs assume that disadvantaged children simply do not acquire, in their families, the capabilities essential for success at school. Thus the aim of compensatory programs is to promote a planned development which will balance out the deficiencies in stimulation and experience that are caused by the environment.

Much of the family involvement theory that discusses the non-dominant groups in public schools, specifically Hispanic families, suggest that these families lack social capital and that they are in fact deficient. Most of this literature discusses ways for schools to help parents become more involved in their children's education in order to improve their performance in school. Implementation efforts focusing on parental involvement include family education components that are directly based on a deficit-difference paradigm (Valdes, 1996). Research on "disadvantaged" children can be categorized as falling within the cultural deficit-difference paradigm in that it attempts to explain low scholastic achievement by focusing on differences brought to the school by the children themselves (Valdes, 1996).

Closely related to the research on differences between mainstream and disadvantaged children is research on parents and their ability to "support" their children's education. This work has primarily

focused on parental involvement in education, parental attitudes toward school and education, and maternal teaching styles. In general, this research takes the perspective that at-risk children do poorly in school because of their parents' beliefs and behaviors. Non-mainstream parents either do not have the "right" attitudes toward the value of education; or they do not prepare their children well for school; or they are not sufficiently involved in their children's education (Valdes, 1996, p. 17) .

The theoretical framework of funds of knowledge has been used by educational researchers to document the competence and knowledge embedded in the life experiences of under-represented students and their families. The concept was first introduced by anthropologists Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) as part of their household analysis of working-class Mexican families in the U.S. Southwest. Funds of knowledge were described in this work as an array of knowledge and skills that are of strategic importance to working-class households. Moll and González (1994) used the approach to study the literacy practices of working-class Latino children. They offered the following definition of funds of knowledge:

Those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being. As households interact within circles of kinship and friendship, children are 'participant-observers' of the exchange of goods, services, and symbolic capital which are part of each household's functioning. (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992, p. 133).

Funds of knowledge as a theoretical framework has primarily been used by researchers to document the wealth of knowledge existing in low-income Mexican households, to help teachers link school curriculum to students' lives, and to challenge the deficit model that has characterized much educational theorizing about low-income children and families (Olmedo, 1997). Research on funds of knowledge has provided findings that highlight the importance of tapping into understanding the resources those students bring to the classrooms and that challenge dominant schooling practices (Rios-Aguilar, 2010).

The most widely accepted parental involvement paradigms include models espoused by researchers such as Epstein and Henderson & Berla. As mentioned previously, although this model is not a theoretical framework, it is so prolific in the parent involvement literature that it is mentioned because of its influence on the development of research policy. These paradigms are informed by the overlapping spheres of influence theory. This theory is based on the social connections within organizations. It was developed by Epstein as an outgrowth of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory which explains how a child grows and develops. Bronfenbrenner, a developmental psychologist and co-founder of the Head Start Program, identified different aspects of the environment that influence children's development. The basic premise of this theory is that high-quality interactions between schools, families and communities will increase the likelihood that more students will receive common messages from various people about the importance of school, of working hard, of thinking creatively, of helping one another, and of staying in school (Epstein, 1992).

### **The Correlation between Parental Involvement and Student Achievement**

Identified as a critical factor in the success of students and a topic that has been under consideration by researchers for quite some time, the overwhelming majority of this research has found that there is a positive relationship between family involvement and student achievement (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 2002). A review of twenty-nine controlled studies on family involvement programs, in fact, found that family participation in education was twice as predictive of academic learning as family socioeconomic status (Walberg, 1984). Fan and Chen in their 1999 meta-analysis of over 2000 published and unpublished articles described the concept of parental involvement as having a positive effect on students and as intuitively appealing (Fan & Chen, 1999). Jeynes (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of parental involvement on minority students' academic achievement that suggested that parental involvement generally does affect the academic achievement of minority groups. Jeynes noted that "further research is needed to examine why it is that particular kinds of parental involvement are especially beneficial for certain racial groups" (Jeynes, 2010, p.215). Further, parental expectations for their children's educational achievement have been found to have a significant effect on the achievement of eighth graders (Keith and Lichtman, 1998).

Correlation studies are helpful in that they tell us that there is a positive and significant relationship between parental involvement and student achievement. This data cannot be misinterpreted to imply a causal relationship since no causation has been identified between parent involvement and student achievement. The distinction between correlation and causation is important since there are no studies that support a causal

relationship between parent involvement and student achievement, yet interpretations of the parent involvement literature drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and local levels. What these quantitative studies are not capable of is providing us with substantive information that can help in the formulation of effective parent involvement programs. In order for data to be useful to researchers, policymakers and educators in the implementation of programs whose aim is to bring about positive change in a population, causation needs to be established. Correlation studies produce a gap in the literature in that the studies say nothing more than that parental involvement matters (Peek Corbin-Staton, 2009). The quantitative studies do not provide information needed as to what works for which population and why.

Further parental involvement has been embraced by a wider audience than just the academic audience who read peer reviewed articles. This topic has been presented in the non-peer reviewed education journals as well as the popular media. This becomes a problem when quantitative data can be presented in the non-peer reviewed journals and the popular media, possibly resulting in parental involvement being misinterpreted as having a causal relationship, when there are no studies to support this.

Another problem with quantitative research in parental involvement is that it conceptualizes parental involvement as a certain set of actions or behaviors rather than broadening and advancing understanding in relation to the construct under study (Peek Corbin-Staton, 2009). According to Fan and Chen, student achievement was measured by numerous differing indicators in the studies that they analyzed, further clouding any consistent findings in this area. Further, parental involvement in the quantitative

literature is based on each individual researcher's operational definition of the parental involvement construct. Multiple, narrowly focused qualitative studies are needed to investigate each of these variables and provide specific empirical data on each.

### **The Confounding Definition of Parent Involvement**

The relationship between families and schools has been widely discussed in the parental involvement literature (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 2002). One result of the fact that parental involvement is such a broad, well-researched topic is that the term parent involvement has several different and therefore inconsistent definitions. Definitions of what constitutes parental involvement defined by school policy or held by school personnel can vary greatly from those held by parents. It is a popular term that has the incorrect, underlying assumption that it means relatively the same thing in different contexts (Corbin-Staton, 2009). The term *parent involvement* refers to numerous behaviors and attitudes that support their children's education. It is a definition that varies greatly depending upon the school setting and context (Lopez, 2001). Schools often quantify and evaluate parental involvement by the physical presence of parents at certain school-based functions. Most of the definitions presented in the parent involvement literature have a middle class dominant culture bias.

Joyce Epstein defines parental involvement as a two-way partnership between the family and the school (Epstein, et al., 2009). Chavkin and Williams (1985) define parental involvement as any variety of activities that allow parents to participate in the educational process at home or in school, such as information exchange, decision sharing, volunteer services for schools, home tutoring/teaching, and child advocacy. Brouard

(2003) defines traditional involvement as parents helping schools reach specific goals that reflect the school's values and priorities (Brousard, 2003). Yosso characterizes one specific type of parent involvement, high educational aspirations, as "aspirational capital," which refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Parents, however, are perceived as caring more about their children's education when they are actively supporting and maintaining the school's focus (Goodwin & King, 2002). Goodwin and King suggest that there are many ways in which parents can be involved in their children's education. In fact, in most settings, supported by the most widely accepted paradigms of parental involvement, school personnel have specific expectations of parents. Parents are expected to perform a particular role in schools that is primarily determined by people other than the parents themselves (Lopez, 2001). Fan and Chen argue that the operational use of parental involvement has not been clear and consistent. They found that the definitions of parental involvement were very diverse, ranging from participating in school activities, communicating with teachers, and imposing school-related rules at home (Fan & Chen, 1999). They go on to say that the somewhat chaotic state of the definition of the main construct not only makes it difficult to draw any general conclusion across studies, but may have contributed to inconsistent findings in this area (Fan & Chen, 1999). While it is clear that there is empirical evidence to suggest that parental involvement has a positive and significant effect on student achievement, a gap in the literature becomes evident when there is no clear definition as to what parental involvement actually comprises. If the research community cannot develop a consensual



definition for the term, then it should be no surprise that definitions held by educators and families vary widely.

Joyce Epstein's work is often cited at the forefront of the family involvement research. She describes overlapping spheres of influence among schools, families, and communities. She advocates for a partnership in which "teachers and administrators create more family-like schools and parents create more school-like families" (Epstein, 2002, p. 11). Her work has produced a specific conceptualization of parental involvement.

Epstein and her colleagues Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Jansorn, & Van Voorhis (2009) identified six types of parent involvement:

1. Parenting, which includes supporting, nurturing, and child rearing
2. Communicating, which includes relating, reviewing and overseeing
3. Volunteering, which includes supervising and fostering
4. Learning at home, which includes managing, recognizing, and rewarding
5. Decision-making, which includes contributing, considering, and judging
6. Collaborating with the community, which includes sharing and giving

In fact, while Epstein's concept appears comprehensive at first, her argument supposes that the role of a parent is to assist the school in fulfilling its mission. Further, in spite of Epstein's emphasis on two-way communication, her model did not include a mechanism for incorporating parent input into the "partnership," and the individual assets or cultural capital of parents were not recognized (Gottlob, 2009). A common element in Epstein's construct is the importance of school and not the importance of the family's cultural assets (Gottlob, 2009). While significant, in-depth, and worthy of respect and

consideration, Epstein's prolific dominance in the field has the potential to extinguish the search for theoretical and conceptual advancement of the parental involvement construct and nuances associated with this topic (Corbin-Staton, 2009).

These formulations tend to automatically benefit those families who are already cognizant of academic culture and naturally perform the role expected by school, while creating automatic disadvantage for families unfamiliar with school culture and unfit to meet its expectations. Moreover, in regulating family-school relations--specifically, by defining home as a learning setting for the school curriculum and imposing on the parents a certain educative (parenting) model--educational policy is in fact extending political regulation onto the diffuse realm of the family and private life, particularly affecting working-class and lower-class families (Carvalho, 2001, p. 46).

Moreover, this framework presupposes a certain universality surrounding the "basic obligations" of parents and teachers, while downplaying the fact that such obligations may be culturally defined or grounded (Lopez, 2010). It is important to shift from "educating parents to do what teachers and schools want them to do to building an understanding of cultural capital and building on the wealth of knowledge of Hispanic parents and families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992).

A gap in the literature is apparent when there is no clear definition of parent involvement among the research community. A theoretical model for parent involvement cannot be provided until there is some consensus among the research community as to this definition. Further, reliance on the findings of the mainstream literature, which has a

White, middle-class bias, fails to include the perspectives of diverse parents. This present study will add specific findings to the extant research which includes perspectives that lie outside the mainstream. Inclusion of these perspectives will add important information to the development of a comprehensive theoretical construct of parent involvement that includes the perspectives of diverse families in its definition.

### **Parent Involvement as Policy**

Since the late 1980s, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act has included increasingly specific, research-based mandates and guidelines for programs and practices of family and community involvement. Most recently, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) outlines a system of school, district, and state requirements for developing research-based programs that involve parents in ways that contribute to student achievement and success in school. These guidelines must be met to qualify for and maintain federal funding (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). Linking federal funding to federal parental involvement guidelines has resulted in a de facto mandate on public schools that rely heavily on federal funding. As a result, Midland Public Schools and many other local districts have adopted parent involvement policies that essentially mirror the federal guidelines. (Appendix I)

Parental involvement has been so accepted as an important part of educating the disadvantaged, that it has been codified for the first time in the history of the ESEA and has a specific definition (Corbin-Staton, 2009). NCLB mandates have been based in part on the extant literature on parental involvement (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). As Henderson and Mapp conclude in their 2002 publication,

A synthesis of the research concluded that the evidence is consistent, positive, and convincing: families have a major influence on their children's achievement in school and through life. When schools, families and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more (p. 3).

The generally accepted policy for parental involvement endorses parental involvement models like Joyce Epstein's model. These models call for a partnership in which successful schooling is dependent on parental input. Adding to the stresses in schools are the demands placed on schools by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and its state-level accountability policies that cause schools to demonstrate annual yearly progress for all children (Darling-Hammond, Sizer & Wood, 2004).

As schools and society grapple with stringent legislative mandates and expectations for continually increasing student success, an evolution in what is known about parental involvement is needed (Corbin-Staton, 2009). Parental involvement policy disregards the fact that family material and cultural conditions and feelings about school differ according to social class and furthers educational inequality. The imposition of a particular parenting style and intrusion into family life, and the escalation of educational inequality are the gravest effects of some traditional kinds of parental involvement policy (Carvalho, 2001). "Insofar as there are families that cannot fulfill the requisite parenting role or create a learning environment in the home aligned to the school curriculum, the likelihood that this policy will enhance inequality of learning and outcomes seems obvious, moreover ratifying the possibility of blaming families for

student failure (Carvalho, 2001, p. 7). Policies of parental involvement seem to be grounded in contrary conceptions that school can change families and at the same time depend on families for change and improvement, and that families are deficient and at the same time have an important role in responding to the school's agenda (Carvalho, 2001). If and when policy efforts fail to benefit all families and students, they undoubtedly harm some of them (Carvalho, 2001). Parental involvement program implementation still evokes the deficit paradigm. With few exceptions, programs aimed at at-risk children are designed to address key shortcomings or deficits in these students in order to assist them in succeeding in the school environment (Valdes, 1996).

### **Barriers to Latino Parent Involvement**

Researchers have identified a number of barriers to effective parental involvement related to low income, minority, Hispanic, and specifically Mexican-American parents. There are systemic structural and cultural barriers to greater parental involvement inherent in many schools that affect these groups. This research indicates that there are structural problems embedded in the organization of public schools that creates barriers to greater parental involvement specifically for minority and low-income parents. Certain structures created by schools as institutions do not facilitate good parental involvement. Teachers' contracts and custodians' hours limit evening and weekend meetings (Moles, 1993). The structured times for parent-teacher conferences are brief, narrowly defined, and unidirectional (Lopez, 2001). On the other hand in many families both parents work outside the home, making it difficult, if not impossible, to attend school conferences and meetings scheduled during the day (Galarza-Hernandez, 1996; Lindsey, 2006; Lareau, 1989; Moles, 1993; Valdez, 1996). Even the most convenient

meeting times may still mean that families need care for young children or transportation. Teachers and school personnel place an important value on the efficacy of this particular exchange, largely recognizing and embracing it as an important signifier of involvement (Carvalho, 2001).

Language, the need for childcare, work schedules, transportation, and comfort at their children's school were identified as barriers to Latino family involvement (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Galarza Hernandez, 1996; Lindsey, 2006; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Participants in several studies indicated a sense of discomfort in going to school as a result of insensitivity or even a sense of hostility on the part of school personnel (Bermudez, 1993; Lareau, 2000; Lindsey, 2006; Valdes, 1996).

Studies that look at diverse populations have led to a greater understanding that parent involvement is a complex issue that is affected by various factors. These studies have been helpful in laying the groundwork in the study of minority parental involvement. Many studies, however, are limited by the fact that they include all Hispanics into one category. The studies that look at Latino communities place "Latinos" or "Hispanics," terms that are used interchangeably in the parental involvement literature, into one broad category. Studies that paint Latinos with a broad brush have been helpful in laying the groundwork for understanding; however, more studies that provide culturally specific data will add important information to the extant literature. This present study looks at a specific ethnic group who have immigrated to a specific region of the United States. Further, these participants are at a similar stage in their acculturation and their second language acquisition process. These factors may affect their engagement choices in certain parent involvement behaviors. Such micro-level

explorations are not present in the extant literature. The findings of this present study add important information to the extant literature base that includes alternative perspectives and understandings of parent involvement.

Immigrant parents may be victims of cultural barriers reflecting differences in language, values, goals, methods of education, and definition of appropriate roles (Moles, 1993). Minority parents' lack of participation in traditional parent-school activities should not be misinterpreted as a lack of interest in their children's education. Many minority parents don't participate in traditional school activities because they feel uncomfortable at the school. Because of racial, income, and educational differences, these parents are more reluctant to become involved at school (Comer, 1986). Limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration, restricted opportunities for interaction, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools are three main factors that may account for a lack of parental involvement (Moles, 1993). Participants identified communication from school in their native language, Latino community meetings to discuss education, parent education opportunities, increased school-sponsored family events, childcare, and the integration of Latino cultures into their children's curriculum as strategies for improving family involvement. Due to factors including language barriers, the level of education of family members, and confidence with the material, however, many Mexican American parents tend to feel unable to assist their children with academic material in ways that are validated by their teachers (Goldenberg, 2004).

## **Language**

Researchers have reported that a serious handicap in supporting their children's education is their limited education and lack of English fluency (Galarza-Hernandez, 1996; Valdes, 1996; Moles, 1993). In schools with large populations of families who do not speak English, language can pose the most obvious barrier to family involvement (Lindsey, 2006; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996; Bermudez, 1993). Bermudez, in her study on this population, found some of the reasons for the alienation of culturally and linguistically diverse parents from involvement in school to be lack of confidence and lack of English proficiency (Bermudez, 1993). In fact, parents are blamed for their children's failure to succeed in school, yet a cycle of failure has been institutionalized as a result of the parents' lack of skills to assert themselves and effect change.

## **Education**

Researchers have also found that limited education and the difficulties these parents have experienced in school lead many parents to fear and mistrust the schools, not expecting them to help their children to succeed (Galarza-Hernandez, 1996; Menacker, Hurwitz, & Weldon, 1988; Valdes, 1996). Further, in the middle grades, parents feel they are not able to help their academically weak children without special guidance from teachers about how to help (Chavkin, 1989). In fact, there is less investment by middle-grade teachers in informing parents about how to help their children at this level (Goldenberg, 2004, Valdes, 1996). Latino families in the United States, however, have been found to demonstrate high interest and responsiveness in the support of students' academic achievement. Mexican American parents specifically have



been found to be particularly responsive to the completion of homework (Goldenberg, 2004). In the case of minority parents, parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do relative to their children's education, their sense of self-efficacy in the parental involvement role, and their perception of how the child and the school want them to be involved in their child's education can encourage involvement or negatively affect parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Even well designed school programs inviting involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school.

These studies focus on barriers to involvement or greater involvement. These studies have the underlying implication that the parent involvement of Latino parents is somehow lacking or needs to be increased. Although the literature referencing the barriers to parent involvement or greater parent involvement is quite extensive, there remains a gap in the literature specifically in reference to the way that parent involvement is framed by the research community. Using the term barriers as part of the discourse presupposes that certain parents are not involved or are involved, but to a lesser degree or quality than an arbitrary standard for parent involvement. That standard, which has yet to be clearly defined, is most likely based on a White, middle-class notion of what parent involvement behaviors should consist. Phrases like lack of skills, lack of education, and lack of English proficiency saturate the literature. In *Language of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire tells us that language is never neutral. Although many of these researchers have sought to give a voice to an often silent minority, they have framed minority parents as somehow deficient, unable to meet the arbitrary expectation of parent involvement.

Because of the disadvantages that have been historically experienced by Mexican immigrants in the United States, culturally specific research needs to be framed in the larger context of minority status and socioeconomic status. Specific, culturally relevant research, however, is needed to further the parental involvement construct as it applies to different groups. Further, the mainstream parent involvement constructs that call for parents to support learning activities sponsored by the school do not take into account the role that a parent's level of education may play in their engagement in parent involvement activities. More micro level research is needed to understand parent involvement constructs for diverse parents.

#### **Mexican American Parents' Understanding of Parent Involvement**

Keith and Lichtman investigated the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement of 1,714 Mexican- American eighth-grade students using the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS 88) data. They found that that parental involvement, which was described as "discussing school activities with their children and . . . [having] . . . high educational aspirations for their children" did positively influence academic achievement (Keith and Lichtman, 1992, p. 7). They argue that parental expectations for their children's educational achievement have a significant effect on achievement (Keith and Lichtman, 1998). This is an especially important factor for minority families who may lack the resources to be involved in their children's schooling in other ways (Gottlob, 2009). This study lacks depth in that it provides no details as to the specific content and context of discussions about school and aspirations that Mexican immigrant parents engage in with their middle school children. Further, this study does not imply a causal relationship.

In controlling for demographic characteristics and socioeconomic status, Crosnoe, on the other hand, found that Mexican immigrant parents were less likely to engage in “learning activities” at home than parents from other populations. In fact, Mexican immigrant families were the outliers in this study (Crosnoe, 2006). Educational attainment is the primary factor in whether parents structure learning activities for their children, and Mexican-immigrant parents are generally less educated than other parents (Crosnoe, 2006). Crosnoe found that rates of parental involvement were more closely related to ethnicity than to socioeconomic status. However, what constitutes a “learning activity” is not clear and may be based in a priori assumptions and biases of the researcher. The study does not consider the funds of knowledge that may exist in many of these households (Moll & Diaz, 1987). Results like these lack specific definitions on critical factors that leave the reader to make too many assumptions.

When controlling for socioeconomic status, Crosnoe found that Latino parents had lower levels of parental involvement than Caucasian, African American, and Asian-American counterparts (Crosnoe, 2006). Further, what constitutes involvement is often based on assumptions of what school policy and school personnel consider to be acceptable demonstrations of involvement.

Galarza-Hernandez (1996) conducted a qualitative case study that sought to gain a better understanding of Mexican American parental involvement from the perspective of the parents. Participants viewed parental involvement as very important. They reported that they participated in their children’s education by attending parent teacher conferences, helping children with their homework, and by providing emotional support. Valdes (1996) points out that what is often interpreted by educators as a lack of interest in

their children's education is a misinterpretation. She found that some of the specific parental involvement behaviors that school personnel and mainstream families value were foreign to Mexican parents. Their parental involvement was limited to ceremonial occasions at which there was little time to talk with teachers about their children's progress. These parents reported that they made appearances at school to please their children and that they felt that in attending they had done their duty.

Generally the school's PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) or PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) is the accepted structure for parent-school communication. It is the official structure through which parents can influence the culture and organization of schools (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). In certain qualitative studies researchers have found that Latino and Mexican American parents knew little about PTA, about volunteering to work at the school, or about other ways in which they might become "involved" in their children's education (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdes, 1996). These types of involvement have been found to be less important to these parents than other types of involvement. When parents interacted with the school personnel, they did so only on those occasions in which they felt that their children needed intervention or when they had been asked to come to the school by the teacher.

Too often, however, Mexican American families are characterized negatively by the differences they evince with mainstream U.S. culture. What is not recognized are the noneconomic resources or funds of knowledge enjoyed by their children, such as the strong intergenerational networks that undergird their lives and protect them, as well as the special strengths of their parents that allowed them to make the immigrant journey in the first place (Crosnoe, 2006; Moll & Amanti, 1992 Valdes, 1996).

Both Valdes and Liska-Carger report that the term *educación* (education) has a much more comprehensive definition that is not directly translatable from English to Spanish and that it connotes a different meaning than it does in English. “In Spanish, the phrase connotes a wider sense of rearing well-bred, mannerly, clean, educated, respectful, responsible, articulate, loved, and loving children rather than solely academically well-prepared ones” (Liska-Carger, 1996, p. 143). A parent’s desire for their child to be *bien educado* (well-educated) is a composite of academic, social, cultural, and religious aspirations (Goldenberg, 2004; Liska-Carger, 1996).

Quantitative researchers have found that certain behaviors, like having high educational aspirations for their children, have a positive and significant effect on student achievement, while qualitative researchers have found that Mexican American parents with low levels of education often do not have high aspirations for their children. Findings of this present study differ from these qualitative researchers, indicating that more study is needed in this area before conclusions can be drawn. Further, researchers have found that Mexican American parents are less likely to engage in learning activities in the home and that these activities are often linked to their own level of education. A clear definition of the term “learning activities” is needed. More micro level research is needed to understand parent involvement constructs for Mexican immigrant parents.

### **Conclusion**

Although there is widespread agreement on the efficacy of parental involvement as a means to raise student achievement, the term parental involvement refers to multiple behaviors and attitudes. Generally, school personnel and school policy favor a mainstream middle-class cultural perspective, while largely ignoring the cultural

perspective of the minority families whom they serve. While there is a well-established line of scholarly work that explores family-home-school collaborations, there is also a growing body of literature that examines representations of families in schools (Miller-Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2009). “A text that critically examines representations of families and applies that information to forging stronger, more successful relationships among families and educators has yet to be made available” Miller-Marsh & Turner-Vorbeck, 2009, p. 1). Crosnoe, a quantitative researcher, in discussing the value of the different research designs says that “qualitative, community-based methods allow for the careful elucidation of specific mechanisms of inequality and the rich understanding of particular groups within contexts,” (Crosnoe, 2006, p. 4).

Findings revealed within the qualitative paradigm are amenable to a variety of analytic approaches and to consideration from multiple theoretical perspectives. On the other hand, the controlled structure of quantitative research historically yielded a limited view of its subjects, due to the contrived nature of the research setting, with predetermined variables that have yielded a predominance of findings highlighting the deficiencies of those at risk (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Azul, 1997, p. 177).

Carvalho suggests that an alternate view of the ideal family-school partnership might pose the school mission in terms of embracing cultural diversity and, thus, learning from families, in which case the formula would be teacher involvement with families rather than parent involvement with schools (Carvalho, 2001). Moll and Diaz state that

“ongoing ethnography to inform teaching” could be an invaluable tool in teaching rather than something reserved for anthropologists and researchers, (Moll & Diaz, 1987, p. 311)

Mexican-born students have experienced a long history of educational problems, including below-grade enrollment, high attrition rates, high rates of illiteracy, and underrepresentation in higher education (Valdes, 1996). Valdes argues that while a number of factors have been identified that influence the school achievement of Mexican-born children, including school financing, school composition, teacher-student interaction, family income, language background, and family characteristics, a coherent theory that takes into account the many factors that impact the poor school achievement of Mexican-origin children has not been proposed (Valdes, 1996). She says that not only is there a lack of coherent theory about macro-level factors that can adequately explain the failure and success of these children in American schools, but there is also a lack of coherence among theories at the micro-level (Valdes, 1996). Few studies of family-school interactions have focused on class and cultural mismatch, referring to the differences between values and ways of learning promoted at home and those promoted at school (Carvalho, 2001). This present study will add to the growing base of literature that focuses on the class and cultural mismatch between U.S. public schools and many of the diverse families that they serve. While empirical studies have been conducted that examine the parental involvement of Mexican parents in American public schools, many studies have relied on quantitative research, specifically survey research. The nature of survey research as a methodology is that it is limited in both the depth and breath of information that it is able to provide. Further, survey research is based on prior assumptions of the researcher that may not match the beliefs of the participants. A

qualitative research approach, on the other hand, attempts to understand phenomena from the participants' perspective. Such study can enrich or provide critique for current theories and findings involving minority parental involvement. This study, therefore, will provide an opportunity to explore low-income Mexican immigrant parents' constructions of parental involvement that may improve professional understanding and subsequently help design more effective programs of parental involvement in schools. This study will serve to inform family involvement policy decisions and administrative practice, specifically in schools with a Mexican immigrant population.



## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

The purposes of this study were to (a) investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents of parental involvement and the family-school connection, (b) identify the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement, and (c) identify the ways that Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education. I used a qualitative design for this study in an attempt to understand Mexican-born parents' experiences in their children's middle-school education and perspectives on parental involvement in school. Specifically, I interviewed Mexican-born parents of middle school students to find out their conceptualization of parental involvement in their children's education, barriers to family involvement, and how these families support their children's education. The results of this study provide a better understanding of parental involvement in their children's education from the perspective of these parents and, in turn, can be used as a foundation to improve family-school communication. The results may also lead to the development of a comprehensive theory of Mexican American parent involvement that may be theoretically transferrable to other Latino immigrant populations and language minority populations.

#### **Design**

I chose a qualitative design because it was useful in attempting to understand parent involvement from the point of view of a low-income Mexican immigrant parent. A qualitative design allows a researcher to explore and understand a situation in depth. I attempted to uncover the ways that these parents understand and support their children's

education that might not readily be recognized by the extant literature or by school personnel. Further, I wanted to understand the barriers that may affect greater levels of involvement of these participants from their own perspective.

I asked low income Mexican-immigrant parents of middle school students about their family involvement experiences, their expectations of what family involvement comprises, and the influences on their parent involvement choices. Further, I asked them about the ways that they support their children's education. In the discussions, I attempted to engage the participants in conversations about their understanding of parental involvement and the family school connection and of school support, the influences on their parent involvement choices, and their own support of their children's education. In order to accomplish this, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with either the mother or the father or both the mother and father. The participants were low-income Mexican-immigrant parents of students who had just completed the sixth or the seventh grade in one public middle school. The semi-structured interviews with each parent allowed the participants to express their ideas about family involvement in their own words.

Bogden and Biklen state that qualitative researchers are concerned with understanding behavior from the subjects' own frame of reference (Bogden & Biklen, 1982). A qualitative design is appropriate for this research since I am attempting to understand a situation in great depth (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). A qualitative design enables the researchers to "gain greater insight into a research topic by concurrently studying multiple cases in one overall research study" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Although empirical studies have been conducted that examine the parental involvement of Mexican parents in American public schools, many studies have relied on quantitative research, specifically survey research. The nature of survey research as a methodology is that it is limited in both the depth and breath of information that it is able to provide. Further, survey research is based on prior assumptions of the researcher that may not match the beliefs of the participants. A qualitative research approach, on the other hand, attempts to understand phenomena from the participants' perspective. Such study can enrich as well as provide critique for current theories and findings involving minority parental involvement.

I used the following research questions to guide this study:

1. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education?
2. What are the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement?
3. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents understand parent involvement and the family school connection?

### **Site**

To maintain the anonymous identification of the subject district and the middle school, I gave the municipality, the district, and the middle school pseudonyms for identification. They shall be known in this study as the City of Midland, Midland Public Schools (MPS) and Midland Middle School (MMS) respectively. The City of Midland is a small, but densely populated city with a population estimated at 46,858 according to the U.S. Census Bureau's 2008 American Community Survey. This survey estimates that

23,217 of the city's residents, 49.5%, are Hispanic. The municipality has a large population of Mexican immigrants. In particular, the largest Hispanic group in this city is of Mexican origin with 11,336 reported (US Census Bureau, 2011). Roughly 24% of the city's population is of Mexican origin and comprises 49% of the city's Hispanic population. The City of Midland is representative of many urban centers in the state of New Jersey as well as around the nation in terms of economic and demographic characteristics. The concentration of Hispanic residents, specifically Mexican Americans is typical of New Jersey's urban centers. The latest figures from the U.S. Census Bureau, in fact, indicate that there are twenty New Jersey cities where the Hispanic population is greater than 42% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

The public school district serves a population of approximately 8,000 students. Midland Middle School accommodates over 1,600 students. The ethnic makeup of the school is 86% Hispanic, 13% African American and 1% described as other. I chose this particular district to conduct this study because of the concentration of Mexican Americans living in this city. Moreover, I chose this school because of the large number of students considered "at risk" due to factors including partial proficiency on an assessment of skills and literacy and their socioeconomic status (SES) based on inclusion in the National School Lunch Program.

Grades 6 through 8 have been recognized in both psychological and education literature as a transition stage in a child's life. Further, there is a great deal of available research that has studied parental involvement in the elementary grades, specifically early elementary grades. Some extant research suggests that the level of parental involvement in their children's education in middle school is much less than the level of involvement

in elementary grades (Goldenberg, 2004). There is a lack, however, in the extant body of literature that deals with this important transition in education.

### **Sampling**

Because I wanted to understand how low-income Mexican immigrant parents understand parental involvement in their children's education in middle school, I interviewed the Mexican-immigrant parents of sixth, seventh and eighth grade middle school children. I asked these parents about their parent involvement experiences, their expectations of what parent involvement comprises, what they believe are influences on involvement choices in their children's education, and the ways that they support their children's education. I conducted these interviews during the summer after the completion of at least one of their children's sixth, seventh, or eighth grade school year.

I used purposeful sampling in the selection of candidates. I considered eligible parents who met the following criteria:

1. Have one or more children attending Midland Middle School
2. Were born in Mexico
3. Speak Spanish as a first language and English as a second language.

Although there are many influences within families and many definitions of what comprises a family, I have specifically chosen to study primary caregivers and not include other family members. I chose to include Mexican-born parents who comprise either two-parent or single-parent households. Primary caregivers who were not the biological parent, such as grandparents or extended family members, were not specifically excluded in the selection process; however, it has been my experience in working with this population that the Mexican American children in this district tend to live with at least one parent. In fact, since the parents are immigrants themselves,

grandparents or extended families are not always present in the United States. Some studies have been done that focus only on mothers; however, I feel that focusing on mothers only would have excluded the important influence of fathers on these children from this study. In purposeful sampling, I attempted to include various examples of typical households. As it turned out, all of the participants were the biological parents of their sixth or seventh grade child. All of the participants were married with the exception of one single mother. No parents were non-custodial parents, not living with their children.

### **Recruitment**

The City of Midland has a youth services system that is run by the city, separate from the board of education. Its purpose is to run an after-school homework help program that takes place immediately after school in Midland Public School's nine elementary schools. Additionally, they run a city-wide safe play summer camp program at various city parks during the summer. Both programs are voluntary, free of charge, and open to all children residing in the city between the ages of six and fourteen.

After obtaining permission from the superintendent of schools and the approval of the Institutional Review Board of Seton Hall University, I contacted the principal of the middle school and the director of the city's youth services system program to inform them of my study and to obtain permission to recruit in person, at one of the elementary school sites. In order to eliminate any possibility of coercion, I had a proxy, who was not affiliated with the Midland Public Schools, conduct preliminary screenings of potential participants. The proxy, who is bilingual in Spanish and English, was trained and

received certification from the National Institutes of Health for tests on Human Subjects and was included in the application review and approval from the Institutional Review Board at Seton Hall University.

Both the after-school program and the summer camp require parents to sign out their children when they are picked up. I was able to obtain permission to have my proxy seated at the sign-out table at the after-school program and at one of the summer camp locations. My proxy was able to provide me with a list of 15 candidates. She provided them with a solicitation letter, to take with them, that explained the purpose of the study and my interest in setting up an interview. I contacted 13 candidate families by phone. I contacted each candidate no more than two times to set up an appointment. If I did not receive a returned phone call after a second attempt, I considered the candidate no longer interested in being a participant and I moved on to another candidate. I was unable to set up an appointment with three of the 13 candidate families.

### **Data Collection**

I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 13 participants from 10 families. In all cases, the participants were the biological parents of their sixth or seventh grade middle school child. In two cases I interviewed both spouses together. In seven of the cases, I interviewed a mother or a father unaccompanied by a spouse. One participant was a single mother. When a mother or a father was interviewed separately, it was for no other reason than scheduling. Often working mothers and fathers have different work schedules. I attempted to schedule mutually agreeable times when both spouses could be

present; however, when candidates were willing and able to participate, I chose not to pursue other scheduling options so as not to pressure them or inconvenience them.

According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), a semi-structured interview is "scheduled in advance at a designated time and location outside of everyday events" (p. 315). Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon time and place. I chose a place off school premises to conduct the interviews so that the participants would feel comfortable discussing issues related to their children's school. I did not want to use any of the Midland Public School buildings to conduct the interviews. I felt that by conducting the interviews in a school building, the participants would see me more as a district employee rather than a graduate school researcher. I made arrangements with the public library to reserve the public meeting room for the interviews. I conducted the first three interviews in the public meeting room. As it turned out, it was much more convenient for the participants for me to meet them at their homes, most often in the evenings. I therefore began offering this option to all of the candidates. Meeting in their homes became the preferred option for the candidates. This option eliminated the need for transportation and child care. It allowed for both parents to be present, if they were available. In most cases, some of the children were present as well.

I identified myself as a teacher in the district at one of the elementary schools; however, I emphasized that I was a graduate student at Seton Hall University as well and that the purpose of the interview was to gather information for my study. Since I conducted most of the interviews in the summer when I was not commuting to or from my teaching position, I would arrive at the participants homes dressed in a t-shirt, shorts, and sneakers carrying just my digital recorder and a pocket folder that contained a lined



pad for notes, the informed consent and the consent to be audio taped, and the typed interview questions in both English and Spanish. I feel that an informal style of dress, along with conducting the interviews in the participants' homes, allowed for a more relaxed conversational atmosphere than having the participants meet me in a public school building where I was dressed in a dress shirt and tie. As a result, I feel that the participants seemed relaxed. None of the participants refused audio taping.

While I am not Hispanic, I do speak Spanish conversationally. Prior to beginning each interview, I explained to the participants that I understand Spanish and that I am able to conduct a conversation in Spanish. I demonstrated my level of proficiency to them by proceeding to speak to them in Spanish. I provided a copy of the interview questions in both Spanish and English. While this may not be the norm in a semi-structured interview, I explained to the participants that my questions had been professionally translated into Spanish and that I would refer them to a particular question if for some reason we had a misunderstanding about the questions. (See complete list of questions in English in Appendix G and a complete list of questions that were certified as professionally translated into Spanish in Appendix H) Some examples of these questions include: How do you support your children's achievement in school? Describe for me what you do. *¿Cómo apoya usted los logros de sus hijos en la escuela? Describame lo que usted hace.* Describe how the school encourages you to become involved in activities at school. *Describe como lo alienta la escuela para que se involucre en las actividades que se llevan a cabo en ella.* I also explained that I would not be asking the questions one by one on the list and that some of my questions would not even be included in the list of questions, that our discussion would be more like a conversation. I

explained to the participants that they could speak to me however they preferred, either in Spanish or English. I explained further that speaking in Spanish might allow them to explain things in more detail and that I was looking for as much detail as possible. The interviews were conducted in English with the participants resorting to code switching when needed. Any responses that were given in Spanish were translated into English. I noted on each transcript whether the participant was speaking in English or Spanish and when any code switching took place. I also made note of the participants' tone of voice. If a particular phrase was used in Spanish that is not directly translatable into English, both the Spanish and the closest translation were included side by side.

The timing for the individual, semi-structured interview is usually between 30 minutes and several hours (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). The interviews in this study were, on average, 40 minutes long. I made every effort to accommodate each participant and ensure that he or she was comfortable during the interview. The information gained from the interview is important to me; however, it might also be beneficial to participants in that it would provide an opportunity for the participant to tell his or her story and make sense of it (Murray, 2003). In this case, the interviews provided the participants an opportunity to discuss their parental involvement conceptions. I developed the interview questions from the research questions and created open-ended questions that I felt provided an opportunity for participants to discuss their experiences and conceptions. I developed some of the interview questions directly from the literature that I had reviewed for this study.

I asked the participants about their family involvement experiences, their expectations of what family involvement comprises, and the influences on their

involvement in their children's education. The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview format. This format features a prescribed set of questions using an interview protocol that also provides opportunities for other questions to emerge from the dialogue of the interview (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The semi-structured interview can be done either with focus groups or individuals. I had originally proposed conducting small focus groups; however, the participants were more comfortable with participating in individual interviews including either one spouse or both spouses. The interviews allowed the participants to express their ideas about parent involvement and their experiences with parental involvement in their own words, if possible, along with their spouse as a shared experience. The semi-structured interviews allowed me the means to investigate the understanding of these low-income immigrant parents about their parent involvement experiences, their expectations of what parent involvement comprises, and the barriers to greater involvement in their children's education. I engaged the participants in discussions about their cultural values, their own support of their children's education, support from the school, and the existing influences on family involvement.

### **Data Analysis**

Each of the participants agreed to be audio-taped. I interviewed individual parent participants and spouses together in semi-structured interviews. I transcribed each of the interviews verbatim. Any participants' responses that were given in Spanish during the interviews were transcribed into Spanish, and then translated into English. I also included some observer comments in the transcripts to provide some context which included tone of voice, code switching between English and Spanish, idiosyncrasies

present in their responses, and other observations that I made during the interview. Immediately after each interview, I recorded field notes to include the observations that were not present on the interview transcript. The conversations with the participants before the interviews were generally about the interview itself, the purpose of the study, and their role as a participant. After I had signaled the end of each interview and terminated recording, the conversation generally continued. I recorded these observations in field notes using thick description.

Miles & Huberman (1994) and Goetz & LeCompte (1985) recommend constant contact with the data by reading and rereading transcripts, field notes, and observations (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Miles and Huberman, 1994). I read the transcriptions and notes from the interviews and identified specific categories and themes present in the participants' responses. I analyzed the data collected during the interviews by using a thematic-analysis approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Strauss and Corbin (1990) call this step "open-coding." "In open coding, analysts immerse themselves in the data through line-by-line analysis, coding the data in as many ways as possible and writing memos about the conceptual and theoretical ideas that emerge during the course of analysis" (p. 61). Glazer, in fact, believes that if the researcher follows this simple but rigorous process, the analysis itself "carries with it verification, correction, and saturation" (Glaser, 1992, p. 60). I used analytic memos where I analyzed my field notes and began the process of the development of themes and codes.

I began to analyze the data that I had collected after the second interview. I then continued to code the data after each subsequent interview. Miles and Huberman (1994) state that this "Gets the researcher into analysis during data collection, so that later field

work can be more focused” (p. 158). I allowed the participants’ responses to guide the creation of the categories. I created categories out of the information that I saw as salient to the conceptualization of parental involvement in this child's education by the participant. Even though the participants had a variety of responses and some of the categories did not apply to all of the participants, many of the responses revealed similarities. I used this procedure for each of the research questions. I developed the research questions from the literature that I had reviewed, and from the research questions I developed interview questions to ask the participants. I found several overlaps in the participants’ responses to the interview questions. Therefore, when I performed the analysis, I looked at the notes and matched the interview responses back to the research questions, as was appropriate.

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), “Analyzing text involves several tasks: (1) discovering themes and subthemes, (2) winnowing themes to a manageable few (i.e., deciding which themes are important in any project), (3) building hierarchies of themes or codes books, and (4) linking themes into theoretical models” (p. 89). Ryan and Bernard state that in theme discovery, more is better. They suggest applying several techniques to theme discovery. They further suggest that looking for repetitions, similarities and differences, and transitions and linguistic connectors are likely to produce more themes than more complex methods of theme discovery (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). According to Ryan and Bernard (2003) themes or categories are the classification of more discrete concepts. “This classification is discovered when concepts are compared one against another and appear to pertain to similar phenomena” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p. 61).

Before I started coding, I developed a start list (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This list should come from the “conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas, or key variables that the researcher brings to the study” (p. 58).

The following is an example of a few of the items on my start list.

- Barriers
- Language
- Support
- Homework Help
- Communication
- Participants’ Understanding of Parent Involvement

I first organized the codes into primary codes. These codes were then broken down into smaller subcodes. Then using a thematic analysis approach, I generated codes as they emerged from the participants’ responses. I began to construct a code book with a set of criteria for each code. The criteria included a label, a definition, a general description, criteria for inclusion and exclusion from the code. Appendix J is an example from the code book that illustrates the criteria used in the development of the three primary codes along with the subcodes of one of larger themes that developed into one of the major findings of this study.

I coded the data from the transcripts into emergent categories. I used thematic pattern-coding to code themes, as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation...in which the researcher needs to reduce and channel data into a small number of concepts” (p. 58). I then used the process of inductive analysis,

which enabled me to discover patterns, themes, and categories in the data to reflect the understandings expressed by the participants (Patton, 2002 as quoted by Marshall & Rossman, 2004).

While many categories of data emerged from the participants' responses, I derived three major themes from analysis of the data. I present the data, therefore, according to these three emergent themes: (1) the participants' support of their children's education, (2) participants' understanding of parent involvement, and (3) the structural barriers to and subtle influences on parent involvement. I looked back at the purposes of this study along with my research questions. Then I began to categorize the initial findings according to each of my three research questions. I then went back over the data without constraint of the categories to look for additional emergent themes. While there is quite a bit of overlap among these themes and these themes cut across the research questions, the data generally emerged along themes that relate directly back to my purposes for this study and subsequently my research questions. I present each theme and proceed to give a detailed analysis and explanation of the data that resulted from my research. I include examples from the data that support my findings and I include some description of the participants to further illustrate my findings.

I used single case analysis in which I treated each participating family as a case. I summarized the individual participant family experiences and understandings using a Within Case Display, creating narrative memos regarding each participant (Miles and Huberman, 1994). After I developed a clear understanding of each participant's conceptualization of parent involvement, I continued to analyze the data using cross-case analysis. The purpose of the cross-case analysis was to assemble a sound sequence of

evidence and “to construct a theoretically and conceptually coherent theory by checking for rival explanations and looking for negative evidence” (Maxwell, 2004, p. 153).

I looked back again at the codes that I had developed and at the raw data as well. I began to construct a conceptual framework that illustrated the dominant themes. I developed descriptive narratives to begin to answer the research questions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

I discontinued new interviews when I began to hear repeated information and themes and when it seemed that I had reached what Strauss (1987) and Kruger and Casey (2000) call saturation, when I was unable to obtain new information using the interview protocol. Saturation in my data analysis seemed to occur at approximately 10 participating families.

The use of thematic analysis involves three distinct stages: Stage I, deciding on sampling and design issues; Stage II, developing themes and a code; and Stage III, validating and using the code. Within Stage II, there are primarily three approaches to developing themes and codes systematically: (a) theory driven, (b) prior data and prior research driven, (c) inductive (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 29). The purposes of this study allowed me to use the prior data and prior research-driven approach to data analysis as well as inductive analysis. Two purposes of this study were based greatly on the prior-research approach: (a) to investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents about parental involvement and the family-school connection and (b) to investigate the influences on these parents’ further involvement. My research questions and subsequently many of my interview questions were constructed based on findings in the extant literature. (See Appendix G for Semi-structured Interview



Questions for Participants in English) “A review of the literature, typical of the research process, provides insight into the possible development of a thematic code” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 37). Several codes were derived from findings that resulted from these specific interview questions. I included several questions that were designed to explore some of the extant theories of parental involvement with this specific population. In my analysis, I compared and contrasted my findings with this specific sample of participants and with the findings of literature that included similar populations as well as dissimilar populations.

In investigating the ways that these parents support their children’s education, I relied heavily on my raw data to inductively construct codes. I was seeking to explore parent involvement behaviors and perceptions of a population of participants that are generally not found in much of the extant literature. By working directly from the raw data, I found that some codes revealed themselves in ways that have not been presented in the extant literature. I found additional ways that the participants support their children’s education that is not present in the extant literature. Further, I found that the barriers to greater involvement in their children’s education are different for these participants than has been discussed by other researchers. “Previously silenced voices or perspectives inherent in the information can be brought forward and recognized (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30). I therefore used an inductive approach to analyzing these data.

I will illustrate my methods of data analysis by giving examples of codes and coding techniques. One of my findings that I find most interesting that it is not presented in the extant literature is the subtle influence of the participants’ confidence with their proficiency in English as well as their confidence in to their level of education. Some of

the structural barriers such as indifference and hostility on the part of school personnel that have been found to affect similar participants in earlier studies do not seem to be as apparent at this site. I was, therefore, able to uncover another layer of more subtle influences related to the participants' confidence with their level of education and their proficiency in communication in English that has not been presented in the extant literature. This may be due to several factors, including their location in the Northeast of the United States or the duration of time living in this country. These findings may be related to the specificity with which the sample of participants was purposefully selected. My interpretation of these findings will be presented in Chapter IV in detail.

I will illustrate my method of analysis of the raw data and my techniques for coding this data as an example. For example, I want to understand the participants' perception of their ability to communicate in English with school personnel. In my analysis, I established degree of confidence as a dependent variable (Boyatzis, 1998). For data-driven inductive code development, I identified participants with relatively high confidence and those with relatively low confidence. This became the criterion reference and source of subsamples for the code development. I found that for some participants their confidence with their proficiency in English was referenced more often. For other participants, I found that their confidence with their level of education was referenced less often. I separated the code confidence into two smaller sub codes with different definitions. I then identified participants with relatively high confidence and relatively low confidence in both English proficiency and level of education, respectively. This became the criterion reference for both codes from which I drew samples from the raw data. "Once the researcher has the anchored, or criterion referenced, material, he or she

uses a compare-and-contrast process to extract observable differences between or among the samples” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 42).

Finally, I developed narrative passages to describe the findings of the study. Miles and Huberman (1994) tell us that qualitative research manages words, language, and the meanings these imply. This procedure helps to “reconstruct the participants’ realities and portray the multiple viewpoints existing in the case” (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 409).

### **Researcher Role**

I am employed as a fifth-grade teacher in the Midland Public Schools. At the same time, I have been attending a graduate program in education. In my studies, I have always drawn from my teaching experience in the interpretation and critique of the education research. In doing so, I found that the Mexican American families that I serve do not quite fit into the traditional model of parental involvement found in the literature. In fact, this group is largely ignored by the mainstream education research. I came to find that this disconnect between my experience and the education research makes up part of the gap in the extant literature on this topic.

I have access to and familiarity with this population in this district; however, I have no affiliation with this particular site that would present any conflicts of interest or biases in the study. In an attempt to eliminate threats to the validity of the study, I purposefully selected participants who were representative of the population to be studied. I assured the participants’ confidentiality. The fact that I am employed by the district did not influence the participants in any way. First, I do not serve in a supervisory capacity in the district. Further, to eliminate further threats to the validity of

the study, I chose the site specifically because I teach in another school and I have no affiliation with the population at this site.

Because the study site is similar in demographic characteristics to nineteen other urban centers in the state of New Jersey, I believe that the site will be representative of similar sites in similar municipalities, allowing for some comparability. Further, purposefully sampling participants so that the sample is representative of a greater population provides an additional level of reliability (Geotz, & LeCompte, 1984).

### **Limitations**

There are some limitations to the design of this study. The participant sample for this study was small. I included only thirteen participants from ten participating families. The small sample size may limit the ability to generalize the findings of this study to similar populations or other populations with similar characteristics.

All of the participants in the study speak Spanish as a first language and English as a second language. I conducted the interviews in English, which is not the native language of the participants. Speaking in a second language may have limited the participants' ability to express their ideas in a manner that communicates the full range of meaning and nuance that each participant intended.

### **Delimitations**

Since the only participants in the study are the students' parents at this particular site, this study tells one side of the story. I did not attempt to tell the school's side of the story. I did, however, speak less formally with faculty members, including a guidance counselor, and the school's principal. To verify and triangulate data, I attended some of

Midland Middle School's parent activities, including back to school night, a PTO meeting, and two middle school parent orientation presentations. In addition, I spoke with school personnel about their parent involvement offerings and the attendance at these venues. I did not, however, develop a separate question protocol for semi-structured interviews, nor did I conduct any formal interviews with the middle school's faculty or administration in an attempt to understand a different perspective. I believe that doing so would have taken me beyond the scope of my research questions. Further, I feel that there is substantial literature that tells the story from the point of view of the educator, and much of that literature is grounded in the deficit theory paradigm.

This study does not include observation of these families in their natural settings beyond the home visit at the time of the interview. I rely solely on the first person accounts provided by the participants in the interviews along with the observations that I made before, during, and after the interview. The purpose of a larger, ethnographic study might require more in-depth, natural observation. In-depth observation is not warranted to meet the purpose of this study, and it is not necessarily the best method to answer my specific research questions.

### **Summary of Participants' Backgrounds**

Figure 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of seven of the ten families that I purposefully selected to represent in the narrative chapter of this study. All of these participant parents and any of the middle school children whom I mention by name are identified with first name pseudonyms. The participant characteristics are based on information that was provided to me by the participants in the interviews.

### Participants' Demographic Characteristics

Pseudonym	Number of Children in MMS	Number of Children	Years in the US	Grade Finished	Birthplace
Lucas and Maria	3	8	16	6	Puebla, Mexico
Marisol	2	3	20	6	Puebla, Mexico
Evelyn	1	2	20	12	Veracruz, Mexico
Juan and Sophia	1	3	33	8	Puebla, Mexico
Luis and Gethemene	1	6	20	6	Puebla, Mexico
Lidia	1	1	20	8	Puebla, Mexico
Miguel	1	3	16	5	Oaxaca, Mexico

*Figure 1.* Participants Demographic Characteristics

All of the participants were born in Mexico. With the exception of two of the participants, all of the participants were born in the state of Puebla in Mexico. One participant reported coming from the state of Veracruz and another participant reported coming from Oaxaca. The state of Puebla, the state of Oaxaca, and the state of Veracruz are located adjacent to each other in Southern Mexico. Figure 2 represents the state map of Mexico.

### Map of the States of Mexico



*Figure 2.* Map of the States of Mexico

All of the participants reported coming from small towns. Their time here in the United States ranges from sixteen to thirty-three years. None of the participants, therefore, would be described as recent immigrants. All of the participants self-reported as growing up “poor.” Additionally, some of the participants describe their current economic situation as being “poor.” To verify this information, I asked participants whether their children receive free or reduced lunch and breakfast at school. All of the participants said that their children received either free or reduced lunch and breakfast at school. In order to verify this data, I would need to get the student identification numbers for each of the participants’ children and then cross check with student records at

Midland Middle School. Since student and family income data are not public information that can be shared, I was not given permission to cross-check this data. I therefore, rely on the information provided to me by the participants. Midland Public Schools reports student data to the State of New Jersey and the federal government for a variety of reasons. The federal government determines students to be “impoverished” when they receive free or reduced lunch at school from the National School Lunch Program. The term *impoverished* is defined by the federal government as having a family income below the federal poverty guidelines based on the number of family members (USDA, 2011).

None of the participants has ever attended college. Only one parent reported completing high school in Mexico. She also reported recently completing a GED here in the United States. Two of the parents reported completing eighth grade, one parent reported completing fifth grade, and the remainder of the parents reported completing the sixth grade. Sixth grade is critical, because it is the end of compulsory education in Mexico. The end of sixth grade marks the end of *elementaria* or elementary school. It is, in most non-urban areas in Mexico, the end of free public school. After sixth grade, students in Mexico have the option to continue on to *secundaria*, roughly the equivalent to middle school, which comprises seventh grade through ninth grade. Generally, *secundaria* requires tuition. Finally, the tenth through twelfth grades are called *preparatoria* or *bachillerato*. This level of education is meant for college preparation.

### **The Participants**

**Lidia** came to the United States from Mexico by herself 19 years ago. She is the one single mother that I interviewed. As we were discussing background information, she reported that she had never been married to her son's father. She has one son who was



just completing the sixth grade at the time of our interview. She describes herself as a hard-working, dedicated parent. As an only child, she describes her son Justin as her whole world. She's the one parent who is aware of the PTO and tries to attend meetings regularly. She's not somebody who would be reluctant to enter the school and discuss matters on her own or her son's behalf. She even referred to herself as being "a pain in the butt." She's very concerned about her son's performance in school; therefore, she's very much concerned with the completion of homework. She in fact brought up the topic of homework before it was even asked. She describes most of her interactions with the school personnel as positive; however, she was not afraid to detail a negative experience with one particular teacher.

**Marisol** is a married mother of three. She preferred to meet me at the public library one day near the end of the school year. Since her husband works long hours, he was not available to be interviewed. She has three children. One daughter has graduated from high school. She has one son who was just about to graduate from eighth grade and one daughter who was just about to complete the sixth grade. Both children attend Midland Middle School. She came from a small town in the state of Puebla before moving to the United States over 20 years ago. She came to the United States with her husband. Marisol works in a factory in town and her husband drives a truck. She expressed an understanding that she could come to the school when she needed to advocate on behalf of her children, but she was unaware of parent involvement activities like the school's PTO (Parent teacher Organization).

**Lucas and Maria** have eight children. They are both from a small town in the state of Puebla in Mexico. They knew each other in Mexico and dated before Lucas left

for the United States 16 years ago. After a few months, Lucas sent for Maria to come to the United States where they were married. At the time of the interview, the oldest three of the eight children attended Midland Middle School in eighth grade, seventh grade, and sixth grade, respectively. The family lives on the second floor of a two-family house within walking distance of the local elementary school and across town from Midland Middle School. Lucas and Maria described themselves as poor.

As soon as I contacted Lucas, he seemed eager to want to participate and made himself and his family available immediately. Theirs was the first interview that I conducted in a participant's home. It was because of the relaxed manner in which we were able to conduct the interview, along with the ability to see the family in their home, that I decided that offering to conduct the interviews in the participants' home would be a viable option. This interview set the stage for the interviews that followed.

**Evelyn** is the one participant who came from the state of Veracruz 21 years ago. She is self-described as someone who is probably different from the rest of the participants in the study because of the difference in the region from which she comes. Most of the people that are Mexican immigrants in the city of Midland come from the state of Puebla. She described the people from Veracruz as being very different. In her words, the people from Veracruz are "Crazy like me and very verbal, and they speak a lot, and they're willing to speak their mind." She described the people of Puebla, however, as people who will not want to speak their mind. She used the term *conformista* or conformist. She would not describe herself as conformist.

At the time of our interview, her son was completing the seventh grade. She also has a daughter who was completing the fifth grade. She is divorced and remarried to a

man who is not the biological father of either of these children, but she described him as just like their father. At the time of our interview, her husband was unavailable because he was at work.

She believes that she motivates her children and believes that is one of the most important things that a parent can do for the children. She says that her purpose is to have excellent children and speaks quite a bit about having respect for the teachers and other students. She emphasizes good behavior in school with her children. She believes that it is her role to “control what needs to be done in the house in whatever way” to make sure that her children get good grades and can be successful. While she is a very outgoing person who describes herself as somebody who is not afraid to speak, she presents a bit of contradiction. While she considers herself to be an outspoken person and is not afraid to speak in school, she also doesn't want to be a bother to the teachers and sees the home and the school as two completely separate domains. She believes that school decisions are not the domain of the parents but are to be made by the administration and the teachers together. She repeats on several occasions, “The teacher is the teacher.” She says that she never questions the teacher but that she questions her son. We discussed her hopes, dreams, and aspirations for her children. She really has a lot of expectations, hopes, and dreams for her children.

**Luis and Gethsemane** are also from small towns located in the state of Puebla. They met each other here in the United States where they were married. They live in a one-family house that they seem to share with several extended family members, as there were several adults in and out of the house at the time of the interview, which took place in the evening on a weeknight during the summer.

They have six children, two of whom attended middle school when it was part of the local pre-K through eighth grade elementary school and are now currently enrolled in vocational technical high school. They also have two younger children who are below the age of four and therefore are too young to attend school. They have one son who is currently attending the local elementary school. Finally, they have one son who had recently completed the seventh grade at Midland Middle School. They were able to provide some contrast between their experiences with the current Midland Middle School as a separate middle school and when the middle school students in the sixth through eighth grades were contained in the local elementary schools.

Gethsemane is a stay-at-home mother. Luis reports to work 12 to 14 hours per day in food services as both a dishwasher and a bus boy. His oldest son Nestor works part-time with Luis at the restaurant as a bus boy. He says that he would like to see a better life for his children. He hopes that his children will have opportunities that he never had. They would like to see their children do something professional; they indicated a doctor or maybe a teacher. Luis and Gethsemane express an understanding that education is the way to achieve that.

They described Elias, who was present during the interview, as having trouble in school for the first time since he began attending Midland Middle School. The parents even went on to describe Elias as angry, but they were unable to elaborate as to why.

**Juan and Sophia** both came from a small town in the state of Puebla as well. Juan, who reported to me that he is almost 50 years old, said that he came to the United States by himself when he was 17 years old. He was also the only participant who nonchalantly mentioned in the course of the conversation that he had been brought here

illegally when he came 33 years ago. Sophia, whose age I did not ascertain, seemed to be younger, and indicated that she came to the United States to live with her sister when she was 19 years old. They live in a second-floor apartment of a two-family house that was neatly furnished with a new couch and loveseat and a 32-inch flat screen TV in the living room. Juan has worked as a mechanic for many years. He speaks much more English than his wife Sophia, which he explains was due to working with American people. Sophia currently works part-time packing boxes at a factory. Sophia reported having gone to school only until the sixth grade. Juan, on the other hand, reported having completed the eighth grade.

**Miguel** also reported coming from a small town in Oaxaca, Mexico. He came to the United States 16 years ago, where he met and married his wife Maritza. He works in food services, usually twelve to fourteen hours per day. While I was able to meet his wife Maritza, she was on her way out in the late afternoon to work in a factory. I was able to witness the “changing of the guard,” as one parent goes off to work just at the time the other parent is home. Maritza does not work full time, but picks up a shift at the factory in the evening on Miguel’s day off. He has three sons. David was just beginning the eighth grade at Midland Middle School at the time of our interview. His other two sons are in elementary school. He was the one participant who reported to me that he left school in Mexico after the fifth grade. He wasn’t able to articulate his reasons for leaving, but he indicated how much he regretted the decision, a decision that was not influenced by his father. Miguel indicated that his level of education prevents him from becoming more involved in activities at school that may involve decision making on the part of the parents.

In the narrative presentation of the data in Chapter IV, I purposefully select specific parents' narratives as examples because they reflect the range of experiences and approaches reported by the participants about their conceptualization of parental involvement, their support of their children's education, and the influences on their parent involvement. In this narrative I tell stories of Miguel, Marisol, Evelyn, Lidia, Juan and Sophia, Luis and Gethsemane, and Lucas and Maria. These ten participants represent seven of the ten families that I interviewed for this study. I believe that they give a voice to the range of experiences of all the participants.

## Chapter IV

### RESULTS

#### **Mexican Immigrant Parents' Conceptualization of Parent Involvement**

The Riveras may not seem to be a typical American family. Lucas and his wife Maria are both from a small town in the state of Puebla in Mexico. They have eight children. The oldest three of their eight children were attending Midland Middle School at the time of this study. In many ways they are typical of the ten families that I interviewed and they are in some ways like many Mexican immigrant parents living in the United States who bring up their children and send them to public schools in urban centers across the United States. Such families may not fit the assumptions that are imbedded in the parent-involvement policy discourse. These families, however, are American families who care deeply about supporting their children's education in American schools.

When I first met the Riveras, they lived in a second floor apartment in a two-family house within walking distance of the local elementary school their younger children attend. Across town from Midland Middle School, we all crowded into a small room that was set up as a makeshift dining room. The room was also furnished with bedroom dressers and other types of storage containers along the walls. It was the only air-conditioned room in the apartment on an extremely hot June afternoon during a summer that would soon become the hottest summer on record in New Jersey.

When I arrived, the children were all seated around the table ready to participate in the discussion. Lucas and Maria described how these two foldable tables were put together to create a table large enough to fit the entire family for dinner. They told me

about how they eat dinner together every afternoon while they sometimes watch a movie or they discuss what has gone on in school that day. Then, this same table became the place where their school-aged children completed their homework.

They described their dinner and homework routine and how the set-up of the room was part of that routine. As we talked, I saw how the table became a busy place with homework, playtime, and arts and crafts going on. There was no separate, quiet study area or home library for the children as some researchers and educators would suggest is an essential part of the family-school connection. Lucas carried on most of the discussion while Maria was in and out of the conversation as she tended to her children. As we discussed their hopes and dreams for their children and the ways that they supported and participated in their children's education, I could see how this room served their purposes.

Lucas and Maria were the first participants that I interviewed at home. It was eye-opening to see this family in their home and to hear about how they understood their involvement in their children's education, specifically what they felt was important to support their children's education. As I continued to meet with participants, I came to find that Lucas and Maria were not different from the rest of the participants. The experiences of the Riveras and the other participating families, however, were very different from anything I had ever known and were most likely different from anything that most White middle class educators and education researchers know. They were a family struggling, adapting to a culture different from their own, and working hard so that they could bring about the best future for their children that they could possibly achieve.



By interviewing parents like Lucas and Maria, I was attempting to (1) investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents about their parental involvement and the family-school connection, (2) identify the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement, and (3) identify the ways that low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education.

From the participants' responses I found three themes in the data: (1) a strong foundation of support that low-income Mexican immigrant parents provide for their children, (2) specific influences on the parents' approach to involvement in their children's education, and (3) low-income Mexican immigrant parents' conceptualization of parent involvement. The results of this study indicate that these themes are interconnected and that each of the themes may influence Mexican immigrant parents concept of parent involvement and the approach that these parents take toward engaging in involvement in their middle school children's education. Additionally, the results of this study indicate that there is a discrepancy between low-income Mexican immigrant parents' conceptualization of parent involvement and the school's vision of parent involvement that is driven by national, state, and local district policy as well as mainstream parent involvement research.

The results of this study suggest that the Mexican immigrant parents provide a strong foundation of support for their children's education. The participants understood that their support played a large role in their overall conceptualization of parental involvement. I found that the participants, in fact, support their children's education in several ways that may not be recognized by educators and are not generally recognized by the extant mainstream parent involvement literature. This finding is significant

because many types of support that parents engage in at home are often not visible to most educators and researchers. Further, the ways in which parents engage in the support of their children's education at home often remain unrecognized by education professionals as well as from much of the extant research because knowledge of such behaviors requires an in-depth investigation into the perspectives and subsequent behaviors of these parents. Further, the results of this study dispelled the notion that immigrant parents do not support their children's education or embrace the value of education in the United States.

The literature on parental involvement has identified a number of barriers to effective involvement, specifically related to low income and minority parents. Lack of English proficiency, lack of academic skills, work related issues, lack of time, restricted opportunities for interaction, limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools are some of the main factors that may account for a lack of parental involvement (Galarza-Hernandez, 1999; Lareau, 1989; Lindsey, 2005; Lopez, 2001; Moles, 1993; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996). The results of this study indicate that, while some of the same structural barriers to involvement exist at this particular site, they are less overt than the structural barriers that have been reported by participants in prior research on similar populations (Lindsey, 2005; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996).

The results of this study indicate that there is a level of cultural sensitivity and understanding at this particular site that has been not been presented in prior research with similar populations. Creating a level of comfort by using a familiar setting and

language allowed me as a researcher to delve deeper into the participants' parental involvement conceptualization and experiences.

A significant finding in this study is that there are more subtle influences that are present with these participants. These subtle influences include the participants' perceptions of their ability to contribute to parent involvement activities and support their children academically relevant to their level of education and their level of proficiency in English. Additionally, I found that some participants have a perception of other parents that may also influence their likelihood to engage in certain activities at school since the participants do not see themselves as part of a cohesive parent support network. I found that these influences may affect the types of involvement activities that the participants engage in at school and at home as well. This finding is significant for three main reasons. First, these subtle influences seem to greatly shape the way that parents participate in their children's education, including the ways that they respond to school personnel's efforts toward engaging parents in involvement activities. Second, the subtle influences may also affect the ways that these parents support their children's education at home. Finally, because these subtle influences are often not readily visible to many educators, they are likely to be hidden more acutely and less likely to be understood by most educators. Further, because these influences are subtle, they have also remained virtually invisible to the research community as well.

Further, the results of this study indicate that there is a discrepancy between the parents' conceptualization and the school's vision of parent involvement. The participants indicated that their conceptualization of parent involvement did not align with the school's vision, which is aligned with national and state parent involvement policies as

well as the extant mainstream literature. Further, the parents' conceptualization of parent involvement had little convergence with much of what the mainstream literature recognizes as essential parental involvement programs and behaviors necessary for student achievement (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009).

These results have implications for education practitioners and policymakers, as well as in the research, establishment, and implementation of parental involvement programs in schools. The results of this study indicate that the participants' understanding of parental involvement differs greatly from the expectations that school personnel may have of these parents based on national, state, and local parent involvement policy outlines. Further, findings under this theme diverge greatly from the extant mainstream literature specifically in the types of engagement behaviors that have been outlined in the literature and specific behaviors that certain models indicate bring about increased student achievement. This finding is significant because the literature has influenced the development of parental involvement policy at national, state, and local levels. The Midland Public Schools District has embedded these types of engagement in its parental involvement policy and practice.

The participant sample for this study consisted of low-income Mexican immigrant parents who spoke Spanish as their first language and English as their second language. None of the participants can be described as recent immigrants since they have lived in the United States between 16 and 33 years. The sample in this study was purposefully selected to include more specific participant characteristics than most studies that recruit participants by larger racial, ethnic, or income classifications. Additionally, this study

includes only participants from a specific region in one country who have immigrated to the Northeast of the United States. Further, the participants share the same socioeconomic status and are similar in their stage in the acculturation process. Because of the purposeful sampling, the results of this study add unique and notable information to the extant literature. No qualitative study to date has purposefully sampled by specific ethnicity, income level, level of education, level of acculturation, and level of language proficiency. Further, the results of this study dispel the notion that immigrants do not embrace the value of education in the United States or support their children's education. Because of the level of specificity in this study, rather than making cursory generalizations about a population that has many within-group diversities, this study design allowed for a depth of inquiry that adds new information to the extant literature. Although the findings are specific, since Mexican Americans represent the largest segment of the growing Hispanic population in the United States, the findings of this study provide important culturally relevant data that has implications for policy, practice, and research for public school districts with similar populations as well as other immigrant and language minority populations. The results of this study may provide information that adds to the development of a theory of Mexican-American parental involvement that may be theoretically transferable to other Latino groups or language minority populations.

As I indicated in Chapter III, I purposefully selected specific participants' narratives as exemplars because they reflect the range of experiences and approaches reported by the participants about their understanding of the school personnel's efforts to engage them in greater parental involvement, their support of their children's education,

and the influences on their approach to parent involvement. These experiences form the overall conceptualization of their parent involvement experiences at Midland Middle School. Along with Lucas and Maria, I tell the stories of Miguel, Marisol, Evelyn, Lidia, Juan and Sophia, and Luis and Gethsemane. These ten participants represent seven of the ten families that I interviewed for this study. I believe that they give a voice to the range of experiences of all of the participants.

### **Mexican Immigrant Parents' Solid Foundation of Support**

The Mexican-immigrant parents in this study provide their children a solid foundation of support in their education. The participants described a clear understanding of what it meant to support their children's education that may be specific to their culture. Their measures of support and approaches to parent involvement, however, may not be readily recognized by school personnel or the extant literature. The parents generally saw preparation at home as an important instrument in providing support for their children's education. They provide support to their children through discussions about school and the relationship of education to their children's future in the United States. These discussions include topics such as behavior, motivation, and future aspirations and dreams. In addition, the participants also saw the monitoring of homework as part of their way to support their children's education. Additional results of this study suggest that checking on the completion of homework and attempting to assist in its completion is part of the participants' understanding of the way they support their children's education and part of how parents and schools maintain communication between the home and the school.

### ¿Como Le Fue Papi? (How Did It Go, Buddy?)

When I asked the participants to explain to me how they support their children's education, all of the participants' responses included discussions that they have with their children about school, specifically the importance of school and the value that a good education has in their future. In fact, for most parents, this was their first response, indicating that they see discussions with their children as an important part of their parental involvement. All of the parents seemed to demonstrate a clear understanding that discussing school was an important way to let their children know that they cared about their children's education and that they wanted their children to understand its importance to them. Evelyn's responses typify the participants' responses. "In my house we speak much about school. I want to let my son know that I am with him." Lucas told me, "Everyday, I share the things from school with my kids." These findings are important for educators and policymakers since it is just these behaviors that often go unnoticed by most of the mainstream parent involvement literature. The results of the study indicate that there are different kinds of support that may not be readily understood by educators or researchers. Most of the mainstream literature enumerates types of involvement that include setting up a study area at home, reading to children, and using language at home that is similar to the language that is used in school (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). These typologies, however, do not consider that there are other types of involvement that may be effective in supporting academic achievement.

Discussions between the participating parents and their children about school tended to center around their children's behavior in school and motivating their children

to do well in school. Additionally, the parents relayed to me that they have continuing discussions with their children about the future, specifically about their dreams and aspirations for their children in the United States.

### **Bien Educado (Well-Educated)**

Children's behavior is important to Mexican American parents. This is an important aspect for educators to consider when working with this population. Both Valdes (1996) and Liska-Carger (1996) report that the term *educación* (education) has a much more comprehensive definition that is not directly translatable from Spanish to English; it connotes a different meaning than it does in English. "In Spanish, the phrase connotes a wider sense of rearing well-bred, mannerly, clean, educated, respectful, responsible, articulate, loved, and loving children rather than solely academically well-prepared ones (Liska-Carger, 1996, p. 143). A parent's desire for his or her child to be *bien educado* (well-educated) is a composite of academic, social, cultural, and religious aspirations (Goldenberg, 2004; Liska-Carger, 1996).

A child's behavior and the respect that a child demonstrates toward his or her teachers are very important in the Mexican-American culture. These findings support the findings of other qualitative researchers (Liska-Carger; Lopez, 2001; Valdez, 1996). The importance of behavior is represented on multiple occasions in the transcripts by all of the participants. Lucas, for example, told me, "Every single day from pre-kindergarten to sixth grade, every day I say to these guys you listen to the teachers. You depend on them. If you want to looking for good future." Lucas' responses were typical of the participants. Each parent indicated how important it was to them that in order to get a good education, it is necessary to be respectful of the teacher and pay attention in class.



### **I Want a Better Life for You**

Motivation was an important factor for the parents in discussions with their children. Themes of motivation emerged from the data as a result of my question: Describe for me how you discuss school with your children. Evelyn was the one parent who actually used the word *motivate* directly. She told me, “I motivate my children day by day and doing their homework and behaving in school and having respect for the other children and teachers.” In fact, she relayed a contrasting story of a friend whose middle school child was not motivated by his two aunts who serve as successful role models in the family. In this anecdote, she recalled how her own child recounted the importance of education. She told me that her own son was at her side during this conversation and she asked him what he wanted for his life. He responded, “I want so many things, so much. I want a house for you and a house for my children. To educate myself is for me and my family. Without a diploma you lose so many dreams. To study, you graduate and become rich.” Evelyn's anecdote exemplifies the strong messages that these parents have imparted to their children about the importance of education. Lucas tells his children, “You are never finished to learn. If you want to learn, you discover more and more things, every single day. Some days you discover this thing, then next day maybe discover something else, you learn something else. Never say you can't. You have a dream you can do it but don't stop doing it. Just continue working hard.” These parents not only impart the value of a good education as a commodity in the U.S. economy, but also the value of learning and becoming a lifelong learner. These findings dispel notions that immigrant parents do not embrace value of education in the United States.

None of the participants related any negativity toward education. In fact, they all drew a connection between their children's education and their ability to improve their life circumstances through a good education. Each parent contrasted his or her own life circumstances as a result of being an immigrant to the United States with a lower level of education with the dreams and aspirations that they have for their children. The fathers in this study specifically use discussions comparing their own lives as models for their children not to follow. They see this as a means to motivate their children. Lucas told me about how he wished he could have gone to high school, but it was just not an option that his family could afford. "I was wishing one day my dad was going to say to me I'm going to the high school, but my father says no more." Miguel relayed to me the story about how he left school after the fifth grade by his own choice. Today he tells his own boys how hard he works here in the United States as a result of his lack of education. Luis and Lucas recounted the same ideas. Luis' oldest son Nestor, in fact, works with Luis in a restaurant. Luis is a dishwasher and Nestor is a busboy. He tells his children regularly that he wants a better life for them in the United States. He feels that his oldest son is able to see firsthand how important his education is for him so he does not have to "be like his father." These findings dispel the notion that parents who themselves were not afforded the opportunity to obtain an education subsequently do not value education for the children.

### **¡Claro Que Sí! (Yes, of Course I Have Dreams for My Children)**

All of the parents had future aspirations and dreams for their children. First of all, these parents frame their responses with the underlying assumption that they are planning to remain in the United States and that their children's education is an important element

for their future. All of the parents indicated that they wanted their children to attend college. Further, all of the parents indicated that they wanted their children to obtain some sort of professional career that required a college education and specifically did not involve manual labor. I asked the participants directly what they saw for their children's future in the United States and if that future included a college education. Evelyn's response was "*¡Claro que si!*" (Yes, of course) "Yes, of course I want them to study in any manner necessary." Luis and Marisol, in separate interviews, enumerated almost the exact same list of professions in which they would like to see their children working, "Doctor, lawyer, teacher, police officer." Marisol, in fact, indicated that this list results from conversations she has had with her children. Her daughter has indicated an interest in medicine. She described her son, on the other hand, as a bit active and not such a good student. He has indicated an interest in law enforcement. Marisol expressed to me her understanding of the importance that education plays in her children's future. This finding is important because it presents a conceptualization that most often remains unrecognized by educators and is therefore not generally part of their understanding about most Mexican immigrant parents. Further, this understanding has not been expressed in the literature. In fact, it is in contrast to findings of other researchers who have found that parents with low levels of education do not emphasize the importance of education in the home since they often do not see education as a means of economic betterment (Valdes, 1996).

The city of Midland is a relatively small city that is home to a large state university campus, two major teaching hospitals, and the world headquarters for a large multinational corporation. Some of the participants who work in the service sector

relayed stories that included regular contact with people from a range of professions that may shape their dreams and aspirations for their children. Lidia and Lucas, for example, both work in different restaurants that are frequented by lawyers, judges, and sheriff's officers from the superior court. They engage in daily conversations with these professionals. They expressed that these engagements probably shape their aspirations for their children. They both expressed their wish to see their children with professions similar to the patrons they meet.

The mothers and the fathers wanted a good future for their children here in the United States. All of the mothers were clear that they wanted their children to obtain a college degree. The mothers seemed to see a future for their children in the United States that included a professional career. The fathers did as well; however, they seemed to see their children's future in stark contrast to their own life circumstances. They feel that their children's future is the reason for their own hard work today.

Evelyn is the one participant who attended high school in Mexico. She also studied English as a second language and completed a GED at the adult school in Midland. She hopes to serve as a role model for her children. "I'm thinking that sometime when they [the children] don't need me so much, that I will continue my studies. I am going to follow my studies so that I can realize them. To study is very important. If you don't study, you have nothing. When you study, the preparation, preparation for yourself, preparation for your family, preparation for your dreams." Since none of the other participants completed more than the eighth grade, Evelyn's dreams and aspirations for herself are not representative of all of the participants.

A study by Keith and Lichtman (1992) investigated the relationship between parent involvement and student achievement of 1,714 Mexican American eighth-grade students using the National Education Longitudinal Survey (NELS 88) data. In this study they found that parental involvement, which was described as “discussing school activities with their children and . . . [having]. . . high educational aspirations for their children” did positively influence academic achievement (Keith and Lichtman, 1992, p. 7). Keith and Litchman (1992) tell us that the types of involvement the participants from the NELS 88 study engage in, which include discussing school and future dreams and aspirations with their children, can affect student achievement. However, this study is limited.

The present qualitative study adds results with qualitative depth that provide and support details as to the specific content and context of discussions about school and aspirations that Mexican immigrant parents engage in with their middle school children. These findings are important in that they add subtle information to the extant literature that may be difficult to ascertain through quantitative studies that are based on preconceived notions and a priori assumptions. Further, these findings add information that may lead to a theoretical framework that includes educational aspirations in the definition of parent involvement.

### **Homework**

The data revealed that homework is an important construct to the participants. The parents saw the monitoring of homework as part of their way to support their children's education. The subject of homework can be a unique and complicated topic since its effectiveness and correlation with student achievement is subject to debate

among educators and education researchers. I originally considered not including any questions or discussion related to homework in this study. After completing some field test interviews for this study, I found homework to be an important construct to the parents. The results of this study are supported by the findings of other researchers who found that homework is an important construct to Mexican American parents (Goldenberg, 2004). In this present study, the topic of homework came up on several occasions with almost all of the participants without prompting, indicating its relevance and importance to these parents. The first word out of Lidia's and Juan's mouths was, in fact, "Homework," in response to my question, about how each parent supported their respective son's education.

I have recounted the Riveras' afternoon routine that I witnessed the afternoon that I visited the family in their apartment. Lucas described how, "After dinner is finished, we tell the kids you know what you have to do--your homework. Take your time and try the best. You can do it. I don't need to see it 100 percent perfect." Evelyn told me, "I think homework is very important. But it's not important the amount of homework, as long as they are learning the capacity to think, the capacity to learn, the capacity to exercise." She went on to say, "I help what I understand with the homework. And I stay in the living room with them and they began working on the floor or on the table in the living room and I'm seated with them when they begin their homework." Lidia recalled a similar story, "I sit with my son when he is doing his homework until he is done. I tell him, 'Justin you are doing a good job. Just keep trying.' Sometimes I don't know what the homework is about. Even the math they learn today. It's different than the way we learned."

Juan and Sophia told me they are not really able to help their son with his homework, but they feel it is important to see that he has homework and they check to see that it is done. They used to struggle with their son when he was in the younger elementary grades to get it done. Luis struggles with his son more now that he is in middle school. His son tells him that he completed his homework in school. Then he hears from the teachers that his son is not turning in his assignments. While on the one hand, there is research that indicates that homework is not an effective means to increase student achievement in that no correlation can be drawn between homework completion and student achievement, homework is a concrete concept that these participants understood. These results add important information about the efforts these parents expend to support their children's education. The results of this study help to dispel notions that Mexican American parents do not care about their children's education or that they are not capable of providing substantive support to their children's academic achievement.

### **Influences on Parents' Approach to Involvement in their Children's Education**

Researchers have studied low income, minority, Hispanic, and specifically Mexican-American parents and found that there are systemic structural and cultural barriers to greater parental involvement inherent in many schools. In schools with large populations who do not speak English, language can pose the most obvious barrier to family involvement. A serious handicap in parental support for their children's education is their limited education or lack of fluency in English (Bermudez, 1993). Further, some of the reasons for the alienation of culturally and linguistically diverse parents from involvement in school are work interference, lack of understanding of the home-school

partnership, as well as insensitivity and hostility on the part of school personnel (Bermudez, 1993, Lindsey, 2002, Lopez & Vasquez, 2006). These studies have looked critically at the parent involvement paradigms presented in schools with substantial Latino populations. Much of the research that looks qualitatively at Latino populations, although cognizant of the deficit paradigm, tends to use language that portrays their participant parents as somewhat deficient. Further, much of this research is framed in the notion that parental involvement for Latino parents needs to be increased.

The results of this study were fairly consistent with some of the findings of the extant research on parental involvement that deals specifically with the Hispanic and Mexican American population (Lindsey, 2006; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996). The participants reported lack of time and other economic factors, including the need to work long hours, along with child care and other family obligations, which may limit their ability to become involved at school.

The results of this study add important new information to the extant literature. The results of this present study indicate that, although some of the same structural barriers to greater involvement exist at this particular site, they are less overt than the structural barriers that have been reported by participants in prior research on similar populations (Lindsey, 2006; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996). Further, the findings of these particular studies remain framed in the notion that parents' presence in school is an indicator of parent involvement. Given the findings of robust support that has been presented in this present study, in discussing influences on parent involvement, one cannot look only at the types of involvement that are endorsed and measured by the school. Therefore, to look at these influences solely as



barriers, I would challenge the notions of the deficit paradigm: that if these parents are not involved in the way that the school, the policy, and the literature endorses, that they are somehow deficient. I have chosen therefore to reframe the notion of barriers and call these influences on parent involvement rather than barriers to parent involvement.

What is most notable in this present study is that proficiency in English and level of education emerged from the data as subtle influences on certain types of involvement. These influences have not been presented in previous literature to this extent. What is important to note is that the participants in this study were purposefully sampled. The participants share specific demographic characteristics. The participants were born in one region of the same country, have lived in the United States for at least 16 years, speak Spanish as a first language and speak English as a second language, and share similar levels of education and levels of income. The purposeful sampling in this study differs from the qualitative studies in the extant literature that draw from a larger pool of candidates that have less specifically sampled demographic characteristics.

I have therefore differentiated these subtle influences from the structural barriers such as lack of time due to conflicting work schedules or childcare or other economic factors that might affect a broader range of parents. These subtle influences stem from the participants' confidence in their assessment of their own abilities to effectively communicate in English and contribute substantively in parent involvement activities and may result in a sense of self-efficacy that may affect their parent involvement behaviors. These results are profound because they uncover a much deeper understanding of some of the factors that may affect the parent involvement activities in which low-income Mexican immigrant parents choose to engage.

Further, when I found that some aspects of the understanding and behaviors of these participants did not match the findings of the mainstream literature, I probed them further to determine their confidence in engaging in certain parental involvement behaviors due to their level of education and their self assessment of their proficiency in understanding, speaking, reading, and writing English. These subtle influences are most likely invisible to many educators. Further, they may be difficult to assess quantitatively, so they are not often present in the mainstream literature or the alternative literature that focuses on minority, Hispanic, and even specifically the Mexican American population, since most studies draw from a candidate pool that often includes a broader range of parent characteristics than is present in this study. Understanding of the subtle influences that are part of the findings of this study, therefore, do not generally inform decisions on the development and implementation of parent involvement policy and programs.

Additionally, some of these parents reported feeling a lack of support from other parents that ultimately may affect their perception of their ability to be a collective voice for change at Midland Middle School. This finding supports research that indicates that although middle-class parents often develop parent networks that encourage engagement in activities in school, the same is generally not true for low-income parents (Lareau, 1989). The results of this study indicate that these subtle influences affect both the types and levels of involvement of the participating parents in this study.

The participants in this study did not indicate that some of the structural barriers existed to the same extent that has been represented in previous literature with similar populations. I will, therefore, discuss two structural barriers that were particular to this population that support findings in the extant literature. I will introduce the subtle

influence of the participants' confidence. Then, I will present specific examples of the subtle influences later in this chapter as they relate to the participants' support of their children's education and their understanding of the school's efforts to engage them in parent involvement activities. In this way I will indicate how these subtle influences may affect the way that these participants support their children's education and how they understand the school personnel's efforts to increase parental involvement at this site and how these influences which may affect the formation of the participants' overall conceptualization of parental involvement.

### **My Day is Busy**

Like parents from different ethnicities and socioeconomic strata, all of the participants indicated that lack of time was a constraint on involvement in their children's education. Most of the parents indicated that conflicting work schedules made it difficult to get to school. Fathers generally cited work schedules and mothers generally cited child care and housework as reasons for a lack of greater physical presence at school. This finding is consistent with the literature. Evelyn laughed, "Why I don't participate more? I have to clean my house and cook for my children. My children absorb all of my time. I need my time for my house and my children." Mainstream notions of parent involvement continually reference the school's agenda. Implying that these parents need to engage in specific types of parent involvement may be the wrong lens through which many researchers and educators view these parents.

All of the fathers cited lack of time as a barrier to greater involvement in their children's education. Luis, Miguel, and Lucas reported working long hours in the food services industry and finding it difficult to get to school. Lucas told me that he tries to get

to school as much as he can, but he is often unable to because of work schedules. Juan and Miguel also cited work as a reason for not being able to get to school. Miguel leaves his house every day before 10 a.m. and does not return until after 10 p.m. Luis revealed to me that he works fourteen-hour days, six days a week. “Sometimes I don’t have too much time in the daytime to go to school. Because my day off I have things to do. My day is busy.”

There is some research that indicates that there are structural problems embedded in the organization of public schools that create barriers to greater parental involvement specifically for minority and low-income parents. The structured times for parent-teacher conferences are brief, narrowly defined, and unidirectional (Lopez, 2001). Teachers’ contracts and custodians’ hours limit evening and weekend meetings (Moles, 1993). In many families both parents work outside the home, making it difficult, if not impossible to attend school conferences and meetings scheduled during the day (Lareau, 1989; Lindsey, 2006; Moles, 1993; Valdez, 1996). Even the most convenient meeting times may still mean that families need care for young children or transportation. While the parents in my study indicated that they would like to have more convenient times to meet school personnel made available to them, they didn’t feel that the current structure particularly inconvenienced them.

### **Six Miles**

Lack of transportation was another finding that was consistent in the literature (Lindsey, 2006). For the participants in this study it was not only a lack of transportation, but the cost of transportation to get to school. The city of Midland is just less than 6 square miles in area. Midland Middle School happens to be located at the far

westernmost point of the city on the border with its neighboring municipality. Getting to the school presents a challenge for anyone who does not own a vehicle. Since Midland is such a small city surrounded by suburbs, there is not a great deal of available mass transit to travel within the city. Many of the residents therefore rely on taxis for transportation.

Participants from six of the ten families reported not owning a car and indicated that they use taxis to get to and from Midland Middle School to attend conferences or school functions. All of the parents indicated that they live within walking distance of their children's neighborhood elementary school, on the other hand, making access to the neighborhood elementary school much easier. Lucas indicated that he missed the easy access that they had to the local elementary school. "Before, when they were going to the other school, I would just go across the street. It's more easy for me to go and ask the teacher how she's doing and how he's doing." He indicated that he's not able to get to the middle school as often as he would like. "I'm going to say, my situation the economy is a little, (*pauses*) it's very tight now. And if I'm going to ask the teachers, I'm going to go at least once a week and each time I pay a taxi like five dollars. Five dollars and five dollars is ten dollars. I know that money is not everything, but we don't have. And probably ten dollars is like nothing, but if we don't have it--it's too much, you know?"

As I detailed in the methods section in chapter III of this study, I conducted seven of the ten interviews in the participants' homes. When I originally proposed the data collection methods for this study, I did not consider the economic, transportation, or childcare-related constraints on these parents. I found that some of the same barriers that parents may experience to parental involvement may have been a constraint in

participating in this study. I found that removal of these constraints afforded certain participants a greater opportunity for participation.

### **If I Know Perfect English**

I began to discover that the participants' level of confidence with English may affect their decisions with regard to how they become involved in their children's education. The confidence that these English-speaking immigrant participants expressed presented itself as an influence on their involvement in their children's education, both in helping their children with homework and their presence in school-related activities. Even the participants who presented themselves as confident in going to school to advocate on behalf of their children when necessary seemed to be less confident when we discussed voicing their opinions on matters or speaking in a public venue.

When I observed parent involvement activities like middle school orientation and back-to-school night, I found that bilingual personnel were readily available for translation and that translation was not an afterthought, but part of the everyday structure of parent related activities at Midland Middle School. Effective translation in and of itself, however, presents its own challenges. There is still a sense of delay and awkwardness where nuances in the message can be lost in translation. Further, immigrant parents often must rely on translators with other school actors, alternating the natural power structure both within the family and the school (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005).

Miguel, who came to the United States by himself sixteen years ago, may exemplify the experience of many parents for whom English is not their first language. While Miguel and I were able to communicate in English, I felt that, perhaps even in the

interview, his lack of proficiency in English prevented him from providing more detailed responses. I told him that he could provide responses to me in either Spanish or English, but he continued to speak in English; giving fairly short, not very detailed responses. Parents like Miguel, who are able to speak English, will come to school and speak to the English-speaking school personnel in English. They may not, however, be able to communicate in the detailed and nuanced manner needed to maintain a detailed and complex conversation about education.

These results support some of the extant research that is specific to Hispanic participants. Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton (2005) found that their participants realized that they lacked the formal cultural capital or knowledge to defend their point. While their participants expressed that they were able to speak Spanish with their teachers, narrowing the gap between the schools and the participants' cultural world, they lacked an understanding of the school's programs and did not have the necessary command of English to talk about them. Further, immigrant parents find that their beliefs and actions have less power than those of other school actors (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Valdez, 1996).

The data that I derived from this particular site diverged from studies in which participants shared experiences that included difficulties in communication with school personnel and how they felt a lack of respect when they attended parent-related events and no translator was available (Lindsey, 2006; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). "The lack of bilingual personnel represents a source of tension and symbolizes the lack of respect for parents who had to wait until the translator was available to negotiate both trivial and crucial situations" (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, &

Barton, 2005). The participants in this study did not identify lack of interpreters or a hostile environment toward Spanish speakers as a barrier to involvement as has been cited in other studies. Even when the school personnel make an effort to ensure that communication can take place with parents who speak languages other than English, parents who speak English as their second language may choose to speak with the English speaking school personnel in English, rather than relying on translation. Therefore, even when the parents speak English, language remains a subtle influence on their involvement choices. This finding is unique and very important. In this context, confidence in one's own proficiency in English presents itself as a subtle influence on parental involvement.

Because of their lack of confidence with English, parents find it difficult to understand and express their views and concerns regarding the schooling of the children. Language is also an instrument of identity and power, and thus immigrant parents lose some of the authority they had in their home countries because they lack knowledge of the nuances of language called for in particular situations. (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Further, immigrant parents generally have limited knowledge of the "invisible codes of power" embedded in school cultures (Delpit, 1988). They often have a limited understanding of the curriculum and organization of U.S. schools and a lack of awareness of their rights as parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992), which may constrain the questions they might pose and critiques they might make regarding schooling practices.

As I indicated, all of the parents were able to communicate with me clearly in English. I asked them to speak to me in Spanish as they chose to more clearly communicate their intended message if they preferred. The participants chose to speak to



me in English. This indicates to me that they are also able to communicate with school personnel in English when they wish to or need to. In fact, most English-speaking immigrant parents will most likely make this choice rather than communicating through an interpreter. All of the participants, however, reported to me that they were not confident in their skills in speaking, reading and writing English. This assessment may affect their willingness to participate in functions at school where they may be asked to articulate an idea or voice an opinion on something. Further, they reported that their lack of confidence with their English proficiency affects their ability to support their children with the completion of homework.

When I asked Juan what prevents him from being more involved in events in school, his reply was definitive and staccato, "My English." When I confirmed this with him, he went on to say, "If I know perfect English, I can talk to people and explain because I know I'm good to talk. If I hear something I know I go and talk and say look I don't like this I don't like that. So sometimes it's not easy if you get an interpreter every time. Juan explained the difficulty many parents experience trying to voice their opinions through an interpreter.

Juan and I were able to communicate in English quite well. As I noted in the methods section of this study, I was able to communicate clearly with the participants in English, but I explained to them that if they are better able to express a complex idea in Spanish, then I would prefer that they speak in Spanish. The participants chose to speak to me, a native English speaker, in English with occasional expressions in Spanish. Juan exemplifies the difficulty that many second language learners experience and the complexity of living life using a second language. In the midst of the discussion, in

English, about his confidence with English, I complimented his language skills. “Your English is pretty good,” I said. Juan explained that he had learned to speak English at work by speaking with native English speakers. “No, it’s too long right here. You get to talk to too many people. And I understand in the street. I used to work with only American people before. Nobody speaks Spanish in my job. And that’s the way I understand a little bit more. When you talk and talk...” He admitted, however, that he does not read English that well and that he writes even less.

As I noted in the summary of the participant’s backgrounds, 10 of the 13 participants received no more than a sixth grade education in Mexico. Two participants had completed the eighth grade, and one participant had completed high school. Their lack of confidence with their level of education did not present itself overtly as a barrier to certain parent involvement behaviors as it has been presented in some of the literature. The participants in this study did not indicate any sense of discomfort in going to school or a sense of hostility on the part of school personnel as has been reported by participants in previous studies (Lareau, & Horvat, 1989; Lindsey, 2006; Valdez, 1996) The participants in this study indicated that they would go to school to discuss their child’s academic progress with school personnel at a variety of venues.

Another notable result of this study is that the participants indicated that their confidence in their level of education may affect how they are able to support their children with homework at home and how they feel they are able to add value to the decision-making process in school. In addition, some but not all participants reported that their perception of other parents also affects their interest to become involved to a greater extent in the decision-making at the school. This perception may affect their

interest to become more involved in decision making venues at school where they might affect change.

The subtle influence of confidence seems to affect further findings in this study since they may greatly shape the way that parents participate in their children's education, including the ways that they respond to school personnel's efforts toward engaging parents in involvement activities, as well as the ways that they are able to support their children in the completion of homework.

All parents reported that they were not confident in providing assistance with homework to their children due to their own lack of proficiency in English. When I asked Juan and Sophia about homework, they immediately began to explain how they try to help, but that their own lack of proficiency in English hampers these attempts. "We try at home, but we don't understand enough English to help him." I confirmed with them, "So if you try to help, one of the biggest problems is English?" "Yeah, my English is not that easy to do the homework in English," replied Juan. His response was typical of all of the participants. His story illustrates the struggle these parents experience. At the same time their efforts indicate the strong support they give their children and the message they impart regarding education as a value.

Evelyn, who has the highest level of education in this group of participants, is able to offer the most help to her children. Even with a high school education and some classes in English as a second language, she struggles to offer effective and substantive assistance to her children. "I looked to see what they're doing and how they're writing it. And then I read the paragraph or I read with them or I read while they're working. And I watched to see if they're reading and then I see if they have the right answer. Then I look

for the main idea and then I asked them what is happening in this paragraph.” She told me that there is no homework in Spanish. “It’s only in English, so I must force myself. There are dictionaries or with my child I say, ‘Explaine to me what does this say in other words.’”

### **The Parents Who Needed to Be There Would Not Be There**

Several of the participants revealed their perceptions of other parents in the school. They tended to generalize that many of the other parents of children in Midland Middle School do not support their children’s education to the same extent that they do. They made these statements based on conversations they have had with other parents, observations that they made of other parents’ parenting behaviors, as well as conclusions that they were able to draw based on the behavior of their children’s classmates. At first, I felt that perhaps these were data that had little or no relevance to this study. This theme, however, emerged from data gathered from several of the participants. Further, none of my interview questions related to this topic. In my analysis, I scoured my data, looking specifically at my questions and comments to see if at any point I had prompted these responses. After such review, I concluded that the parents were providing this information to me without any prompting on my part.

Evelyn is the one participant who came from the state of Veracruz 21 years ago. She is self-described as someone who is probably different from the rest of the participants in the study because she comes from a different state in Mexico. Most of the Mexican-born residents of the City of Midland come from the states of Puebla and Oaxaca. She described the people from Veracruz as being very different. In her words in English, the people from Veracruz are “Crazy like me, and very verbal and they speak a

lot and they're willing to speak their mind.” She described the people of Puebla, however, as people who will not want to speak their mind. She used the term *conformista* (conformist). She would not describe herself as conformist.

Evelyn told me that she felt that the parents are fearful. She went on to define the term *conformista* for me. “They won’t confront anybody. They have fear.” Both Evelyn and Lydia felt that very few of the other parents understand the importance of education for their children. Lucas questioned what other parents do at home to support their children’s education. “They don’t tell kids how to be responsible or talk to their kids about school.” He felt that parent meetings were necessary to provide parents with direction in proper ways to support their children’s education. Juan, on the other hand, indicated that parent meetings would be a good idea, but he felt that, “The parents who “needed to be there would not be there.”

The results of this study, however, may reveal some insight into how these parents conceptualize parental involvement in relation to other parents. These data may present some findings that relate to parental self-efficacy. Do these parents feel that they are powerless to act alone? Perhaps if they felt that they had the support of other parents, they might be more likely to be more involved in school. This finding is consistent with the findings of Lareau (1989), who found that there were qualitative differences in the types of involvement that parents engaged in. She concluded that certain types of parental involvement were specifically related to socioeconomic status. She found that working class parents did not develop the same parent support networks that many middle class parents did. While the participant sample of this study differs from Lareau’s sample, I feel that connections to her findings can be made. The participants in this study

revealed in their responses a lack of connection to other parents that is consistent with Lareau's findings on parents of lower socioeconomic status. Many immigrant parents experienced immigration as a process of isolation that makes it difficult for them to create social support networks that can sustain their efforts in regard to engaging in their children's schooling (Trueba, 1998). In many cases, immigrant parents work long hours at job sites away from their communities or hold jobs in the service sector that allow little schedule flexibility to meet with other parents or school actors (Trueba, 1998). In the case of minority parents, parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do regarding their children's education, their sense of self-efficacy in the parental involvement role, and their perception of how the child and the school want them to be involved in their child's education can encourage involvement or negatively affect parental involvement as explained by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (1997) suggest that even well designed school programs inviting involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school.

### **Parents' Conceptualization and the School's Vision of Parent Involvement**

The parents in this study communicated a clear understanding of what parental involvement meant to them. This understanding, however, has little support from the extant mainstream parent involvement literature. In fact, the parents' understanding diverges from what the mainstream literature indicates are behaviors necessary for effective parental involvement. I included interview questions that probed specific participation behaviors that were suggested by the mainstream literature as essential

parent involvement behaviors and necessary components of parental involvement programs for successful student achievement. The results of this study, on the other hand, corresponded with much of the research that focuses specifically on Mexican American parents that indicate that Mexican American parents hold culturally distinct conceptualization of the teacher's role. Mexican American parents do not have different agendas or interests from teachers, but understand the home and the school as being corresponding domains and view their roles as being intimately connected (Lopez, 2001). In fact, they referred to themselves as the "first teachers" and to teachers as the "second parents" (Lopez & Vasquez, 2006). Such conceptualizations of involvement are not widely circulated in mainstream literature and are rarely recognized by popular typologies. As such they often go unnoticed in the broader parental involvement discourse.

### **I Depend on These Notes**

The participants in this study demonstrated a clear understanding of the need to communicate with the school. In fact, they welcomed it. All of the parents favored consistent and continual dialogue with their children's teachers. Their concept, for the most part, included forms of communication between the home and the school as well as coming in person into the school. Communication is a form of support that generally coincides with the definition of parent involvement according to the way that it has been defined in some of the mainstream literature.

These parents seemed to favor phone calls and notes home to provide continual progress monitoring of their children's academic progress and behavior in class. The participants cited their lack of preference for this mode of communication with their

children's teachers for this reason. They felt that if the school wanted to get information to them, then it should be sent home in a bilingual English and Spanish document or through a phone call to the home or to their cell phone. Evelyn stated, "I am *dependent* (emphasis) on these notes. I always ask my children, 'Did you bring a note that I have to sign? Any complaints? Anything?' All the time. For whatever reasons the teachers have to take because I need to know something." "Send me a note or call me on the phone," responded Sophia, who also looked for notes to be sent home. Most parents in this study felt that the most effective way to communicate with parents is to place a phone call home. They felt that parents should provide the school with both a home and a cell phone number for contact. Participants reported receiving many calls from the school and the caller spoke to them in Spanish. "I give my cell phone to many people inside," Juan told me. Specifically when I asked Juan and Sophia about increasing attendance at school events Juan replied, "Make a phone call to the people. Make a phone call, that's the best way, the easiest way."

Lidia, who enjoys constant contact with her son Julian's teachers, held a position that was quite different from the rest of the parents. She is not somebody who would be reluctant to enter the school and discuss matters on her own or her son's behalf. She felt that the teachers should each have a cell phone that is dedicated to school use.

None of the parents mentioned contact via email or through the school's website.

Behaviors like checking the school's website for information updates, or checking an online grade book to monitor a child's progress in school might be considered typical forms of communication between the parents and school personnel. These participants also did not prefer checking the school website or an on-line grade book as a means of



communication either. These types of communication did not seem to be part of their understanding of communication between parents and school personnel. In fact, while most of the parents indicated that they had regular access to a computer and an email account, they expressed concern for other parents who may not have the same access.

### **How is My Child Doing?**

The data revealed that the participants' concept of parental involvement is related directly to their own children's academic performance or behavior in school rather than in a broader sense of participation in activities that would bring about general improvement in the school. As part of the regular and consistent communication with their children's teachers, the parents seemed to have a consensus in the understanding that parental involvement in terms of their physical presence at school consisted of four main activities: (1) regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences, (2) a specific request from the school personnel to come to meet with them at school regarding their children's academic progress or behavior, (3) dropping in to monitor their children's progress in school, or (4) an invitation to a special event such as a concert or the parent involvement activity. The parents had almost no concept of going to school for any reason that does not concern their own child directly such as a meeting including the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), serving on an advisory committee, or volunteering in the school (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). What is most notable about this result is that it highlights the diversions between the participating parents' concept of parent involvement and the vision of parent involvement that is encouraged by the school, a vision that is supported by national state and local policy as well as mainstream parent involvement research.

Some participants indicated that they would also visit the school from time to time. Their main reason for visiting the school would be to monitor their children's academic progress or behavior or in response to a request from the school personnel to attend a meeting to update them on their children's academic progress or behavior. Most of the participants' responses indicated that a request from the school to attend a meeting about academic progress or behavior, outside of the regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, would be for the school to report a behavior problem or the teacher to report a problem with the completion of assignments.

None of the participants reported that they would feel uncomfortable coming into the school for drop-in visit or that they felt that a drop-in visit was beyond their purview. Lidia, Marisol, Evelyn, and Lucas all reported specific incidences where they have had an opportunity to stop in to check the progress of the students' academic progress and behavior.

### **Meeting with the Teacher**

The participants communicated an awareness of the parent-teacher conferences that are held three times per year at midterm. Midland Public Schools holds regularly scheduled parent-teacher conferences three times per year in the first, second, and third marking periods. They are a regular part of the school culture, prompted by the school's policy. These conferences are well attended. They serve as the primary exchange between parents and teachers about academic progress and behavior. These conferences are held three afternoons and one evening at the midway point in the marking period. The purpose of parent-teacher conferences is to discuss with parents the academic progress of their children so that adjustments can be made if needed before the end of the

marking period. Interpreters are generally available to assist non-Spanish-speaking teachers. The students themselves often act as interpreters for their teachers and their parents when no interpreter is readily available. Sometimes even babysitting services are provided for younger children. Parent attendance data is regularly collected by the administration to document parent involvement school reform efforts. The parents seem to have confidence in these conferences as a means to gain information about the academic progress and behavior of their children. Every participant mentioned attending most parent-teacher conferences.

It seemed that these parents found the parent-teacher conference a primary exchange with their children's teachers. Teachers and school personnel place an important value in the efficacy of this particular exchange, largely recognizing and embracing it as an important signifier of involvement (Carvalho, 2001). Consistent with the intent of the school's personnel and the findings in the literature, they found this exchange to be a positive and successful exchange with their children's teachers. Further, this parental involvement activity seems to be lacking some of the structural barriers that are evident in the experiences of participants based on the findings of other qualitative researchers. Their foremost conceptualization of parent involvement in their children's education in the form of physical presence in the school is in the form of the parent-teacher conference. As I probed the parents further for indications of other involvement activities at the school, they referred back to the parent-teacher conference, indicating that this exchange is at the foreground of their understanding.

### **I Just Want To Know How My Child Is Doing**

Midland Middle School has a PTO (Parent-Teacher Organization) that meets once a month. One purpose of the PTO is to keep parents informed of events and activities that are happening at the school. Parent teacher organizations also serve to raise additional funds for the school for extracurricular activities for the students. Generally the school's PTO or PTA (Parent-Teacher Association) is the accepted structure for parent-school communication. It is the official structure through which parents can influence the culture and organization of schools (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005).

I asked parents if there was a PTO at Midland Middle School. Of the thirteen participants that I interviewed, Lidia was the only parent who had attended a PTO meeting at Midland Middle School. The participants had very little understanding of the function of a parent-teacher organization. Parents indicated that their lack of attendance had more to do with external barriers such as work, child care needs, or lack of transportation.

The parents did not articulate a belief in going to school for a meeting, volunteering, or to serve on an advisory committee. The idea of attending meetings at school, volunteering, and serving on advisory committees for these parents, however, was in contrast to the idea of the parent-teacher conference which they embraced. Some researchers have asserted that these types of involvement behaviors are necessary parts of a good parental involvement program (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). As a result, these behaviors have been outlined in national and local parent involvement policies. The fact that these parents did not recognize this particular form of parental involvement, attending meetings at school and serving on advisory

committees that can affect decisions or make change in the school, could be due to a lack of communication between the school and the home. This code revealed much less data than the others because the participants just didn't have much to say about these particular concepts, indicating that these activities are just not part of their construct of parental involvement. The parents were not really aware of their ability to be involved in an equal partnership with the school personnel regarding decision-making on school policy and curriculum. Answers to these questions, across all participants, were remarkably brief in comparison to other themes that emerged. These questions, therefore, elicited very little data from the participants. Since the participants had very little to say in response when I began to probe them, they continued to refer to meeting with the teacher at a parent-teacher conference or at the teacher's or an administrator's specific request.

The presence of this category of data in this study is due to my inclusion of a set of questions in the interview protocol. These questions relate specifically to Epstein's model that suggests parents need to be directly involved and present in the school in activities which include volunteering and serving on advisory committees. Further, they reflect the national and local parent involvement policies.

Marisol's responses were typical of the participants' responses. I asked her if she felt that she was encouraged to become involved in activities at school. Her response was one word, "No." I asked her if she felt that they asked parents to come to the school. Once again her response was a one word answer, "No." She expressed an understanding that she could come to the school when she needed to advocate on behalf of her children, but she seemed unaware of the PTO or any other type of parent meeting where parents

could influence decision-making at school. She felt that when parents come into school, it is to check up on the progress of their children.

The lack of depth and breadth in the participants' responses indicates that there is a disconnect between the parents and the school's vision of parent involvement which includes concepts like a PTO or an advisory or decision-making committee. The parents do not perceive themselves in the same position of power from their inclusion in these types of involvement activities as the research suggests. While it is the school district's mission to increase parental involvement, the findings of this study indicate that there is a disconnect between the school personnel's efforts to increase parental involvement and the parents' understanding of parental involvement.

### **I Don't Think I Can Change Things at School**

Further, I asked questions about decision-making and the parents' ability to influence decisions and make changes in their children's school (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). It was through these questions that a subcategory emerged relating to the decisions made at school. This category emerged in my discussion with Juan and Sophia and Evelyn without specific prompting. The theme emerged with other participants in response to my questions about affecting decisions and making change.

Evelyn presents a bit of contradiction in that while she considers herself to be an outspoken person and not afraid to speak in school, she also doesn't want to be a bother to the school personnel. She believes that the decisions are not the domain of the parents, but they are to be made by the school personnel. Evelyn's response typifies the responses of the participants and their conceptualization of the parents' role in decision-making in

the school. Evelyn explained, "I don't think that I can change anything in the school. But I believe that a director (principal) and the heads of the teachers they need to see what is convenient, what is correct for, what is the best for the school. I think that this is the work of a principal; to look." Evelyn's responses and the responses of the other participants support the findings of other researchers. Immigrant parents find that their beliefs and actions have less power than those of other school actors (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991, Valdes, 1996). They may not believe that they have the knowledge, power, and insight to impact the system (Lopez, 2001).

Since the only responses that I received were brief and as a result of my prompting, I felt I must reflect on the questions themselves. Were they good questions? Were the interview questions comprehensible to the participants? Then, finally, were these questions asking about a conceptualization that is familiar to the participants, or is this something that they have little experience with; therefore, there is little to say? As I analyzed the data, I realized that the influences on the participants' involvement were more than just structural barriers such as a lack of time or conflicting work schedules. I began to uncover more subtle influences which are not generally present in the extant literature. Further, I began to realize that there may be a connection between these subtle influences and the ways that parents feel they are able to engage in parental involvement activities and support their children's education. I felt that perhaps these participants believe that they are not capable of adding value in certain parent involvement activities.

Miguel, a thirty-four-year-old married father of three from the state of Oaxaca, Mexico, who had been living in the United States for 16 years looked perplexed when I asked him these questions. He had the most extreme position on this topic, but he

seemed to articulate his feelings the best. He seemed a bit frustrated as I continued with this line of questioning. “No, no, I have only been to fifth grade. I don’t know about these things.” In other words, Miguel expressed that he felt he did not have enough academic background himself to be able to influence decision-making at school on topics such as curriculum choices. I did not, however, draw any conclusions about Miguel’s understanding without hearing his responses.

In discussing the ways that these parents supported their children’s education and the ways that they understood their role in parent involvement, I began to discover that certain influences affect the manner in which the participants engage themselves in their children’s education. None of the themes emerged as bits of information that stood alone. I found that for the participants, each of the major themes were interdependent, often influencing one another and ultimately the overall conceptualization that these participants had of their role in their children’s education.



## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this study were to (a) investigate the conceptualization of low-income Mexican immigrant parents about their parental involvement and the family school connection, (b) identify the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement, and (c) identify the ways that low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education.

I used the following research questions to guide this study:

1. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education?
2. What are the influences on low-income Mexican immigrant parents' approach to parent involvement?
3. How do low-income Mexican immigrant parents understand parent involvement and the family-school connection?

Through semi-structured interviews, I collected qualitative data that provides a better understanding of Mexican-immigrant parents' conceptualization of parental involvement in their children's education. I asked Mexican immigrant parents of middle school students about their parental involvement experiences, their understanding of what parent involvement comprises, and the influences on their parent involvement choices. Further, I asked them about the ways that they support their children's education. The participants were English speaking, Mexican-immigrant parents of students who had attended Midland Middle School during the 2010–2011 school year and were enrolled in the sixth, seventh, or eighth grade.

I chose a qualitative design because it was useful in attempting to gain an in-depth understanding of parent involvement from the point of view of a low-income Mexican immigrant parent. I attempted to uncover the ways that these parents understand and support their children's education that might not readily be recognized by the extant literature or by school personnel. Further, I wanted to understand the influences that may affect the parents' involvement choices from their own perspectives.

From the participants' responses I found three themes in the data: (1) a strong foundation of support that Mexican-immigrant parents provide for their children, (2) specific influences on the parents' approach to involvement in their children's education, and (3) Mexican immigrant parents' specific conceptualization of parent involvement. The results of this study indicate that these themes are interconnected and that each of the themes may influence Mexican immigrant parents concept of parent involvement and the choices that these parents make about how they engage in involvement in their middle school children's education. Additionally, the results of this study indicate that there is a discrepancy between low-income Mexican immigrant parents' specific conceptualization of parent involvement and the school's vision of parent involvement that is driven by national, state, and local district policy as well as mainstream parent involvement research.

The results of this study indicate that parent involvement behaviors, on the other hand, (a) include a large set of behaviors and attitudes that may vary depending on culture or socioeconomic status, (b) do not completely align with the current landscape of research, policy, or the attitudes and beliefs of many educators, and (c) and can be beset with structural barriers as well as more subtle influences. The results of this study provide

empirical data to support data about how Mexican-immigrant parents who can speak English and have been living in the United States for many years conceptualize involvement in their middle school children's education. These findings can be used as a foundation to improve family-school communication to improve teaching and learning at this site.

Since my sample was purposefully specific, including 13 immigrant parents from one specific country of origin who spoke English as a second language, I was able to identify specific characteristics more deeply than have been identified in previous studies that have sampled from a broader range of participants. As my findings indicate, the participants' conceptualization of parental involvement may be very different from other parents, specifically White, middle-class parents. This conceptualization may be based on several factors which can include culture, parent's level of education, English proficiency, and socioeconomic status. In addition, while several of my findings align with concepts from the literature, other findings diverge. Also, the application of parent involvement models aimed at increasing student achievement may not apply to this population of parents.

These results, although specific to the particular site and participants of the study, contribute to the development of a model for understanding parental involvement that may be theoretically transferrable to other Latino immigrant populations and English language learning populations. Educators, policymakers, and researchers may be able to apply this model to improve the design and implementation of parent involvement programs at the local level. Moreover, this study illustrates the need for further research on how policy and program implementation is understood by disenfranchised

populations. Additionally, this study illustrates the need for further research on how policy and program implementation is understood by low-income Mexican immigrant parents as well as other disenfranchised populations. Purposeful selection of candidates for this study permitted looking at a group of participants at a specific point in the acculturation and language acquisition process. By doing so, this study adds to the extant literature specific information that has not been included by researchers who have looked at Mexican Americans as a comprehensive group or at Latinos generally.

### **A Solid Foundation of Support**

All of the parents I spoke to in this study communicated a clear understanding of what it meant to support their children's education. In fact, the participants understood that their support played a large role in their overall conceptualization and that they support their children's education in multiple ways. This indicates that these parents may be supporting their children's education in several ways that are specific to their culture and that these ways may not be recognized by educators and are not generally recognized by the extant mainstream parent involvement literature.

The participants generally saw preparation at home as the main way that they support their children's education. They saw discussions with their children about school in general, including: behavior, motivation, and the monitoring of homework as ways to support their children's education. Discussions between the participating parents and their children about school tended to center on their children's behavior in school and motivating their children to succeed in their education. A child's behavior and the respect that a child demonstrates toward his or her teachers are very important in the Mexican-American culture (Valdes, 1996). Additionally, the parents relayed that they have

continuing discussions with their children about the future, specifically about their dreams and aspirations for their children in the United States. The results of this study provide important information about the ways that many Mexican immigrant parents support their children's education. The findings of this study support some of the findings of other qualitative researchers whom have studied Mexican American families (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Galarza-Hernandez, 2005; Lindsey, 2009; Liska-Carger, 1996; Lopez, 2001; Lopez, & Vasquez, 2006; Valdes, 1996). These measures of support, however, generally remain subtle and may not be readily recognized by the extant literature or by school personnel.

Motivation was an important factor for the parents in discussions with their children. None of the participants related any negativity toward education. In fact, they all drew a connection between their children's education and their children's ability to improve their life circumstances through a good education. Each parent contrasted his or her own life circumstances as a result of being an immigrant to the United States with a lower low level of education and a lower socioeconomic status with the dreams and aspirations that they have for their children. The fathers in this study specifically use discussions comparing their own lives as models for their children not to follow. Mexican immigrant parents often perceive success in the United States to be based on their perception of their own low status in the United States and their desire to prevent their children from experiencing the same barriers that they had experienced as immigrants (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992).

Moreover, the results of this study indicate that monitoring homework is part of the parents' understanding of the way they support their children's education and part of

how parents and schools maintain communication between the home and the school. The way that the participants are able to support their children's education at home, however, may be affected by subtle influences that include their level of education as well as their proficiency in English, which subsequently affects the participants' understanding of their children's academic material.

Although homework can be difficult and frustrating for many families who are not able to provide students with space, time, privacy, or assistance in its completion, the results of this study suggest that homework is an important construct for Mexican American parents. Goldenberg (2004) suggests that homework is a natural and logical form of parent involvement. Further, homework has the advantage that it can include virtually everyone in the household. It differs from other forms of involvement that make it more difficult for parents to participate (Goldenberg, 2004).

These findings are important in that they add subtle information to the extant literature that may be difficult to ascertain, specifically through quantitative studies that are based on preconceived notions and a priori assumptions. Further, these findings add information that may lead to a theoretical framework that includes educational aspirations in the definition of parent involvement.

### **Influences on Low-income Mexican Immigrant Parents' Involvement**

Researchers have studied low-income, minority, Hispanic, and specifically Mexican American parents and found that there are barriers to greater parental involvement inherent in many schools (Galarza Hernandez, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991; Lindsey, 2006; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). The participants in this study indicated that some of the barriers that have been represented in the qualitative

literature with similar populations do not exist to the same extent at Midland Middle School.

In schools with large populations of students who do not speak English, language can pose the most obvious barrier to family involvement (Bermudez, 1993; Lopez, 2001). In addition to barriers caused by language, some of the reasons for the alienation of culturally and linguistically diverse parents from involvement in school are work interference, lack of understanding of the home-school partnership, as well as insensitivity and hostility on the part of school personnel (Bermudez, 1993, Lindsey, 2006, Lopez & Vasquez, 2010). The results of this study indicate that some of the barriers to parental involvement were consistent with the extant research on parental involvement that deals specifically with the Hispanic and Mexican American population (Lindsey, 2006; Lopez, 2001; Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996).

The participants reported that a lack of time and economic factors, including the need to work long hours, child care, and other family obligations may limit their ability to become involved at school to a greater extent. At the same time, when the participants discussed the barriers to involvement in their children's education, they did not indicate that they experienced the same types of structural barriers, including lack of bilingual personnel and translators as well as hostility on the part of some school personnel, as has been indicated by the Latino and Mexican American participants in other qualitative studies. The participants indicated that they were able to communicate with school personnel who are bilingual in Spanish and English as well as with non-Spanish speaking personnel. This indicates that Midland Public Schools has developed a level of

understanding of and service to their Latino population that may not be present in other districts or in other regions of the United States.

This group of 13 participants was purposefully sampled to include English-speaking participants so that the obvious barrier of language would be removed. Further, each of the participants in the sample for this study has lived in the United States for at least 16 years. My findings indicate that even with the removal of language as a barrier, another layer revealed itself as a more subtle influence: their confidence with their proficiency in English and their confidence in their level of education. These parents revealed that they do not feel confident in engaging in the types of parent involvement activities that many researchers would suggest are essential parts of an effective parent involvement program.

Parents who are able to speak English may come to school and speak to the English speaking school personnel in English. They may not, however, be able to communicate in the detailed and nuanced manner needed to maintain a detailed and complex conversation about education. These influences may affect the types of involvement activities that the participants engage in at school and at home as well.

Additionally, I found that some participants have a perception of other parents that may also influence their likelihood to engage in certain activities at school since the participants do not see themselves as part of a cohesive parent-support network. Some of the participants reported that the belief that there is a lack of support from other parents ultimately affects their perception of their ability to be a voice for change. This finding supports research that indicates that although middle-class parents often develop parent



networks that encourage engagement in activities in school, the same is generally not true for low-income parents (Lareau, 1989).

These subtle influences are most likely invisible to many educators. Further, they may be difficult to assess quantitatively, so they are often not present in the mainstream literature. Additionally, these subtle influences are not prevalent in much of the alternative literature that focuses on minority, Hispanic, and even specifically the Mexican American population since most studies draw from a candidate pool that often includes a broader range of parent characteristics than is present in this study. Understanding of the subtle influences derived from the findings of this study, therefore, do not generally inform decisions on the development and implementation of parent involvement policy and programs.

#### **Low-income Mexican Immigrant Parents' Understanding of Parent Involvement**

The participants in this study communicated a specific conceptualization of what parental involvement meant to them. All of the parents favored consistent and continual dialogue with their children's teachers. The results of this study indicate that the parents have little consensus with the proposed parent involvement behaviors that educators and education researchers consider essential parent involvement behaviors. This understanding, however, has little support from the extant mainstream parent involvement literature. In fact, the parents had little consensus with what the mainstream literature indicates are behaviors necessary for effective parental involvement (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009). For example, they had very little understanding of the concept or purpose of the school's parent teacher organization (PTO). Additionally, they had little confidence in their ability to influence decision-making at school. My findings,

on the other hand, correspond with the research that Mexican American parents hold a culturally distinct understanding of their role (Lopez & Vasquez, 2006). Further, Mexican parents do not have different agendas or interests from teachers but understand the home and the school as being corresponding domains and view their roles as being intimately connected (Lopez, 2001). Such an understanding of involvement is not widely circulated in mainstream literature and is rarely recognized by popular typologies. As such they often go unnoticed in the broader parental involvement discourse. This has implications for education practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in the establishment and implementation of parental involvement programs in schools.

My findings on this topic align with the findings of other qualitative researchers who have studied Mexican American parents. Valdes, for example, found that “None of the families knew about PTA, about volunteering to work at the school, or about other ways in which they might become ‘involved’ in their children’s education” (Valdes, 1996, p. 162). Further, Valdes found that the parents interacted with school personnel only on those occasions in which they felt that their children needed intervention or when they were asked to come to the school by the teacher (Valdes, 1996).

### **Discussion**

Some researchers have identified parental involvement as a critical factor in students’ success (Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, & Van Voorhis, 2009; Henderson and Berla, 1994). Although many quantitative researchers have identified a correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, there are certain limitations to these studies. The overriding implication in the mainstream parent involvement literature is that if one were to apply those same principles to another

population that perhaps one would cause change in the target population. We can find correlation in data, but in order for data to be useful to researchers, policymakers and educators in the implementation of programs whose aim is to bring about positive change in a population, there needs to be a causal relationship which has not been established in the parent involvement data. This distinction has led to interpretations of the parent involvement literature that drive much of the parent involvement policy at the national level and subsequently at the state and local levels.

Lack of a clear understanding of the definition of what parent involvement consists of has led to a flawed interpretation of the empirical data. Additionally, the mainstream parent involvement literature that drives the development of parent involvement policy has operationalized a definition of parent involvement that fails to include the voices of minority families. Not all empirical data apply equally to the range of socioeconomic and cultural differences that are found in many of our public schools in the United States, specifically in our urban centers. Parent involvement practice, therefore, generally reflects more mainstream findings and does not address most culturally diverse families. Schools in our urban centers are often required by policy to adopt parent involvement paradigms that do not address the needs of their diverse populations.

As a result, certain parent involvement typologies have been developed that indicate that schools should encourage parents to engage in specific involvement behaviors (Epstein, 2009). Several problems can result in the implementation of the popular parent involvement typologies that have been endorsed by the policymakers at the national, state, and local levels. Generally, the parent involvement policy that has

been prescribed by state and federal governments is based in the research that does not look specifically at the needs of diverse families. These approaches have led to the one-size-fits-all philosophy toward increasing parent involvement. One-size-fits-all approaches to increase parent involvement in schools are not an effective means to engage parents, specifically immigrant and language-minority parents. Although these programs espouse a method of two-way partnership between families and schools, these programs often do not take into account parents' perspectives on involvement in their children's education. Further, programs designed to involve parents in their children's education to a greater extent tend to benefit those families who are already cognizant of academic culture and naturally perform the role expected by school (Carvalho, 2001).

Districts like Midland Public Schools draw from a fairly similar population in terms of ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics that do not fit into the mainstream. Midland Middle School serves as an example where a one-size-fits-all approach to parent involvement is not the answer. Each school district must define its respective needs, resources, and goals to best serve the population of its particular setting. What is highly successful in one community may not fit the needs in another because the trained personnel, fiscal resources, and student needs could differ enormously (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

These programs, therefore, create an automatic disadvantage for families unfamiliar with school culture and are not prepared to meet their expectations (Carvalho, 2001). In the larger discussion of parental involvement, the perspectives of minority parents, specifically Mexican American parents, are often overlooked. Researchers need to examine what appears to be a disinterest in education by Mexican American parents

and propose alternative interpretations for behaviors that school personnel interpret as indifference (Valdes, 1996).

It is clear that a one-size-fits-all approach to the development of parent involvement programs will only lead to the ineffective implementation of programs and fruitless attempts to engage parents in specific activities. Both policy developers and education practitioners at all levels need to understand that differences exist in the way that parents conceptualize their role in parent involvement. Some of these differences may be based in one factor or a combination of factors including culture, language, level of education, or socioeconomic status. While these factors may affect the types and levels at which parents engage in involvement in their children's education, it is incumbent on policymakers as well as educators at all levels to make attempts to become more aware of the population of students and the families that they serve.

Too often, parent involvement programs emphasize the linguistic and cultural differences of Latino households. Along with suggesting ways that schools can become more "family friendly," they emphasize ways that families can be more "school friendly" (Epstein, 2009, p. 11). The problem with this construct is that it fails to recognize the ways that families are already involved in their children's education as well as the rich funds of knowledge they often possess (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992). Further, it reiterates the deficit notion while promoting the belief in the efficacy of schools to triumph over cultural differences (Lopez, 2001). Such efforts reproduce a very narrow conceptualization of involvement that effectively strips parents from their parental role, prescribes preferred roles for parents, and fosters a false belief in the efficacy of involvement (Lopez, 2001).

When parents appear not to be involved in their children's education, it is most likely not due to the fact that they are not supportive (Valdes, 1996). Educators, for the most part, have little understanding of the lives of poor, immigrant families who are struggling to survive. Their vision of home life includes a view of a typical middle class family (Lareau, 1989). For many educators and policymakers, Mexican parents must be helped to become involved in their children's education; they must be taught how to help their children to succeed in American schools (Valdes, 1996). The evidence in favor of interceding in families to increase parental involvement seems powerful. Research conducted for over three decades has persuaded many policymakers and practitioners that school success is caused by particular parent behaviors and values. As a result, there is a desire in the education mainstream to intermedicate in the lives of families to increase involvement. Often parent involvement is portrayed as a type of subcontracting or outsourcing, in which educators provide families with tasks to support the school (Graue and Hawkins, 2009). Parent involvement remains a one-way relationship. Schools limit themselves to telling parents what they want or what they should do. This does not take advantage of the rich experiences and knowledge that every family brings with them to a child's education. Nor does it respond to what all families need and want from schools (Graue and Hawkins, 2009).

Parental involvement policy and school personnel often seek to "fix" families so that they are more amenable to the school's agenda. Rather, public schools with large populations from specific ethnicities should make attempts to understand their specific populations, find out what strengths exist, and capitalize on them.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

There are several recommendations that can be made for the development and implementation of parent involvement policy and practice at Midland Middle School so that parent involvement programs are developed in a manner that is cognizant of the linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences among families in schools. These recommendations may be theoretically transferrable to other districts with large Latino immigrant populations and language minority populations.

School personnel need to develop programs that no longer continue to engage families solely in one-way relationships with schools. The intentions of mainstream parent involvement programs are to provide equal access for all parents to involvement in their children's education. Since there are several factors that can affect parents' ability to gain access, schools need to consider equity as a goal of a comprehensive family-school relationship. Schools, specifically with large low-income Latino populations, need to develop responsive parent involvement programs that are sensitive to the specific needs of that population. Additionally, a meaningful two-way relationship should include an effort on the part of school personnel to take advantage of the rich experiences and knowledge that every family brings with them to their child's education (Graue & Hawkins, 2009).

Parent involvement policy emphasizes the concept that school personnel should attempt to include parents' perspective in decision-making. The parents in this study expressed that serving on school committees or volunteering in the school are concepts that they have little familiarity with or interest in. The participants were more interested in communications with the school that have a direct effect on their own children.

Connecting with Latino parents sends a strong message. School personnel often label parents as “problematic” or “hard to reach.” This construct places the burden of communicating and getting involved on the parents themselves. Parents can be intimidated by experiences in school due to level of education, proficiency in English, and lack of experience with such matters. School personnel need to build these connections. Just as educators need to share with parents what is happening in the school, they also need to learn about the child’s experiences in the family (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Reaching out to the Latino community is a matter of building trust as a platform for creating sustained collaborations with parents. Latino families need to know that educators are interested in meeting their needs and are respectful of their language and cultural differences (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

School personnel need to reach out to parents in a language they understand, especially when the majority of families’ home language is not English. School personnel should be willing to reach out to parents in their native language. If certain personnel are not able to do so, districts need to employ personnel who can assist in the completion this task. Bilingual personnel should be employed, where possible, in key places in the school such as main office and security personnel.

The participants in this study indicated that they support their children’s education in several ways and that they value continual open communication with their children’s teachers as well as other school personnel. The participants’ responses and triangulation of the data indicate that parent-teacher conferences are very well attended in the Midland Public Schools. For many parents, however, their communication with school personnel is limited to the parent-teacher conference. Midland Middle School



personnel should capitalize on the parents' interest in communication and engage in more continual and sustained communication.

The main goals of parent involvement programs are to share information between parents and schools and to sustain that avenue of communication. Communication from school should begin with positive messages. These positive exchanges may result in more successful exchanges later in the year. Several of the parents indicated that much of their communication with school personnel was related to their child's academic performance, lack of homework or behavior, specifically their child's poor performance in school. Teachers and other school personnel should not wait until it is necessary to contact a parent for a negative reason such as disciplinary action or news related to poor student achievement.

The parents in this study indicated that they would like information made readily available to them. School personnel should not rely on parents to initiate finding information through places such as the school or district website. Although electronic publication of information through a website seems the most efficient means of information dissemination, the parents in this study expressed concerns related to equality and equity of access for all parents. Additionally, this means of broadcast places the burden of involvement on the parents.

Several parents consider telephone calls an effective means to reach them to disseminate information. Midland Middle School should consider having bilingual personnel call parents when specific important information is to be disseminated rather than relying on students to hand-carry the information home in a flyer. Additionally,

districts should consider the parents' level of education when sending home information in writing.

For many schools the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) is the accepted structure for parent-school communication. It is the official structure through which parents can influence the culture and organization of schools (Pérez-Carreón, Drake, & Barton, 2005). One of the main purposes of the PTO, however, is fundraising for the school. The first encounter with the PTO in many cases is for the collection of dues. Fundraising may have the tendency to disengage a low-income population. The PTO or PTA is not an effective means of disseminating information for this reason.

Rather than relying on the PTO to drive many parent-involvement activities, Midland Middle School and schools with low-income Latino populations should consider another form of parent group such as a parent support group or a parent empowerment group as an alternative to a PTO. Alternate options to the PTO are necessary to create avenues for the dissemination of information (Graue and Hawkins, 2009). In the development of parent-involvement programs, school personnel need to recognize that different groups of people need different types of information and that needs are not only individual, but also cultural. School personnel should attempt to engage parents in things that are of interest to them. The district may consider holding bilingual focus groups with a sample of Latino and Mexican American parents to find out parents' concerns about the school, topics for discussion that might meet their specific needs or interest them, as well as what they feel are the best ways to be connected to school. Meetings that focus on topics that parents indicated are of interest to them can be scheduled. Topics for

discussion should include ways to maximize opportunities for their own children to achieve their potential.

A parent support group or a parent empowerment group, rather than solely supporting the mission of the school, should focus on topics that are of interest to these parents. This group should share critical information with parents about learning opportunities that are available to their children. Topics might include extra curricular activities, high school program options such as magnet schools, college preparatory programs, or vocational school opportunities. Increasingly, middle school is the time when families begin to collect information about opportunities that are available for their children at the high school level to prepare them for their future. Generally, immigrant parents did not attend high school in the United States. Often, low-income immigrant parents did not attend high school at all. Little is known by these parents about opportunities for college and career preparation in U.S. schools.

Midland Public Schools has an adult school that teaches non-credit classes in English as a second language as well as preparation for GED. The classes are offered at an adult school located at the district board offices. The participants in this study indicated that time, transportation, and childcare are structural barriers they experience. Midland Public Schools and other districts should consider offering these classes in additional locations, specifically at the neighborhood schools. Parents may choose not to enroll in formal classes due to the time commitment that is often required. Midland Public Schools should consider offering less formal English classes. These classes could be held in the local schools in the morning after drop-off time in the morning or just

before or after pick-up time in the afternoons. Many parents are already at school dropping off or picking up their children.

The participants in this study expressed their interest in helping with homework, yet they experienced frustration in not being able to effectively assist their children. The mainstream parent involvement paradigm endorses teaching parents how to help with homework. Given the fact that several of the participants indicated that they had not attended school past the sixth grade, attempts at training parents to assist with the completion of homework would be both unfair and fruitless.

In this study Midland Public schools has partnered with an agency of the City of Midland to provide an after-school program in its nine elementary schools. First, a program of this type should be extended to the middle-school site. Additionally, the general focus of this program is to provide students with homework assistance. Parents generally come to the program to pick up their children each day sometime before the program closes. There is no attempt to engage parents in this program.

The after-school program should be open to parents as a homework center so that parents can engage in homework assistance rather than it being just an after-care program. It should be a supervised place to complete homework before and after school where parents are welcome. It should be staffed by bilingual educators. Additionally, a homework hotline staffed with bilingual personnel to assist with homework should be established so that parents can assist with homework at home as well. Further, classes should be offered for homework help on topics that are specific to their children's homework.

School personnel need to develop strategies to remove structural barriers to greater parent involvement, specifically if the goal of their parent involvement program is to have parents physically present in school. Transportation, child care, and conflicts with work schedules are barriers that can be easily ameliorated by expanding the hours that school personnel are available to meet with parents for a variety of reasons. Midland Public Schools and other districts might consider revising contracts so that school personnel can be available certain mornings, afternoons, and evenings before and after school for additional times when personnel are available to communicate with parents.

Personnel at Midland Public Schools as well as many other school districts may not be aware that transportation is as specific a structural barrier as has been identified by the participants of this study. While costly, Midland Public Schools and other districts should consider including transportation for families in its budget for specific parent involvement activities.

### **Future Research**

In conducting this study, I sought to gain a better understanding of the parent involvement experiences of low-income Mexican-immigrant parents at Midland Middle School. The findings from this study provide important information that can inform policymakers and education professionals in gaining a better understanding of this group. This information can help educators to design more effective parent involvement programs. To accomplish this, however, more research is needed in this area.

It is important to conduct additional qualitative studies to continue to inform policymakers and educators about the diverse needs of all students and families. Moll and Diaz (1987) state that ongoing ethnography to inform teaching could be an

invaluable tool in teaching rather than something reserved for anthropologists and researchers (p. 31).

Some researchers have studied Mexican American participants from regions of the United States such as the Midwest; however, most research with Mexican American participants is conducted in Southern California or Texas. This study is the only study that has looked specifically at the experiences of Mexican-immigrant parents who have immigrated to the Northeast. As Mexican Americans continue to move to different regions of the United States, specifically regions that have not experienced Mexican immigration in great numbers, additional perspectives are needed. This knowledge will contribute to the development of a theory of Mexican American parent involvement. Conducting studies in different regions will add to the development of a comprehensive parent involvement theory.

A longitudinal study that looks at the qualitative effects of parent involvement in the Mexican American community has not been completed to date. A study of this nature will provide important information about developmental aspects of parent involvement over time. This knowledge will also contribute to the development of a comprehensive theory of Mexican American parent involvement.

### **Concluding Comments**

My purposeful selection of candidates for this study permitted me to look at a group of participants at a specific point in the acculturation and language acquisition process. By doing so, I have added specific information to the literature that has not been included by researchers who have looked at Mexican Americans as a comprehensive group or even at Latinos generally. Further, these findings add information that may lead

to a theoretical framework that includes additional understanding of parent involvement behaviors and a more comprehensive definition of parent involvement. This study points out the need for more qualitative studies that look at the acculturation and language acquisition process and its effect on parent involvement for this group and other ethnic and language groups as well. Exploring the different characteristics of acculturation and language acquisition may also contribute to a further understanding of how these factors may influence parent involvement.

I believe that the specificity with which I have examined one particular group lends strength to the findings of this study. Studies across different Latino subgroups as well as other language minority groups are recommended. Too often the experiences of Latinos have been painted with a broad brush. Understanding the specific experiences and characteristics of specific categories of parents may inform policymakers and assist school personnel in the development of more appropriate parent involvement programs.

When I think back to the parents in the school where I teach, the parents that I see every morning and at dismissal time in and around the school, the parents that I meet with quarterly for conferences, and the fathers waiting on the sidewalk for their teenage children, I realize that like most educators, I had very little understanding of their lives, their struggles, or their involvement in their children's education. In conducting this study I met families who were struggling, adapting to a culture different from their own, and working hard so that they could bring about the best future for their children that they could possibly achieve.

Miguel, Marisol, Evelyn, Lidia, Luis and Gethsemane, Juan and Sophia, and Lucas and Maria invited me into their homes to tell me their stories. Together, we were

able to recount part of the parent involvement experiences of the ten families that I studied. As a result, I found that I have a much different story to tell. My story is different from the researchers who have informed the policy that dictates how education professionals around the nation are charged with the task of getting parents more involved. I learned that parent involvement is not always exactly what policy tells us it should be. Its comprehensive definition still remains elusive. It is, however, framed by many types of influences: parents' view of their roles in their children's education, the goals that parents have for their children, and the opportunities provided by school personnel for involvement.



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**Appendix A**  
**IRB: Informed Consent Form in English**

# SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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## INFORMED CONSENT

### **Researcher's Affiliation**

The researcher in charge of this study is Thomas Crane, a teacher in the New Brunswick Public Schools, but not in the school where the children of the participant's attend. He is a doctoral student at Seton Hall University.

### **Purpose of the Research Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn about Mexican American parents' involvement in their child's education and how their ideas can be used to help improve family and school communication.

### **Research Procedures**

Participants will be asked to take part in a 1 hour interview. The interview will take place away from the school at the public meeting room in the New Brunswick Public Library. Questions will be about how parents are involved in their middle school children's education. The types of questions asked will be: (1) Describe for me what you do at home to prepare your children for school. (2) Are you involved in any activities in school? Can you describe how? (3) Describe how the school could make it easier for you to become involved in activities at school. If the participants agree, the interview will be audio taped.

### **Voluntary Nature of Participation**

Participants have the right to choose to be a part this study. They also have the right to choose not to be part of this study and nothing bad will happen if they choose not to be a part of this study. Participants may choose not to answer any question that they do not feel comfortable responding to.

### **Confidentiality**

Participants' privacy will be kept by not using names when reporting; and by keeping information and data protected. Participant's names will not be shared with the teachers of the principal of the school.

### **Confidentiality and Storage of Records**

All information and data will be kept locked in a safe location by the researcher for three years. All of the participants' information will be kept private and only Thomas Crane will have access to the information. After three years, the audiotapes will be destroyed.

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2012

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Educational Studies  
Tel. 973.761.9394  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Approval Date

**Risks and Discomforts:**

There are no known risks or discomforts caused by taking part in this research beyond those of everyday life.

**Benefits:**

Although participants do not receive any direct benefit from taking part, this research may assist the school in educating its students.

**Contact Information:**

If you have questions or concerns, you may contact the researcher, Thomas Crane at cranetho@shu.edu or the faculty sponsor, Dr. Rebecca Cox at rebecca.Cox@shu.edu or 973-275-2861. For questions about your rights as a research participant or questions regarding the research, you may contact the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, by email at irb@shu.edu or by phone at (973) 313-6314.

**Audio Tape Approval**

Participants will be audio taped during the interview. Tapes will be given numbers and only the researcher will know the name of the person being interviewed on each tape. After each interview, the researcher will type up the interview questions and answers. Only the number will be written on the transcriptions. Only the researcher will listen to and use the audiotapes. Participants have the right to listen to the audiotape and ask that any or all portions of it be destroyed. The researcher will take written notes during interviews of subjects not wishing to be audio taped.

**Copy of Informed Consent:**

Participants will receive a signed copy of this Informed Consent to keep.

-----  
I \_\_\_\_\_ have read the material above, and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to be part of this activity understanding that I may take myself out of this study at any time, and nothing bad will happen if I choose not to be a part of this study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ /2011

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2012

**Appendix B**  
**IRB: Informed Consent Form in Spanish**

# SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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## CONSENTIMIENTO FUNDAMENTADO

### Afiliación del investigador

El investigador a cargo de este estudio es Thomas Crane, un maestro del sistema escolar público de New Brunswick, pero no de la escuela donde están matriculados los hijos de los participantes. Él es un estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad Seton Hall.

### Propósito del estudio de investigación

El propósito de este estudio es aprender acerca de la participación de los padres mexicanos americanos en la educación de sus hijos y cómo sus ideas se pueden usar para ayudar a mejorar la comunicación entre la familia y la escuela.

### Procedimientos de la investigación

A los participantes se les pedirá que tomen parte en una entrevista de una hora. Dicha entrevista se realizará fuera de la escuela en el salón de reuniones público de la Biblioteca Pública de New Brunswick. Se les harán preguntas a los padres sobre cómo participan en la educación de sus hijos en la escuela intermedia. Los tipos de preguntas serán: (1) Describame qué hace en su hogar para preparar a sus hijos para la escuela. (2) ¿Participa usted en actividades de la escuela? ¿Me puede decir cómo participa? (3) Describa cómo la escuela podría hacerle más fácil que pueda involucrarse en actividades de la escuela. Si los participantes están de acuerdo, la entrevista puede grabarse en audio.

### Naturaleza voluntaria de participación

Los participantes tienen el derecho a escoger ser parte de este estudio. También tienen derecho a no ser parte de este estudio y no les pasará nada malo si así lo deciden. Los participantes pueden escoger no contestar a las preguntas que no se sientan cómodos contestando.

### Confidencialidad

Se mantendrá la privacidad de los participantes de las siguientes maneras: no se usarán nombres cuando se hagan los informes y se mantendrá protegida la información recopilada. Los nombres de los participantes no se compartirán ni con los maestros ni con la principal de la escuela.

### La confidencialidad y el almacenamiento de los récords

El investigador mantendrá toda la información y todos los datos bajo llave en un sitio seguro durante tres años. Toda la información de los participantes se mantendrá privada y la única persona que tendrá acceso a ella será Thomas Crane. Pasados esos tres años, se destruirán las cintas de audio.

Expiration Date  
MAY 12 2012

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

Approval Date

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Educational Studies  
Tel. 973.761.9394  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

**Riesgos y molestias:**

No se conocen riesgos ni molestias que causados por tomar parte en esta investigación aparte de los de la vida cotidiana.

**Beneficios:**

Aunque los participantes no reciben beneficios directos por participar, esta investigación puede ayudar a la escuela en la educación de sus estudiantes.

**Información de contacto:**

Si usted tiene dudas o preguntas, puede comunicarse con el investigador, Thomas Crane, a: cranetho@shu.edu o con la patrocinadora de la facultad, la Dra. Rebecca Cox, a: rebecca.Cox@shu.edu o (973) 275-2861. Para preguntas sobre sus derechos como participante o preguntas sobre la investigación, puede comunicarse con la Junta Evaluadora Institucional de la Universidad Seton Hall en 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079, por correo electrónico a: irb@shu.edu o por teléfono al (973) 313-6314.

**Autorización para cintas de audio:**

Durante la entrevista con los participantes, se harán grabaciones en audio. Se le asignarán números a las cintas y solamente el investigador sabrá el nombre de la persona entrevistada en cada cinta. Después de cada entrevista, el investigador transcribirá a máquina las preguntas y contestaciones de la entrevista. Solo se escribirá el número en las transcripciones. Solo el investigador escuchará y usará las cintas de audio. Los participantes tienen derecho de escuchar las cintas y pedir que se destruyan ciertas partes de ellas. El investigador tomará notas, por escrito, durante las entrevistas de las personas que no deseen ser grabados en audio.

**Copia del consentimiento fundamentado:**

Se le entregará a cada participante una copia firmada de este consentimiento fundamentado para que lo guarde en sus archivos personales.

---

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_, he leído el material que aparece anteriormente y se me han contestado las preguntas a mi entera satisfacción. Estoy de acuerdo en ser parte de esta actividad con el entendimiento de que puedo retractarme de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento y no me pasará nada malo si opto por no participar en este estudio.

Nombre (escrito a mano) Firma

Fecha: / /2011

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2012



**Appendix C**  
**Agreement to be Audio Taped Form in English**

# SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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## AGREEMENT TO BE AUDIO TAPED

I \_\_\_\_\_ agree to be audio taped as a participant for an interview in the study titled "Understanding Parental Involvement in Low-income Mexican Immigrant Parents in Middle School Students Education."

I understand that tapes will be given numbers and only the researcher will know the name of the person being interviewed on each tape. After each interview, the researcher will type up the interview questions and answers. Only the number will be written on the transcriptions. Only the researcher will listen to and use the audiotapes. Participants have the right to listen to the audiotape and ask that any or all portions of it be destroyed.

I agree to be part of this activity understanding that I may take myself out of this study at any time, and nothing bad will happen if I choose not to be a part of this study.

-----  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ /2011

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2012

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Educational Studies  
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400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Appendix D  
Agreement to be Audio Taped Form in Spanish

# SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

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## ACUERDO PARA GRABACIÓN DE AUDIO

Yo, \_\_\_\_\_ estoy de acuerdo en que se haga una grabación en audio cuando participe en la entrevista del estudio titulado "Estudio sobre la participación de los padres mexicanos que provienen de hogares de bajo ingreso en la educación de los estudiantes de escuela intermedia".

Se me ha informado que se les asignará números a las cintas de audio y solamente el investigador sabrá el nombre de la persona entrevistada en cada cinta. Después de cada entrevista, el investigador transcribirá las preguntas y contestaciones de la entrevista. La transcripción de la entrevista, solo se identificará por el número. El investigador es la única persona que escuchará y usará las cintas de audio. Cada participante tienen el derecho de escuchar a la cinta de su entrevista y pedir que se destruyan partes de la misma.

Convengo en ser parte de esta actividad, con el entendimiento de que puedo salirme del estudio en cualquier momento y de que no me pasará nada malo si opto por no ser parte de este estudio.

Nombre (escrito en letra de molde)

Firma

Fecha: \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ /2011

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAY 12 2011

Approval Date

Expiration Date

MAY 12 2012

College of Education and Human Services  
Department of Educational Studies  
Tel. 973.761.9394  
400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079-2685

Appendix E  
Protecting Human Subjects Certificate



### **Certificate of Completion**

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Thomas Crane** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants".

Date of completion: 05/06/2010

Certification Number: 444110

Appendix F  
District Approval to Conduct Research



# NEW BRUNSWICK BOARD OF EDUCATION

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268 Baldwin Street  
P.O. Box 2683  
NEW BRUNSWICK, NEW JERSEY 08903-2683  
Phone: (732) 745-5300, ext. 5414 – Fax: (732) 745-5459

**RICHARD M. KAPLAN**  
*Superintendent of Schools*

April 6, 2011

Thomas B. Crane  
213 Midland Avenue  
Metuchen, New Jersey 08840

**Re: *Conducting a Study***

Dear Thomas Crane,

This letter confirms that you have permission to conduct your study, "Understanding Parental Involvement of Mexican Immigrant Parents in Middle School Students' Education" at New Brunswick Public Schools between April and December 2011 for your dissertation research at Seton Hall University.

I understand that you plan to interview parents of students who attend New Brunswick Middle School.

New Brunswick Public Schools' participation in this study is, of course, contingent upon your approval from Seton Hall University's Institutional Review Board; and parents' participation will require their informed consent.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "RMK", written over a large, stylized circular flourish.

Richard M. Kaplan  
Superintendent of Schools

RMK/dil





Appendix G  
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Participating Subjects in English

## SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPATING SUBJECTS

1. How do you support your children's achievement in school? Describe for me what you do.
2. Describe how you monitor your children's progress in school.
3. Describe for me what you do at home to prepare your children for school.
4. Describe how school is discussed with your children.
5. Describe any ways that you influence the decisions that are made at school.
6. Describe how the teachers or anyone else encourages you to monitor your children's progress in school.
7. Are you involved in any activities at school? Can you describe how?
8. Describe how the school encourages you to become involved in activities at school.
9. Do you feel that you are able to influence any decisions that are made at school?
10. Describe any ways that the school encourages you to become involved in the decisions that are made at school.
11. Describe some of the things that make it difficult for you to be more involved in your children's education. For example, describe a time when you wish that you could have been more involved, but for some reason you had a difficult time.
12. Say you had a problem or a question that you would like to address with a teacher or someone at school, describe what it was like to go into your children's school.
13. Describe ways that the school could make it easier for you to know what is going on at school?
14. Think of a time when you tried to help your child with their homework what were some things that prevented you from helping?
15. Describe how the teachers encourage you to be involved with and help your children with their homework.
16. Describe how the school could make it easier to become involved in activities at school.
17. Describe any ways that the school could make it easier for you to become involved in the decisions that are made at school.

Appendix H  
Semi-structured Interview Questions for Participating Subjects in Spanish

## PREGUNTAS SEMI ESTRUCTURADAS PARA LA ENTREVISTA PARA LOS SUJETOS PARTICIPANTES

1. ¿Cómo apoya usted los logros de sus hijos en la escuela? Describame lo que usted hace.
2. Describa como monitorea el progreso de sus hijos en la escuela.
3. Describame que es lo que hace usted en su casa para preparar a sus hijos para la escuela.
4. Describa como discute usted la escuela con sus hijos
5. Describa cualquier forma en la que usted tiene alguna influencia en las decisiones que se toman en la escuela.
6. Describa como los maestros o cualquier otra persona lo alienta a monitorear el progreso de sus hijos en la escuela.
7. ¿Está usted involucrado en cualquier actividad en la escuela? ¿Puede describir cómo?
8. Describa como lo alienta la escuela para que se involucre en las actividades que se llevan a cabo en ella.
9. ¿Siente usted que tiene la habilidad de influenciar las decisiones que se toman en la escuela?
10. Describa las maneras en que la escuela lo anima a involucrarse en las decisiones que se toman en ella.
11. Describa algunas de las cosas que hacen difícil que usted se involucre más en la educación de sus hijos. Por ejemplo, describa algún momento en el que usted deseo poderse involucrar más, pero por alguna razón le fue difícil hacerlo.
12. Digamos que usted tuvo un problema o una pregunta que le gustaría tratar con el maestro o con alguien en la escuela, describa como fue ir a la escuela de sus hijos.
13. Describa las maneras en que la escuela pudiera facilitar el que usted se mantenga informado acerca de las cosas que pasan en la escuela.
14. Piense en un momento en el que usted trato de ayudar a sus hijos con sus tareas, ¿Qué cosas evitaron que usted les ayudara?
15. Describa como los maestros lo animan a involucrarse con y a ayudar a sus hijos con sus tareas.
16. Describa como la escuela podría facilitar el que usted se involucre en actividades en la escuela.

17. Describa cualquier manera en que la escuela podría facilitar el que usted se involucre en las decisiones que se toman en ella.

Appendix I  
Midland Public Schools Parent Involvement Policy



2415.04 PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

A school district that receives Title I funds must implement programs, activities and procedures for the involvement of parents in programs assisted by Title I funding. The district will reserve not less than one percent of its allocation under subpart 2 to carry out these requirements, which shall include promoting family literacy and parenting skills. Parents of pupils receiving Title I services shall be involved in the decisions regarding how funds will be allotted for parental involvement activities. The district is not required to reserve at least one percent of its allocation under Subpart 2 if the one percent of the district's allocation is \$5,000.00 or less.

Each school served with Title I funds shall jointly develop with, and distribute to, parents of participating pupils, this parental involvement policy, agreed on by such parents, that shall describe the means for carrying out the requirements of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, §1119(a) through (f). Parents will be notified of this policy in an understandable and uniform format and, to the extent practicable, provided in a language the parents can understand. This policy shall be made available to the local community and updated periodically to meet the changing needs of parents and schools within the district.

“Parent”, for the purposes of this policy, means a parent and/or legal guardian. “School”, for the purposes of this policy, is a specific school in a Target Assistance Title I program or schools within the district in a school-wide Title I program.

Policy Involvement

Each school served with Title I funds will:

1. Convene an annual meeting, at a convenient time, to which all parents of participating pupils shall be invited and encouraged to attend, to inform parents of their school's participation and the requirements of this Policy, and the right of the parents to be involved;
2. Offer a flexible number of meetings, such as meetings in the morning or evening, and may provide, with Title I funds, transportation, child care, or home visits, as such services relate to parental involvement;
3. Involve parents, in an organized, ongoing, and timely way, in the planning, review, and improvement of programs, including the planning, review, and improvement of the school parental involvement policy and the joint development of the school-wide program plan under NCLB, §1114(b)(2);
4. Provide parents of participating pupils:
  - a. timely information about programs required by NCLB, §1118;
  - b. a description and explanation of the curriculum in use at the school, the forms of



## POLICY MANUAL

## NEW BRUNSWICK BOARD OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM  
2415.04/page 2 of 4  
Title I – Parental Involvement

academic assessment used to measure student progress, and the proficiency levels students are expected to meet; and

- c. if requested by parents, opportunities for regular meetings to formulate suggestions and to participate, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children, and respond to any such suggestions as soon as practicably possible; and
5. Submit any parent comments on the plan when the school makes the plan available to the Board of Education, if the school-wide program plan under §1114(b)(2) of NCLB is not satisfactory to the parents of participating pupils.

### Shared Responsibilities For High Student Academic Achievement

Each school served by Title I funds shall jointly develop with parents of all pupils served with Title I funds, a school-parent compact that outlines how parents, the entire school staff, and students will share the responsibility for improved student academic achievement and the means by which the school and parents will build and develop a partnership to help children achieve the State's high standards. The compact will:

1. Describe the school's responsibility to provide high-quality curriculum and instruction in a supportive and effective learning environment that enables the pupils served by Title I funds to meet the State's student academic achievement standards, and the ways in which each parent will be responsible for supporting their children's learning, such as monitoring attendance, homework completion, and television watching; volunteering in their child's classroom; and participating, as appropriate, in decisions relating to the education of their children and positive use of extracurricular time; and
2. Address the importance of communication between teachers and parents on an ongoing basis through, at a minimum:
  - a. parent-teacher conferences in elementary schools, at least annually, during which the compact shall be discussed as the compact relates to the individual pupil's achievement;
  - b. frequent reports to parents on their children's progress; and
  - c. reasonable access to staff, opportunities to volunteer and participate in their child's class, and observation of classroom activities.

### Building Capacity For Involvement

To ensure effective involvement of parents and to support a partnership among the school involved, parents, and the community to improve student academic achievement, each school and school district assisted with Title I funds:





## POLICY MANUAL

## NEW BRUNSWICK BOARD OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM  
2415.04/page 3 of 4  
Title I – Parental Involvement

1. Shall provide assistance to parents of pupils served by the school in understanding such topics as the State's academic content standards and State student academic achievement standards, State and local academic assessments, the requirements of this Policy, and how to monitor a child's progress and work with educators to improve the achievement of their children;
2. Shall provide materials and training to help parents to work with their children to improve their children's achievement, such as literacy training and using technology, as appropriate, to foster parental involvement;
3. Shall educate teachers, pupil services personnel, Building Principals, and other staff, with the assistance of parents, in the value and utility of contributions of parents, and in how to reach out to, communicate with, and work with parents as equal partners, implement and coordinate parent programs, and build ties between parents and the school;
4. Shall, to the extent feasible and appropriate, coordinate and integrate parent involvement programs and activities with Head Start, Reading First, Early Reading First, Even Start, the Home Instruction Programs for Preschool Youngsters, the Parents as Teachers Program, and public preschool and other programs, and conduct other activities, such as parent resource centers, that encourage and support parents to more fully participate in the education of their children;
5. Shall ensure that information related to school and parent programs, meetings, and other activities is sent to the parents of participating children in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language the parents can understand;
6. May involve parents in the development of training for teachers, Principals, and other educators to improve the effectiveness of such training;
7. May provide necessary literacy training from Title I funds if the school district has exhausted all other reasonably available sources of funding for such training;
8. May pay reasonable and necessary expenses associated with local parental involvement activities, including transportation and child care costs, to enable parents to participate in school-related meetings and training sessions;
9. May train parents to enhance the involvement of other parents;
10. May arrange school meetings at a variety of times, or conduct in-home conferences between teachers or other educators, who work directly with participating children, with parents who are unable to attend such conferences at school, in order to maximize parental involvement and participation;
11. May adopt and implement model approaches to improving parental involvement;
12. May establish a district-wide parent advisory council to provide advice on all matters related to parental involvement in Title I programs;



## POLICY MANUAL

## NEW BRUNSWICK BOARD OF EDUCATION

PROGRAM  
2415.04/page 4 of 4  
Title I – Parental Involvement

13. May develop appropriate roles for community-based organizations and businesses in parent involvement activities; and
14. Shall provide such other reasonable support for parental involvement activities under this Policy as parents may request.

### Accessibility

In carrying out the parental involvement requirements of NCLB, §1118 and this Policy, the school and school district, to the extent practicable, shall provide full opportunities for the participation of parents with limited English proficiency, parents with disabilities, and parents of migratory children, to include providing information and school reports required under NCLB, §1111 in a format and, to the extent practicable, in a language such parents understand.

The district will inform parents of any parental information and resource centers that provide training, information, and support to parents and individuals who work with local parents, school districts, and schools receiving Title I funds.

The Superintendent of Schools will submit this Policy to the New Jersey Department of Education for review to be sure the Policy meets the requirements of NCLB, §1118.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, §1118

Adopted: 18 May 2004

Revised: 15 May 2007

## Appendix J Code Book Sample

Appendix J  
Code Book

Understanding Parental Involvement of Low-Income Mexican Immigrant Parents in Middle School Students Education

<b>Label</b>	<b>Barriers</b>
<b>Definition</b>	A structural or psychological impediment or obstacle.
<b>General Description</b>	Parents have a general understanding that they could have increased levels of involvement at home or at school and that there are specific reasons why their involvement is lessened.
<b>Description of inclusion and exclusion</b>	<p><b>Inclusion</b> -For a set of data to qualify for this code there must be the mention of some type of impediment or obstacle to greater involvement. two or more teachers working together or not working together. During the interview, teachers may discuss methods of communicating with each other both verbally or in written form.</p> <p><b>Exclusion</b>- For a set of data to be excluded from this code, there is no mention of a barrier or impediment to parent involvement activities.</p>
<b>Examples</b>	“ Sometimes I don’t have time in the daytime to go to school. Because my day off I have things to do. My day is busy.”
<b>Sub-codes</b>	<p><b>Structural Barriers</b> which may include Economic Factors such as time due to work scheduling conflicts or the cost of transportation or childcare or actions inactions of school personnel or other parents as well as obstacles that may be institutionalized.</p> <p><b>Subtle Barriers</b> which include a lack of confidence that results from the participants’ self-perception that their proficiency in English and that their level of education is not good enough for effective participation in parent involvement activities.</p>

Label	Structural Barriers
Definition	An impediment or obstacle to greater involvement that results from the actions of school personnel, or institutionalized factors such as the economy.
General Description	All schools have factors that impede greater parental involvement. Minority and low-income parents often experience additional obstacles to greater involvement that are often economic.
Description of inclusion and exclusion	<p>Inclusion- For a set of data to qualify for this code the participant mentions an external factor that causes him/her to be less involved s/he would like to be of which s/he feels s/he has little control over.</p> <p>Exclusion- For a set of data to be excluded from this code the participant makes no mention an external factor that causes him/her to be less involved or the factor is related to self-perception such as the participant's self assessment of his or her skills in English or level of education.</p>
Examples	"I'm going to say, my situation the economy is a little tight now. I pay a taxi like five dollars each way."
Sub-codes	<p>Economic Factors – Factors such as time due to work scheduling conflicts or the cost of transportation or childcare.</p> <p>Perception of Other Parents – Parents have a belief that other parents are not supportive of parent involvement efforts on the part of the school personnel or other parents.</p>

Label	Subtle Barriers
Definition	A psychological impediment or obstacle that results from ones' own self-assessment of one's own abilities.
General Description	The participants generally shared a self assessment of their ability to speak English as well as their level of education. This perception, or self-assessment, may be an internal obstacle to greater involvement in their children's education.
Description of inclusion and exclusion	<p>Inclusion- For a set of data to qualify for this code the participant mentions an internal factor that causes him/her to be less involved s/he would like to be such as the participant's self assessment of his or her skills in English or level of education.</p> <p>Exclusion- For a set of data to be excluded from this code the participant makes no mention an internal factor that causes him/her to be less involved or the factor is an external factor over which the participant feels s/he has no control over.</p>
Examples	"I have only been to fifth grade. I don't know about these things."
Sub-codes	<p>Lack of confidence with English – Participants feel that they are not able to assist in the completion of homework or effectively communicate their point of view at school.</p> <p>Lack of confidence with their level of education – Participants feel that they are not able to assist in the completion of homework or effectively communicate their point of view at school because of their level of education.</p>

Label	Support
Definition	The means by which parents supply the physical and psychological resources needed to avail in their child's education.
General Description	Parents engage in a variety of activities at home and at school that supply the physical and psychological resources needed to assist in their child's education.
Description of inclusion and exclusion	<p>Inclusion- For a set of data to qualify for this code the transcript must highlight the manner in which parents supply physical and psychological resources for their children's education.</p> <p>Exclusion- For a set of data to be excluded from this code, there is no mention of the child's education, achievement, or future; or activities or behaviors that relate to the child's education or achievement.</p>
Examples	"In my house we speak much about school. Everyday I share the things from school with my kids. "
Sub-codes	<p>Home Preparation – Parents who discuss school with their children which includes behavior, respect, motivation, and future dreams and aspirations; Parents who monitor homework completion and attempt to assist in its completion.</p> <p>Physical Presence at School - Parents who attend parent teacher conferences and monitor the progress of their children at school.</p>

Label	Understanding of Parental Involvement
Definition	Understanding of the School Personnel's Efforts to Increase Parental Involvement
General Description	The participants generally have different understandings of the school personnel's efforts to increase parental involvement than is found in most of the mainstream literature. These understandings may involve formal school sanctioned venues or may illustrate a divergence from the mainstream activities which may include serving on an advisory committee.
Description of inclusion and exclusion	<p>Inclusion- for a set of data to qualify for this code the participant must allude to their understanding of their role in parental involvement at the school, or the school personnel's efforts to Increase Parental Involvement which may include a divergence from what is considered mainstream.</p> <p>Exclusion- A set of data will be excluded from this code if the participant makes no mention of their understanding of the school personnel's efforts to increase parent involvement.</p>
Examples	Inclusion – "I have heard of those meetings, but I have never been to them."
Sub-code	<p>Communication between Parents and School Personnel – Data that includes forms of communication between the parents and the school personnel including: phone calls or announcements and notices sent home which may include general information or specific information that pertains to their child's behavior or academic progress.</p> <p>Physical Presence in School – Data that includes parents involvement efforts that take place at the school. This may include parent teacher conferences or other means of monitoring the progress of their children.</p> <p>Affecting Decisions – Data that suggests parents' understanding of how decisions are made at school.</p>