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Investigating Parents' of Immigrant Origins Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences with American Educational Communities

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INVESTIGATING PARENTS' OF IMMIGRANT ORIGINS PERCEPTIONS,
EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES WITH AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL
COMMUNITIES

by

Mary Jo Palmer

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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research. Thank you for everything. I give honor to my parents, Mark and Jennette Bell, who made me who I am. I thank you God!

Abstract

Palmer, Mary J. Ed.D The University of Memphis. December/2010. Investigating Parents' of Immigrant Origins Perceptions, Expectations and Experiences with American Educational Communities. Major Professor: Dr. Sally Blake

The purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate parents of Latino origins' perceptions of educational environments in preschool programs in the US by examining individual experiences, expectations and socio-cultural understandings regarding American educational systems.

The study consisted of five female parents of Latino origin with children enrolled in a child care program at a mid-southern US, urban community college. Across the eight-week data collection period, the parents participated in a series of activities to communicate their perceptions and experiences with North American educational institutions. Primary methods for collecting data included a series of interviews, field observations recorded in a journal, parents' photo representations of childhood icons, and a focus group discussion. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all data forms were coded inductively to discover emerging patterns of parent experiences and expectations.

To better understand the expectations and perceptions of Latino parents, as a collective group, I focused on two interpretive questions:

1) What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of North American schooling?

2) How do the cultural experiences and expectations of Latino origin parents influence their view of early childhood education?

The following were identified as major themes: 1) Language is more influential than cognitive ability. 2) Early childhood is viewed through a generational lens. Six sub-

themes emerged from the two major themes: 1) Latinos are marginalized by academic

failure based on language; 2) North American Schools use language to equate cognitive

abilities; 3) Latinas have not observed greater cultural awareness; 4) Younger generations

view early care as valuable; 5) Older generations view early care as unnecessary; and 6)

Family is the primary educator of young children. The participants' cultural perceptions

of early care programs echo the connections between education, culture, race, family, and

equality. By breaking the silence, and allowing parents of Latino origin to tell their story,

researchers can document ways to construct and eliminate some of the limited social

conditions in education.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND/ INTRODUCTION

As a practitioner in an early childhood environment, I am responsible for ensuring that all of the voices of parents are heard. "To find treasure, look in your own backyard. Child care professionals do not have to travel far to find the riches of the world. Children and their families from Afghanistan, Cambodia, China, Romania, Nigeria, Kuwait, Cree, and Cherokee nations, urban and countryside America, bring opulent, vibrant, runny nosed treasures to the program" (Bruno, 2003, p. 58). Acknowledging and accommodating different perspectives on early childhood education may contribute to improving relationships between parents and schools.

Accounts and descriptions of parent participants' early care from another culture, has given me additional knowledge about those cultural experiences they may have had during their lifetime. "Families who have emigrated from countries are often unsure about the expectations of the new school and may hesitate to join in school activities or become involved in school events" (Kirmani, 2007, p. 94). Latino origin parents who experienced socio-cultural influences in another country or as first or second generation immigrants in an American home may also be often misunderstood by those of us who work in schools.

The Latino population is the largest growing diverse population in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2006). Because of this, I decided to focus on parents of Latino origin for my study. The overwhelming lack of information about Latino parents' cultural experiences with early childhood programs has provided both an obstacle and an opportunity. My study focused on obtaining pertinent information about

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the parental expectations and understandings of five Latino origin families. This study investigates the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of five Latino immigrant parents regarding the American education system.

As the population of immigrant families increases in the United States of America, the assimilation and enculturation of these groups into educational institutions is important for the future of this country. According to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), "the nation's children all deserve an early childhood education that is responsive to families, communities, and racial, and cultural backgrounds "(Kirmani, 2007, p. 98). I sought to solicit the interpretations of early childhood experiences from the perspectives of parents who could tell their own story about the beliefs, values and practices of their culture. In the socio-cultural learning milieu of the US, each family represents a whole unit. This unit is vital to the social construction of knowledge, which is the essence of intellectual development in a "fully social – that is, public-collective – world" (Smith, 1993, p. 127). My research provides additional insights into the perceptions, experiences, and expectations of Latino parents, which could allow early educators to strengthen relationships with, embrace the culture of, and improve their methods of educating the children of Latino families.

There is little information on how diverse families' cultural beliefs and customs influence the interactions between families and school personnel, especially with regard to their beliefs about early childhood education. The literature review did not provide much information on parent-teacher interactions. What literature is available approaches these interactions from the perspective of the educational community, which is predominantly white and middle class. Early childhood educators have not worked to

create positive relationships between diverse populations and teachers, who are often white, and untrained in techniques that might lower tension, and increase school success (Fuller, Gesicki, Kang, & Wright, 2006). The expectations and beliefs of immigrant parent representatives about educational systems are a mostly untapped source of information. Improving educators' understandings of these expectations and beliefs can provide an opportunity to address possible educational changes that better suit the changing population.

The demographic make-up of America's public school enrollment has changed very dramatically in the 38 years between the first official collection of national data in 1968 and the data released for the 2006-2007 school year. In l968, the proportion of white students was much higher, accounting for about four out of every five students (Orfield, 2009). As the first systematic national data of students in the US were collected, Latinos were a barely visible minority. They accounted for about one student in twenty. Asian students were present in insignificant numbers in most of the country. American schools were overwhelmingly white. Most blacks were concentrated in the South or in a few big central cities. No city had yet been ordered to desegregate fully, and the courts had said nothing thus far about the duties of cities outside of the South, nor about the desegregation rights of Latino students (Orfield, 2009). Although there were modest efforts at inter-district transfers in a handful of communities, it seemed that the nation's largest cities were destined to have virtually all-black school systems surrounded by almost all-white suburbs.

The Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act, INS, Act of 1965, Pub. L. 89-236) abolished the national-origin quotas that had been in place in the

United States since the Immigration Act of 1924. By equalizing immigration policies, the 1965 act resulted in new immigrants to the US from non-European nations which would dramatically change the ethnic make-up of the United States. The reform was only three years old when the first school data collection started, and no one really had any idea of how deeply it would transform the country.

Almost four decades later, data indicate that only 56% of students in American public schools are white. It is further predicted that nationally, there will be a white students will be in the minority within a decade (Rothstein, 2004). As immigration and population trends continue to transform many sectors of American society, the country has failed to build educational faculties that reflect the diversity of American students, 44% of whom are non-white. Furthermore, many teachers are not effectively prepared communicate with the 20% of homes, where a language other than English is primarily spoken (Orfield, 2009).

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) act has brought new emphasis to the learning gaps amongst certain groups of students. Disadvantaged demographic groups were identified as consisting mainly of children of color as compared to white children, and children from lower socioeconomic status environments contrasted with those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (No Child Left Behind Act, 2001). These gaps have continued to be a problem in schools where financial support and governance structure depend on progress and gains in accountability tests scores. The percentage of poor children in American schools has been rising substantially. Black and Latino students, including those from middle class families, are largely attending schools with very high proportions of low-income children who face many challenges in their homes and

communities (Orfield, 2009). This problem is further complicated as teachers who serve students who are economically disadvantaged, who have a limited-English-proficiency, or who are lower achieving, often devote less time and emphasis to the higher-level thinking skills than do teachers working with more advantaged students (Copley & Padron, 2004). These neglected skills have been demonstrated to be important to academic and future success.

Several studies have found that parents' beliefs influence child rearing (Okagaki & Sternberg, 1993; Segal, 1985; Stevenson, Chen, & Uttal, 1990), but limited research exists on how, or if, parents' beliefs inform early childhood education programs. The child's success in school is believed to signify or represent a portion of the parent's self-worth. "The school is the primary setting for educating children, but the family is a primary force in a child's development" (Orozco-Suarez, Orozco-Surarez, & Todotova 2008, p. 21). The degree to which this happens varies according to the parenting style (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Castro, Bryant, & Peisner-Feinberg, & Skinner 2004), and the context of the family (Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997; Minuchin, 1974; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

These issues are more critical to the families of immigrant parents, whose family structures are influenced by the cultural and social expectations and norms of their country of origin. Furthermore, the process of assimilation amongst immigrants in the US may include adaptation or modification of some ethnic beliefs as well as their sense of belonging.

Though, immigrant parents are expected to assimilate and adapt to American culture and educational structures, the viewpoints of immigrant parents are not readily acknowledged, or included in many school activities or environments. This may be due to teachers' personal epistemologies or perspectives of themselves as dispensers of knowledge. While most teachers have experience with building strong relationships with families, it has been found that when dealing with Latino parents, many teachers may be unsure where to begin, or feel ineffective (Keyser, 2006). Knowing how to respond to cultural diversity is one key to successful interaction with young children, and their families (Barrera, Corso, & McPherson, 2003).

One interesting proposition influencing family interaction in early childhood education is to adopt a "community of mind" (Nelson & Snyder, 2005). As an individual is exposed to a large community, they attempt to gain acceptance and membership into that community. The community is synonymous with a person's surrounding, and social context. It is sometimes referred to as social-cultural environment. The emphasis in the "community of mind" approach is on the interaction of minds with certain similarities and differences of structure and beliefs. Ultimately, understanding the differences among minds requires understanding the source of the differences among people; their backgrounds, personalities, relationships, and experiences (Winsor, 2009). If educators are to address the needs of the changing populations in schools, they must first face the idea that traditional social-cultural norms are no longer universally applicable to all children.

Statement of the Problem

Increasing numbers of immigrant families in the United States have changed the school population. Historically, these groups have been considered "minority" populations. Currently, however, these "minority" populations are becoming a "majority" in many states, and are increasing in all parts of the United States. Norms, which were developed to work with American socio-cultural standards and expectations (predominantly White, and middle class), may no longer be as universally applicable or effective as was once believed. As this dramatic change occurs, we need to closely examine the perceptions and expectations of this new "majority," and reconsider our traditional educational environments in early childhood programs. How do we, as educators, address socio-cultural family expectations, and adapt these concerns into existing structures that will best prepare a changing population for the continuum of educational experiences and citizenship?

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of five Latino parents towards school expectations, and to investigate the influence of their own socio-cultural experiences, and interactions that might influence the academic success of their children. To better understand the expectations and perceptions of Latino parents, as a collective group, I focused on two interpretive questions:

1) What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of North American schooling?

2) How do the cultural experiences and expectations of Latino origin parents influence their view of early childhood education?

These questions were meant to capture the voices of individual parents, and to guide the research study.

<div align="center">Operational Definitions</div>

The operational definitions in this research will be used to present the findings with scholarly and academic thoroughness, yet should be accessible enough for general reading.

Immigrant Origin: Families who have come to the United States from another country.

First generation: Families who have come to the United States from another country and have produced a generation of children removed from direct influence of the country of origin.

Hispanic /Latino Origin: Families or children from any country where Spanish is the home language, including (but not limited to) Cuba, Costa Rica, Mexico, Spain, etc.

Minority-Majority Schools: Schools in which groups that were previously identified as minority populations have become the predominant group.

Early childhood education/ child care/ preschool: Terms used to represent the care of young children, ranging in ages from birth to 8 years old.

Theoretical Framework

This study supports and builds on the theoretical base of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems approach. Bronfenbrenner, who was a co-founder of Head Start Programs in the United States, believed that the immediate classroom environment is a Microsystem, and reflects relationships that directly impact a number of other ecological

levels. The individual level affects the child's family, peers, and teachers. The mesosystem is that which directly links to the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a child's home environment). The exosystem is that which indirectly links but may affect the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a parent's work, relationship, financial situation). Finally, the macrosystem is the much larger cultural context that can impact the classroom environment. According to Bronfenbrenner's (1988) bio-ecological model of human development, nature and nurture interact to describe development as it relates to individual differences that are present between cultures, neighborhoods, and families. .

The ecological systems framework enabled the researcher to develop approaches to investigating the customs, beliefs, influences, expectations, and cultural experiences of parents from diverse backgrounds. In this investigation, parents drew from their own cultural experiences to describe educational expectations for their children in the US. Their words conveyed societal influences, as well as personal epistemological beliefs and expectations of educational systems. As an epistemological heuristic, the study enlisted ways to improve parent relationships with institutions based on those descriptions.

Teachers' interactions with the child influence the child's development of self, which includes how the child sees cultural and ethnic acceptance in American educational environments. Change must occur in education if we are to address the needs of diverse children. We can no longer operate on the assumption that all families come to schools with the same socio-cultural influences and expectations of the middle class White population.

Methodological Framework

A qualitative approach was selected for method and data collection in this study, in order to develop a more in-depth understanding of how five Latino families make sense of their lives in a different socio-cultural environment from their country of origin; how they feel, and what they believe. This approach to research produces detailed descriptions of participants in a social context (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007, pp. 98-99).

Qualitative researchers conduct studies, interviews, make observations, keep journal notes and conduct focus groups (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study included observations, interviews, and a focus group with five parents of Latino immigrant origin. To support this approach, pictorial histories provided a visual journey of parents' cultural associations with their own educational experiences. Parent-child interactions were also observed during school activities. The observations were recorded in a field journal. The participants were interviewed individually, and in a focus group environment. They were also given cameras to take pictures of icons of their early childhood associations with educational experiences, as well as those of their children. Parents gave brief explanations of why they selected their pictures, and how they were associated with education. Notes were written during the interviews, especially if another question arose, or if I was unclear on the comment. A journal of 40 observations, field notes, and of my own reflections was recorded and transcribed.

Ongoing data collection and inductive analysis of the emerging data were employed to identify patterns of common perceptions, expectations, and experiences. This approach was associated with Moustakas' (1994) data reduction technique to

condense data, and to follow inductive analysis. For this study, I am not attempting to develop a theory, but wanted a rigorous approach to analyzing the participants' words and interactions.

Through the participant's perceptions, I learned how educational expectations influence interactions, and relationships with parents. "Constructivists believe in pluralistic interpretive, open-ended, and contextualized (e.g., sensitive to place and situation) perspectives towards reality" (Creswell, 2007, pp. 125-126). If we truly believe in equal education for all, then we must include the viewpoints of all groups of people in policy and practice. This research sought to discover ways of understanding cultural influence, in order to break barriers, and develop parent involvement plans that are applicable to all parents.

Improved knowledge about the ethnic and cultural beliefs and customs, gained directly from parents, provided me with more insight into acceptable, and non-acceptable, ways to interact with families. "Adults play a vital role in children's lives if those children are going to incorporate the attitudes and behaviors that go with honoring diversity and seeking equality and social justice" (Gonzalez-Mena, 2008). A design of activities that are more inclusive and sensitive to all parents could prove to be constructive to building relationships between home and school. Knowing how to respond to the needs of parents is one way to value and strengthen relationships. Parents, who have had a different cultural experience as a child themselves in another country, or in an American home with parents from another country, are "experts" about the early care expectations of young children. This investigation provided in-depth descriptions of

early childhood education from the perspectives of different assessments of personal knowledge and background.

Limits and Possibilities of the Study

Limitations of this study are the ability to listen, and to make relevant influencing decisions about the relationship of information to educational practice. Researchers need to be clear in order to design sophisticated studies, and know why it's being used (Creswell, 2007, p. 4). My challenge in doing this study was to get unchanging, as opposed to transitory, or short lived, claims about good child care for young children. Parents' experiences may vary, depending on their present life situation. The information may be stained. The framework used in this study, leaves it to the learner to establish long term structure (Crotty, 2006, p. 1). An interpretivist explores the participant's expressions, and constructs an understanding of the topic.

In order to make a change, the investigator needs to have a clear understanding of the historical, contextual material, and to position the subject within the larger trends in society and culture. Using an ecological model of human development, tied to Critical Race Theory as a lens, has allowed the researcher to dig deep into personal stories for understanding of the participant's beliefs. This framework may uncover many truths that address issues that are entrenched, and prohibited by the written descriptions of the participants' accounts.

The biggest limitation was that the research could be skewed. The delimitation was that immigrant origin parents were able to tell their story by using inductive analysis as a representation of the data. The aforementioned constraints were considered. Triangulation, a method of reviewing resources from at least three sources, was used to

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ensure scholarly rigor. These included observations, interviews, focus groups, and pictorial interpretations of the parents' understandings of educationally associated objects.

In a time where the majority of children in public schools are children of color (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2007), many states schools are now composed of "minority majority" populations. Over 400,000 immigrants moved into this country during the year 2000, according to the US Census (2006). Immigrants have lived this experience of selected educational norms. They are the only ones who can communicate their needs, and their children's needs. In education, much emphasis is placed on social assumptions regarding culture, intelligence, and language capabilities, which guide research, pedagogy, and praxis (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The implications of this statement support the importance of my study, and the need for change in education to match the changing population in educational institutions. The voices of Latino families can no longer be ignored, nor can a single-culture approach guide our praxis in early childhood education. Like the teaching of Greek and Latin as languages, the single-culture approach to educational environments no longer serves the needs of the citizenry.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995), make a linkage between CRT and education, they asserted that the voice of people of color is needed to provide an examination of the educational system. Furthermore, they contend that one catastrophic misfortune of the dialogue in education is keeping people of color silent. This supports the development of my research as I seek to hear what parents or families of immigrant origin understand about expectations, and socio-cultural norms of learning and behavior in educational settings.

There is very little information about what is expected of an early childhood education from the perspective of parents of Latino origin. In the book, *Rethinking family school relations: A critique in developing educational policy*, DeCarvalho (2001) says, "teachers need parents; therefore the partnership idea combines teaches' expertise in child development and curriculum with parent's expertise in their own children." (p. 1). It is important to meet parents where they are, and to incorporate practices and philosophies into a systemic way of connecting home and school. "The goal in creating relationships with families is to build respectful and mutual partnerships. Infusing the idea of educational theories and practices into an intense parent involvement program is an excellent way of not just getting parents involved, but making them partners. Partnerships enriched both teachers and families' relationships with children bring together mutual expertise for benefit of the child" (Keyser, 2006, p. 8). This study offers better insight, and knowledge about five Latino origin parents' expectations for Early Childhood Education school environments.

<div align="center">Organization of Remaining Chapters</div>

This study narrative is divided into five chapters. The first chapter included an introduction to the study, statement of the problem, the research approach, the theoretical framework, the purpose of this study, the guiding questions, significance of the study, and some of the limitations and delimitations of the work. Chapter 2 is a review of the related literature, and theories relative to parents of immigrant children, and educational success. Chapter 3 gives a detailed description of the methodology used for this study, including the sample description (participants involved in the study), the guiding questions, the procedures used throughout the study, and descriptions of the research

design and data analysis. Chapter 4 contains the findings of my research. Chapter 5

includes a summary of findings, conclusions, implications and recommendations for

future.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the pages that follow, I describe the literature that guided my thinking, as well as the questions I used in this investigation. Topics included are: Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's approach; applications of Critical Race Theory; parent-school relationships, and involvement; general information about parents of immigrant origins; and specific research about American educational institutions, and Latino parents and children.

During the early processes of a child's socialization, families model and shape the child's behavior, and sense of identity (Ovando, Collier, & Combs, 2003). This sense of belonging occurs when the child makes accommodations to adapt to the family/group, and may consciously or unconsciously commit to perform patterns within the family system. The child's sense of separateness and individuation develops through participation in different family subsystems within different family related contexts and in groups that are linked to the family but are external to the family system (schools).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecologocal System's Approach

Bronfenbrenner (1979) placed child development in an ecological perspective. His ecological systems approach describes development as an interaction of nature and nurture, as it relates to individual differences that are present between cultures, neighborhoods, and families. His work combined aspects of sociology and developmental psychology, and laid an enduring foundation for future approaches. In the ecological systems approach, relationships between individuals and their environments are viewed as "mutually shaping." This implies that all socio-cultural experiences interact to shape

the individual's growth and development. The individual's experience can be viewed "as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 22). In order to understand influences on academic readiness, one has to see within, beyond, and "across" how the several systems interact.

The micro-system. Within the micro-system, a child experiences personalized interactions with other people. The first micro-system a child encounters is the home, involving interactions with only one or two people in the family ("dyadic" or "triadic" interaction). As the child grows, the microsystem becomes more complex, involving more people - such as a child-care center or preschool. Bronfenbrenner noted that as long as increasing numbers in a child's micro-system mean a greater number of enduring reciprocal relationships, increasing the size of the system will enhance child development.

The meso-system. Meso-systems are the interrelationships among settings (i.e., the role of parents' involvement in their child's educational environments). The stronger and more diverse the links are between settings, the more powerful an influence the resulting systems will be on the child's development. In these interrelationships, the quality of the child's meso-system is influenced both by the initiatives of the child, and the parents' involvement in linking the home and school. In addition to linkages, acceptance also plays a key role in child development. Conflict between accepted interactions can influence the child's development of self. Children are well aware of acceptance and rejection of interactions within the family and the educational institutions relationships. Children benefit most when there is interaction and acceptance of school in the family, and the family in the school.

Both family and school socio-cultural environments are multidimensional concepts. They are two interconnected social institutions and influence children on two levels: micro-level (individual), and meso-level (aggregate). On the micro-level, parent-child relationships are influenced by the family's social characteristics, such as income, occupation, and education. Also included in the micro-level are interactive processes of social capital (Haghighat, 2003). Within the family, the micro-level social capital consists of the dyadic parent-child relationship, which contributes to a child's educational success. On the aggregate, or meso-level, the family enters an external social context, and creates a triadic relationship with school agents. Therefore, meso-level social capital depends on the family's connection with the school's "institutional agents" (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995), as well as the school's compositional effects.

Bearing the above micro- and meso-level family socio-cultural influences in mind, Haghighat (2003), argued that the same interactive function exists in schools, which, in turn, can influence the child's academic performance. On a micro-level, there are a dyadic student-teacher, teacher-teacher, teacher-principal, and teacher-counselor relationships and interconnectedness. A triadic student-teacher-parent relationship is also present at the meso-level. A school with a systematic outreach effort to involve parents, and one that understands the importance of mutual respect in relationships can directly impact children's academic success.

Bronfenbrenner's last two systems that interact on the child's developmental environment are the exo-system and the macro-system. In the exo-system, the quality of interrelationships among settings is influenced by forces in which the child does not participate, but which have a direct bearing on parents, and other adults who interact with

the child. Macro-systems are "blueprints" for interlocking social forces. Their interrelationships play a role in shaping human development. They provide the broad ideological and organizational patterns of the ecology of human development, which are reflected in the meso- and exo-systems. Macro-systems are not static, but change through evolution and revolution, such as with economic recession, war, and technological changes.

Bronfenbrenner's (1988) conceptual framework provided a useful starting point for systems research, in which family considerations became secondary to the design of institution-based social programs focusing on children. Bronfenbrenner has pointed out that the family is of crucial importance in the development of children's abilities. According to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development, nature and nurture interact to create development, as it relates to individual differences that are present between cultures, neighborhoods, and families. In childhood development, an individual is exposed to a large community, and attempts to gain membership to this community. The community is synonymous with a person's surrounding, and social context, sometimes referred to as their socio-cultural environment. The emphasis is on the minds that interact with, and also differ with one another, as well as having certain similarities of structure and content. In the end, understanding differences among minds requires understanding the source of differences among people; their backgrounds, personalities, relationships, and experiences.

Educators must acknowledge that including all families in school activities has been a problem. Individuals whom unconsciously apply their own rules to another cultural system are bound to make mistakes (Ariza, 2002). Ariza further argues that

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putting your own value system to another's custom or beliefs often leads to grave misunderstandings.

The ideas I've described above influenced the development of this research. Using them as a theoretical framework, I sought to capture the ways in which parents and families of immigrant origin perceive and understand the cultural and social norms of learning and behavior in American educational settings. In this study, parents drew from their own personal histories to help construct an understanding of multiple perspectives, and to build better relationships between home and school. The parent narratives provided clarity to the issue of the underrepresentation evident in early childhood educational systems.

<div align="center">Parent Interactions with Educational Environments</div>

A theory that illuminates practices and issues related to parents and schools will need to focus on relationships, because that is essentially what this is all about -- relationships among individuals and institutions (Graue, 1998). Focusing on this relationship is important to understanding, because according to Bakhtin (1990), "it is our relationship that determines an object and its structure, not conversely" (p. 5). Examining these relationships, and how they are founded, involves exploring who has the power to dictate the nature of the relationship, how it is defined, what responsibilities are connected to defined roles, and what outcomes are thought to ensue within particular relationships.

Parents' involvement has long been acknowledged in many areas of school success. Research has indicated that family involvement improves facets of children's education such as daily attendance (e.g., Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Epstein, 2005;

Simon, 2000), student achievement (e.g., Brooks, Bruno, & Burns, 1997; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Henderson, 1987; Herman & Yeh, 1980; Sheldon & Epstein, 2001a; Simon, 2000; Van Voorhis, 2001; Zellman & Waterman, 1998), behavior (e.g., Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Henderson, 1987; Sheldon & Epstein, 2001b; Simon, 2000), and motivation (e.g., Brooks, et al., 1997; Cotton & Wikelund, 2001; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994). Involvement and relationships are two different aspects of the educational environment. Research on both relationships and involvement are included in this section, as they influenced and related to my research.

Parent Relationships and Involvement in School Environments

Early studies concluded that most programs designed to improve schooling fail because they do not adequately address the developmental needs of children. Nor do they address the potential for conflict in the relationship between home and school, among school staff, and among staff and students (Comer, 1980; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996). These early studies do not consider the structural arrangements, specific skills, and conditions that educators need to address in the complexity of today's schools. Addressing these complexities is necessary to be able to cope with the kinds of problems presented by too many children (Comer, 1980, p. 38).

Sheldon and Epstein (2001) write that much of the research that examines the relationships between parent involvement and children's education assesses parent involvement by utilizing one particular measure, such as counting the number of parents that volunteer, come to meetings, or come to parent-teacher conferences (Baker & Soden, 1997). Other studies utilize measures that consist of a few closed-ended questions, targeting a particular aspect of parent involvement, and often focus on the number of

times parents participate in particular events (Goldring & Shapira, 1993; Griffith, 1996; Grolnick & Slowialczek, 1994; Zellman & Waterman, 1998). According to Baker and Soden (1997), this type of measure does not allow for a rich picture of parent involvement, nor generate new ideas.

While basic obligations are set out for parents, none are noted for schools--either related to settings for learning, or for finding out about home settings. Sheldon and Epstein (2001), argue that the model is set out, through agendas directed by the school, in terms of what parents can do to support the efforts of their children. They note that, "Each type of involvement leads to different outcomes for students, families, and schools" (p. 50). However, the nature of these differences is not noted beyond parental appreciation of school efforts, changes in teacher attitudes about parents, and increases in student achievement in highly connected school-home partnerships. The model is silent regarding issues of power and status outside of suggestions that school people invite all parents into relationships, and that they vary their schedules to accommodate the needs of diverse families. The meanings that reside within each of the partnership types are not examined, nor are the power relations within the roles that these types inscribe. Partnerships frame answerability in terms of school people, who develop programs that set up conditions that *allow parents into* school curriculum.

Recognizing the complexity of understanding schools, James Comer and colleagues situated their efforts on general aspects of school reform, with a program informed by multiple theories and practices (Comer, et al., 1996). Conceptualizing education as a system, the Comer model works to change that system by building participation and partnership, to bring about the optimal development of each child. Two

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distinct aspects of this model guide activities: a commitment to child development-based programming and to systems-based approaches to problem solving that work to maximize participation and power.

A more comprehensive view of involvement is presented by Epstein's (1992) model, which supports the work of Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework. This model discusses how children learn, and grow through three overlapping spheres of influence: family, school, and community. These three spheres must form partnerships to best meet the needs of the child.

"We *take stock* in our partnerships; we account for our *resources* and *investments,* and we look for *profits* for all concerned" (Epstein, 1992, p. 40). Students are placed at the center of this model, and seen as the main actors. "School and family partnerships do not 'produce' successful students. Rather, the partnership activities that include teachers, parents, and students engage, guide, energize, and motivate students so that *they* produce their own success." (p. 42). The overarching theme in this work is that groups invest in the schooling of children, which provides individual students with the resources, and motivational frameworks to choose successful strategies. "Social exchanges can, through good design of programs and practices, produce the human and social capital that we want to result from school and family partnerships" (p. 42). Answerability operates at the level of the institution, which invests opportunities and resources, and at the level of the individual student, who must capitalize on that investment through his/her own efforts. Individuals are advanced through systems in which there is a balance of needs, voice, and power. This indicates a need for parent input into the school environment. Parents should be full partners in the decisions that affect children, and families.

Berger (1991) stated:

The importance of parents in education is not a new concept. Parents have always been their children's first educator. The first formal parent education classes occurred in the United States in 1815 and supported three views of children for parent education: (1) the willful and depraved child, (2) the child as naturally good, and (3) the child as a blank slate, influenced parent education through the years. These three premises may sound absurd to the modern educator but provide a good example of how socio-cultural beliefs influence the perceptions of educational approaches to parents and children. Now, as then, how we approach the interactions of families, teachers and educational environments reflect the norms of the culture at a particular time. Historically concern about child development came from many levels including women's associations, colleges, parent cooperatives, government, and schools. Education was used to enlighten middle-income families as well as to help 'mainstream' immigrants and the underclass parents. (pp. 209-219)

This approach focused on "helping" immigrants and lower-socioeconomic families become members of the dominant middle-income population. The intentions of this approach were, and are, well intentioned, but can also be considered an egocentric approach to education. This thinking is outdated in light of the changing demographics of American school populations. The role of parents in children's academic achievement is well documented, and not the focus of the present work. I include this as background information, which influenced my decision to examine the importance of parents' perceptions and expectations of school environments.

Parents of Immigrant Origin

One in five children in the United States today has an immigrant parent. This diverse group of kids, 'tweens, and teens yields an enormous transformational power that will touch every community, business and individual in the 21st century (Rumbaut, 2002). Immigrant origin families have played a major role in the history of the United States. This country was founded on the premise of freedom for all, and has often been referred to as a "melting pot" society. One variable influencing the nature and socio-cultural majority in our schools is that the immigrant populations are no longer predominantly of European Anglo descent. "Learning to respect diversity and include all families is a worthwhile journey that includes self-reflection and self knowledge as well as learning about other" (Keyser, 2006, p.9). The demographics for early childhood programs are changing. Hernandez (1995) claims: Ongoing demographic trends suggest that, in the coming decades, early childhood programs will be serving a population of children which is increasingly diverse in economic resources, racial and ethnic background, and family structure. (p.155)

Understanding how to respond to cultural diversity is one key to successful interactions with young children, and their families (Barrera, et al., 2003). It is important to expand recognizable, mutual connections that contribute to building, and enhancing relationships between children and families of immigrant origin. This includes dealing with the language, and other barriers that may hinder parental involvement. "Parental experiences with the schools dictated the type of support that they were able to access for their children. Parents who were less knowledgeable sometimes found that their social connections served as an important supportive component that compensated, in part, for

cultural naïveté. Their social networks provided a level of involvement, maintaining the families' connectedness, through the trust and safety of family's ethnic ties" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p. 506).

Communicating and connecting seems to be the preface of parental involvement programs. "Schools cannot work if there is no input from the community in the educative process. The problem often is that immigrant minority parents have no sense of how to become involved nor do they have concrete input, how to operationalize their dream" (Gitelman, 2001, p. 251). A more in-depth investigation must occur, in order to alleviate the tensions and dilemmas of parents of diverse cultures. Parent involvement can serve as a cultural broker, bridged between dominant parents, and parents of diverse cultures. "Teachers in preschool and primary education programs all over the country may have English language learners in classrooms. Language barriers between parents and teachers contribute to the lack of communication. Involving all parents and making them stakeholders in their child's education could contribute to designing a culturally responsive program. Strong collaborations between home and school afford parents the opportunity to make suggestions about their children's education" (Menken & Antunez, 2001).

Having a recognizable, workable system in place to assist in meeting the needs of immigrant families is a way to help defeat poor academic performance, and keep children in school (Johns, 2001). Early childhood programs should reflect, and support all of the children and families who attend. "An ideal society would include humility, respectful knowledge of one another, and deeper understanding of unique cultural differences. Rather than merely tolerating differences, people would embrace it" (Cruz, 2005, p. 6).

Mutual understandings of cultural differences can contribute to improved relationships between families and schools. Discourses on partnerships abound, but lack in understanding how partnerships are actually constructed, and what partners are looking for in the relationship (McGrath, 2007).

Insufficient methods of reaching parents of immigrant origin continuously contribute to the ineffectiveness of getting parents involved in schools. Parent customs and beliefs from the home country could cause the family to have unrealistic expectations of how the child will adapt to the American classroom involvement is a well documented factor to school success (Birman, Weinstein, Chan, & Beehler, 2007). "If you have developed a good relationship with families, you can build on this trust when times get tough" (Elliott, 2006, p. 20).

Focusing on children's cultural contexts is essential for adaptation to the early childhood classroom. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) state, "Understanding children's development requires viewing each child within the socio-cultural context of that child's family, educational setting, and community, as well as within the broader society" (p. 13). Children learn in various social and cultural settings. Being responsive to language, and cultural practices is a critical component of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Early childhood programs must recognize the importance of meeting parents where they are, when incorporating school practices, philosophies and teachings into a systemic way of connecting home and school.

Teacher Preparation Programs

"Unfortunately, many teachers are not provided with specialized training in how to meet the needs of ELL's (English language learners)" (Menken & Antunez, 2001).

Because teachers are not adequately trained, and are unaware of some customs and beliefs, it is difficult to develop a strong collaboration between home and school. Cross (2005) argued that many teacher education programs are promoting the same old 'oppression' that objectifies, dehumanizes and marginalizes others, while supporting whiteness as the standard of excellence. Teachers are going to have to put forth an effort to understand the needs of immigrant, and minority parents and children. "The challenge is finding ways to meet the needs of immigrant children. Allowing immigrants to become underachievers or drop out of school is unacceptable" (Johns, 2001, p. 268).

Having cultural agents, or school administrators serve as advocates can promote school activities, and serve as a link between home and school. According to Martinez–Cosiso and Martinez-Iannacone (2007), acknowledging the importance of culture in parent involvement is one of several challenges that coordinators face in creating a bridge between the institution, dominant parents, and diverse parents. Engagements from all are needed to offer creative solutions to potential problems. The argument here is for more teachers in this area to learn to work effectively with all parents; especially, parents of immigrant origin. The need for better teacher understanding has influenced the development of my work, as it seeks to bring the voices of the silent majority to the ears of teacher educators.

It is necessary to continue to examining the family learning environments of children from ethnically different groups to help educators better understand, and interpret the discrete circumstances of children's home lives. Through descriptive research, educators can make recommendations regarding the necessity of schools to open lines of communication with families, and whole communities, in a systemic way,

in order to facilitate families' access to necessary academic and social resources (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p. 513).

<div align="center">Culture and Implications on Child-rearing</div>

Banks (2006) defines culture as "the behavior, patterns, symbols, institutions and other human-made components of society" (p. 52). Because of the cultural diversity within the United States, there exist a variety of beliefs and values about raising children (McGoldrick, 1982). According to Cortez (2008), it is particularly difficult for most immigrants to continue practicing values and beliefs, since they are not valued (p.97). Parents' attitudes and perceptions about raising children affect parental behavior, and as a result, influence children's developmental outcomes (Julian, McKenry & McKelvey, 1994). There seem to be a number of cultural variations in parenting styles of Caucasian, African American, and Latino parents. However, common child rearing goals among ethnic groups include positive orientation to culture, and socialization (Brook, 1991). "Latino families, in particular, teach their children the importance of family unity through daily interactions with important individuals in their lives such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Young children learn respect in the form of *consejos,* which is a form of intergenerational communication" (Cortez, 2008, p. 97). Most of the research on child rearing practices has been conducted using middle-class white children, or lower-class black populations, with little or no attention given to other cultures, or ethnic groups (Martinez, 2006). Studies in child development suggest evidence of cultural and ethnic diversity along various dimensions of child rearing. It is important to understand unique values, beliefs, and customs, but to also appreciate the distinctions, and differences too. Accepting the diversity of a group, and being culturally sensitive allows individuals to

recognize different ways of acting, without holding to a specific standard (Gorman &

Balter, 1997). Both social and cultural influences must be taken into account. A

significant quantity of literature documents a consistent relationship between childrearing

practices, family income, and education of the parents (Buriel, 1993, p.987).

Latino Families

Although they are united by a common language, Latinos in the U.S. are not a

homogeneous group. They represent great diversity in terms of socioeconomic status,

race, age, country of origin, and the nature and timing of their immigration. Differences

among Latino subgroups in communication styles, and socialization practices are often

greater than the overall differences between Latinos and non-Latinos (Haycock & Duany,

1991). Although Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the U.S., relatively little

is known about how Hispanic culture might interact with typical American school culture

to produce positive results for children. Valdivieso and Nicolau (1992) indicated that

Latino's except for Cuban Americans had the highest rates of poverty and lowest

educational achievement. They start kindergarten behind their peers and by age 13, at

least 44% are at least one year below grade level and at least 40% drop out before

completing high school.

Although the academic achievement levels and dropout rates for other

racial and ethnic groups have improved in the past decade, Hispanic school performance

remains consistently poor (Liontos, 1992). In order to correct this situation, educators

must understand cultural factors that may be acting as barriers to Hispanic children's

educational success, and then devise approaches to help early childhood programs reach

out to Hispanic parents, and form partnerships with the home.

Unfortunately, almost 20 years later, little has changed concerning the issues with Hispanic populations, except for one major variable: the increased number of Hispanics in educational environments. Overall, Latino American children perform the weakest, academically, of all immigrant families, with the lowest grade averages found amongst Dominicans. Unexpectedly, the highest dropout rates were among Cuban youth in Miami public schools, followed by Nicaraguans in Miami, and Mexican-origin youth in San Diego (Rumbaut, 2002). In the case of Mexican youths, low levels of parental human capital, combined with a negative mode of incorporation — that is, with a history of exploitation and discrimination, a high proportion of undocumented immigrants, and the prevalence of negative stereotypes — produced high rates of school abandonment, and low mean levels of academic attainment. Mexican immigrants represented the largest single immigrant group residing in the United States in 2006.

This group represents the most significant numeric change from the years 2000 to 2006, totaling 64% (US Census, 2006). Mexican immigrants doubled from 7.9 % of all foreign born populations in 1970 to 15.6 % in 1980 and doubled again to 30.7 % by 2006 (see Table 1).

Table 1

Mexican Born Populations, 1960 to 2006

		Mexican Born		
Year	Foreign born	Rank	Share of all Foreign Born	Number
960	9,738,091	7	5.9	575,902
1970	9,619,302	4	7.9	759,711
1980	14,079,906	1	15.6	2,199,221
1990	19,767,316	1	21.7	4,298,014
2000	31,107,889	1	29.5	9,177,487
2006	37,547,315	1	30.7	11,541,404

Over the past several years, Public Agenda, a nonpartisan research group that focuses on education issues, has been able to look closely at the views of Hispanic parents, students, and young adults in a number of in-depth opinion surveys. They have explored how Hispanic parents rate their local schools, what problems they identify, what kinds of goals they have for the education of their children, and what challenges they see ahead. In Attitudes About Education Among Hispanic Parents, Students and Young Adults, Gasbarra, and Johnson (2008) reveal vital information about how Hispanic parents perceive American educational institutions:

"In many respects, Hispanic families share the aspirations and anxieties of many other families nationwide: placing a high value on going to college. Education and higher education in particular are even more highly prized and respected among Hispanic

parents than among parents in general, despite some erroneous conventional wisdom to the contrary." (p. 7)

Latino parents admire and express confidence in teachers, principals, and superintendents to an even greater degree than other parents. Used well, this sense of trust and respect could be put to good use. However, despite their overall esteem for educators, solid majorities of Hispanic parents are focused on two urgent issues: their beliefs that local schools get too few resources, and their concern over an alarmingly high dropout rate.

Ethnicity and Immigration Trends

Latino parents have a heightened sense that schools are slow to teach foreign-born students English, and are not doing as much as they could to teach kids to get along with people from different cultures and backgrounds. Other concerns, such as fears about violence, weapons, and drugs in local schools, mirror the apprehensions voiced by other low-income parents, especially African Americans.

Overall, it is hard to look at this report, without concluding that far too many Latino families are underserved by public education—and to a significantly greater degree than the general population. Clearly, Latino parents value education, but other studies have found some of the obstacles to relationship success with these parents. The new research supports the older work of Ogbu and Simmons (1998), who argued that immigrant Latino parents develop lower aspirations and expectations for children's educational attainment, not because they believe their children may have limited potential; rather parents' diminished aspirations and expectations stem from the discrimination, and lowered job opportunities they experience in the United States.

Parental aspirations impact the selection of early childhood programs for their children. Latino parents are frequently unaware of practices, which are essential to helping their children develop academic skills. They may be confused about what schools expect from their children, and feel uncertain about how to help their children (Hyslop, 2000). Other studies explore reasons why some Hispanic parents are hindered by low self-esteem (Hughes, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1999; Kelty, 1997; Paratore, Melzi, & Krol-Sinclair, 1999). They found that some parents have been unsuccessful in school, and therefore the entire school experience causes anxiety in them. Some parents feel that because of the language barrier, they are powerless to make a difference in their children's education. Meanwhile, other parents view teachers as experts, and do not feel comfortable questioning them. Feelings of insecurity about not being able to adopt the accepted ways within society may also contribute to the underrepresentation of Hispanic children in early care (Ogbu, 1995). Families in certain ethnic groups sometimes withdraw themselves from organized preschool programs, and choose home care for their young children. Hispanic or Latino parents may prefer a place where caregivers are familiar, or have similar backgrounds (Fuller, Holloway & Liang, 1996, p.3325). Hispanic families may be concerned with their children not being exposed to cultural values, or that their language will be devalued (Garcia-Coll & Vasquez-Garcia, 1996; Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Ogbu, 1995).

Magnuson and Woldfogel (2005) believe that children who attend child care centers or preschool programs enter school more ready to learn. However, both the share of children enrolled in these programs, and the quality of care they receive differ by race and ethnicity. Black children are more likely to attend preschool than white children, but

may experience lower-quality care. Hispanic children are much less likely to attend preschool. The types of preschool that children attend also differ. Both black and Hispanic children are more likely than white children to attend Headstart (p. 169). Cultural differences may be the result of attempts to protect against the prejudice, discrimination, and oppression of a dominant group (Ogbu, 1995; Phinney & Landin, 1998).

The process of acculturation, internalizing a host culture's identity, is more acute for some immigrants than others. Lambourne and Zinn (1993), found immigrant families may go through psychological adaptations, such as culture shock, as they encounter a new culture. Kelty (1997) found that because the Hispanic culture emphasizes obedience, and respect for adult authority, many parents are more likely to communicate with their children in a direct style, than to engage their curiosity by talking with them, and reading to them. Consequently, the parents fail to lay a strong foundation for building academic skills.

Although it is true that culture shock and low self-esteem play important parts in understanding the problems Hispanic parents face, the literature suggests that many other factors are also at work. Moles (1993) reported that in a recent national survey of teachers, Hispanic parents' lack of interest and support was the most frequently cited educational problem. However, nurturing home literacy environments were not enough to improve reading skills among children exposed to poor school environments (Snow, 1991). Cultural values and beliefs can influence whether children attend early care programs, such as child care, preschools or Headstart programs. Different concepts of child rearing affect beliefs about educational activities, such as attending a preschool

(Fuller, et al., 1996, p. 3320). The Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Care Research Network (2003), recommends that "more priority is given to future research in order to be more inclusive of children of color in the United States. Collecting information to support a better understanding of how minority parents early childhood experiences influence their perceptions of early childhood programs is significant for addressing child care and development" (p. 1227).

Paratore et al. (1999), found evidence suggesting that despite limited English proficiency, low levels of education, and few economic resources, when parents were provided opportunities to learn from, and collaborate with teachers, all were willing and able to do so consistently and effectively. Kelty (1997), found evidence that Spanish speaking parents are comfortable with parent conferences, interactive workshops, and to an extent, home visits. These findings contradict previous research, which indicated that parent involvement programs do not reach Hispanic parents.

Moreno and Lopez (1999) found complex relationships between acculturation levels, and personal, contextual, and involvement factors. They found that although less acculturated Hispanic parents reported less knowledge about school activities, and more barriers to involvement, they had high levels of perceived efficacy related to parent involvement, educational expectations, and spousal support.

The study by Paratore et al. (1999), conducted in conjunction with their Intergenerational Literacy Project, found that in all the Latino families studied, the practice of family literacy was an important, and integral part of family life, long before parents joined the project. They concluded that family literacy interventions cannot be the only solution to the problem of school failure for many Latino children

Offering Hispanic families an opportunity to interact in schools can be the bridge to connect with the Hispanic community, and develop solution strategies. "Balancing the need to uphold accustomed ways of the majority, while respecting the unaccustomed ways of the minority is a dilemma that may always be with us" (Bruno, 2003, p. 60). However, evidence has long existed that merely increasing parental school involvement will not necessarily lead to positive outcomes, especially for Hispanic families (Bauch, 1992). Hispanic parents have consistently demonstrated low rates of school involvement; when their involvement has increased, this increase has not necessarily been accompanied by increases in parents' positive perceptions of schools (Bauch, 1992; Costas, 1991). If Hispanic parents feel coerced, and not listened to, they do not necessarily benefit from increased contact with the school.

Early childhood programs should reflect and support all of the children and families who attend. "An ideal society would include humility, respectful knowledge of one another, and deeper understanding of unique cultural differences. Rather than merely tolerating differences, people would embrace it" (Cruz, 2005, p.6). Mutual understandings of cultural differences can contribute to improved relationships between families and schools. Involving all parents, and making them stakeholders in their child's education, could contribute to designing a culturally responsive program. Strong collaborations between home and school can afford parents the opportunity to make suggestions about their children's education (Menken & Antunez, 2001).

Chapter Summary

"Schools are often the first place where families and children experience cultures that are different from their own" (Kirmani, 2007, p. 98). Understanding how to respond

to cultural diversity is one key to successful interactions with young children and their families (Barrera, et al., 2003). It is important to expand recognizable, mutual connections that contribute to building, and enhancing relationships between children, and families of immigrant origin. This includes dealing with the language barrier, and other barriers that may hinder parental involvement. Focusing on children's cultural context is essential for adaptation to the early childhood classroom. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) state that, "understanding children's development requires viewing each child within the socio-cultural context of that child's family, educational setting, and community, as well as within the broader society" (p.13). Children learn in various social and cultural settings. Being responsive to language and cultural practices is a critical component of developmentally appropriate practices in early childhood programs (Bredekamp & Copple, 2009). Early childhood programs must recognize the importance of meeting parents where they are, in incorporating school practices, philosophies, and teachings into a systemic way of connecting home and school. Teachers need parents (DeCarvalho 2001). Therefore, the partnership idea combines teachers' expertise in child development and curriculum, with parents' expertise in their own children. "Learning to respect diversity and include all families is a worthwhile journey that includes self-reflection and self knowledge as well as learning about others" (Keyser, 2006, p. 9).

Bronfenbrenner's theoretical framework influenced the need for studying the perceptions and expectations of parents in my work. His summary of family-related factors that influence development has shown that, in most cases, these factors are influenced by other factors. It is important for educators to know the general ways in which family, and other environmental factors, can influence children. It is even more

important to get to know the individual child (and the individual family), in order to plan instruction as effectively as possible for the child. Since the family exerts such a powerful influence on a child's development, it is important for educators to enlist the cooperation of the parents and guardians of their students.

No study of any group of people different from the American norm can ignore the relationship of race to educational practice. The overall research approach is qualitative rather than quantitative, which has further influenced my research design.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Chapter three describes the methodology used during the research to answer the following questions:

1. What are Latina origin parents' perceptions of American Schooling?

2. How do the cultural experiences and expectations of Latino origin parents influence their view of early childhood education? This is an in-depth interview study seeking to generate an understanding of the perceptions of five mothers of Latina origin, regarding their early childhoods. According to Stake (2006), each unique individual can be examined in the context of group experience, which binds the single case together. New information can be gained by providing opportunities for otherwise silent respondents to give voice to their own issues and concerns. Participants vividly described their childhoods, and shared their expectations of a local early childhood programs, in individual interviews, focus groups, and photo-elicitations.

Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study was to understand five Latina mothers' perceptions of school expectations, and to investigate the influence of socio-cultural experiences and interactions, which might influence the academic success of their children. According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research allows the researcher to obtain a thorough understanding of an issue. The qualitative method investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making, not just *what*, *where*, and *when*. "This detail can only be established by talking directly with people, going to their homes, or place of work, and allowing them to tell their stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the

literature" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Hence, small focused samples are more appropriate to

qualitative research, rather than large random samples. The qualitative approach best fits

the underlying questions of my study of the socio- cultural beliefs and expectations of

Hispanic parents. "As direct consequences of the way in which we humans have

evolved, we depend on culture to direct our behavior and organize our experience"

(Crotty, 2003, p.53). This supported my decision to explore the cultural influences of

Latina mothers in relation to school environments and experiences. Creswell (2007)

further argues that qualitative research keeps good company with the most rigorous of

quantitative research, and should not be viewed as an easy substitute for a "statistical" or

quantitative study (pp. 40-41). Qualitative methods attempt to inquire, in-depth, about the

nature of human experiences within the context in which the experience occurs. My

approach to this study included interviews, a field observation log, and pictorial analysis

of parent icons. "To qualitative researchers, what is to be learned does not invariably

necessitate a particular study design involving theory, hypothesis, or generalization,

though it may" (Peshkin, 1993, p. 23). Observing and understanding how people make

sense of their lives is an essential component of qualitative research. In order to

strengthen my study, I triangulated information sources to determine common themes

from the perceptions given by the participants. My approach offered careful consideration

to all aspects, responses, and perspectives, which gave me insight into the underlying

belief systems related to educational interactions and environments. My research

involved dialogue that was constructed and drawn from families' personal experiences

and histories, through a focus group, visual data, interviews, and field notes.

Using the qualitative approach to my research was the best way to capture the voices of my participants. "Qualitative research methods are unsurpassed for research problems where the variables are unknown and need to be explored" (Creswell, 2007). While there is much data concerning population changes, school issues with Latinos and Hispanics, and socio-cultural beliefs, Latina parents' views on education are relatively unknown. The exploration of Latina parents' perceptions and experiences is of such an individual nature, that a qualitative approach was necessary to gain a better understanding of their experiences that might influence my school environment, as well as others.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The context of this research, in relation to my theoretical and conceptual framework, was based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems' Approach. Bronfenbrenner's work on the social systems that influence all child development led me to seek parents' perceptions about their interactions with, and expectations of, educational systems.

Brofenbrenner's Ecological System. Bronfenbrenner's (1988) bio-ecological model of human development supports the relationships between nature and nurture. According to Ogbu (2000), one cannot discuss culture without including Bronfenbrenner's ecological system as it relates to, and impacts children, parents, peers, schools and families. This interaction describes development as it relates to individual differences that are present between cultures, neighborhoods, and families. The immediate classroom environment is a micro-system, and reflects relationships that directly impact an individual (i.e., family, peer, and teacher); a mesosystem is that which directly links to the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a child's home environment);

an exosystem is that which directly links, but may affect the immediate classroom environment (i.e., parent's work, relationship, financial situation); and a macro-system is the much larger cultural context that can impact the classroom environment. My study focused on two levels identified by Bronfenbrenner, the micro- and mesosystems. The micro-system indentifies the importance of the relationships between parents and teachers. The research examined how parents perceive educational experiences, environments, and interactions, which have a direct relationship to the meso-system (the classroom environment). This work points to the need for a deeper understanding of parents' beliefs in order to interpret how socio-cultural interactions influence educational environments. "Human studies have indeed the advantage over natural sciences that their object is not sensory appearances such as, no mere reflection of reality within consciousness, but rather first and foremost an inner reality, a coherence from within" (Dithey & Jamerson, 1972, p. 231). I wanted to understand the inner reality of Hispanic mothers in relation to school environments, and how they perceived early childhood programs in relationship to their social-cultural beliefs.

<center>Subjectivity Statement</center>

During this research, I sought to gather an in-depth understanding of what parents of Latino origin perceive as customary care of young children. For this research study, I was an outsider (etic), investigating for insight and understanding. As an educator of young children, I have told parents what they should expect from a preschool program, based on my values and beliefs. My school has very little information about what parents want, especially from parents of immigrant origin. Despite over thirty years personal experience working with parents, I am still unsure of their expectations. I want to be able

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to relate to all parents, and work with their children based on their desires and needs. While working with young children, one of my main professional focuses is to provide an environment that is conducive for children to construct their own knowledge.

I admit that my subjectivities will influence and impact the research. I connected myself and my cultural background to this study as a person of color who may have experienced stereotypical low expectations from the educational community. Peshkin (1998) states that "subjectivity is like a garment one cannot remove" (p. 17). I hope to establish myself as a responsible researcher with whom there is a shared sense of trust and contentment. Acknowledging my subjectivities (assumptions and pre-existing opinions) may serve as a revelation to the reader, and make known my personal views, which may impact the findings and implications of this research. For this study, I am an observer, and neutral in regards to my participant's personal accounts of their early childhood experiences.

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

This study investigated socio-cultural interactions of Latina mothers and early childhood education, using both humanist, and functional sociological approaches. From a postmodern perspective of Social Action Theory, Silverman (2007) supports the idea that action arises out of meaning, which defines social reality. Meanings are given to people by society, and shared orientations become "institutionalized," and passed on as social facts. The way people construct and perceive the world as real routine is important. There seem to be limited alternatives to the current social conditions in education. I wanted to challenge the traditional, taken for granted assumptions about interactions and relationships with parents in early childhood programs. Because of value-laden social

assumptions about Hispanic parents, an interpretive qualitative approach was selected. "For practitioners adopting the interpretivist logic of justification for the inquiry means forgoing aspirations to get it right and embracing instead ideals of making it meaningful" (Green, 1992, p. 39). Investigative interviews were used, with supportive data from field observations and pictorial interpretations, to explore perceptions of the parents of Hispanic origin; specifically, descriptions of their relations and interactions with educational environments in early childhood education. Each parent represented a complex, unique single case, but when grouped in a socio-cultural context, the set of parents composed a system of interactions and relationships, producing common beliefs and voices that informed the investigation of common experiences.

Research Site

The research was conducted at an early childhood education facility, located on a college campus. The site serves as the college's laboratory facility for students majoring in education, nursing, and other related disciplines. The child care center has a diverse population, with at least thirteen nationalities of children enrolled in the program. The laboratory school is affiliated with a College of Education at a larger urban southern university. The site selection was influenced by the convenience for the researcher and participants. Data was collected in the natural environment of a school setting, which offered a better opportunity for real interactions in the education institution. Permission to use the site was granted by the Vice President of Business and Finance, and the participants signed an agreement to participate.

Selection of Participants

The choice of a group consisting of five parents for my study came from several points of reasoning. First, from my observations, it seemed that parents with a common language seemed to migrate towards each other during parent meetings in the early childhood setting. For this reason, I selected a group of parents with Spanish as a common language, specifically Mexican and Latin American Latinas. I used purposeful sampling, described as "selecting participants that show different perspective on the problem, process or event being portrayed" (Creswell, 2007, p. 75). While my sample shared a common region of origins (Latin America), they were from different countries, or different generational levels of immigrant families, which allowed for different perspectives and experiences. Secondly, the smaller groups of participants offered opportunities for richer, deeper discourse. Documentation and analysis could also be done more concisely with a small group. Reasons for this include the fact that small groups provide greater opportunity for listening to individuals, and encouraging their thoughts, while offering adequate, yet feasible, amounts of data to be transcribed and interpreted (Duckworth, 2001).

The participants in this study have children who have attended the early childhood program for at least two years or more. They are five Latina mothers between the ages of twenty and forty years old, and are representative of the largest population of immigrant origin parents attending the program. These participants provided an in-depth understanding of the experiences and expectations of the early childhood program through the lens of female Hispanic caretakers.

Gaining Access

Over the course of the research, I built a strong relationship with two of the participants. At first, parents were polite. Elaina, my insider, made special treats, and the participants and I would eat treats and talk. After many morning meetings, I became friends with another Latina parent. Each day, we looked forward to our conversations. A shared sense of trust was developed between the researcher and the participants.

My advisor, a Mexican American employee of the program helped me to recruit the participants. She served as a good ally or insider for the study. She was able to recommend participants, and translate the language for me. She was my member of the group who was privileged, knew about most of the inner workings, and could provide information. She had bought into my research study, and had agreed to participate. demarris (2004) suggests that "qualitative interviews rely on developing rapport with participants and discussing in detail, aspects of the particular phenomenon being studied" (p. 53). After gaining IRB approval (see Appendix), I met with my Hispanic origin employee, and began to plan my approach before speaking to participants.

Data Collection Procedures

The sources of data collection were interviews, one focus group, photographic images, and field observations. "Every method of data collection is only an approximation to knowledge. I selected four data sources to use as triangulation for my study. Each provides a different and usually valid glimpse of reality, and all are limited when used alone" (Peshkin, 1993, p. 28).

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Interviews

Individual interviews were conducted during January and February of 2009. The interviews were scheduled according to the availability of parents and their working hours. Five sets of interviews were conducted, one per parent, and were approximately two hours each for a total of ten hours of individual interview interactions. "While both qualitative and quantitative researchers today tend to rely on the interview as a basic method of data gathering, whether the purpose is to obtain a rich, in-depth experimental account of an event or episode in the life of the respondent or to garner a simple point on a scale of two dimensions" (Atkinson & Silverman 1997, p. 11). The purpose of the individual interviews was to maintain the special contact already established through informal interactions and parent meetings. Energy and effort was put into developing relationships of mutual trust and respect between the researcher and the group. Interviews provided a way to individualize the interaction. Interviews addressed specific issues pertaining to the individual in the following areas: 1) Prior experiences with early childhood programs; 2) memories of individual families about educational environments; 3) family activities outside of the school environment; 4) expectations of the school environment; and 5) involvement levels in school environments. The parents were interviewed at the educational center in a room away from children and other distractions. At the beginning of each interview, I explained how the interview would be structured.

Prior to meeting with each parent, I developed an interview protocol (See Appendix) based on recommendations by Fontana and Prokos (2007), demarris (2004), and Creswell (2007). Discussions were guided by six interview questions. Four open-ended questions were designed to start conversations about participants' memories and

expectations of early childhood programs. Two dichotomous questions were used as a

starting point for unstructured dialogue, elaborating on interactions with the current

educational environment and relationships to their individual past experiences with early

childhood programs. Prompts were used with both sets of questions to illicit more

detailed information from the parents. Table 2 identifies the guiding questions for the

structured interview, and the dichotomous questions to start dialogue for the unstructured

interview. The individual interviews were taped, and used for constant comparative data

analysis throughout the project. The tapes were transcribed by a paid transcriber, and

were used primarily by the researcher to better understand each mother's perceptions of

experiences, interactions, and relationships with early childhood education.

Table 2

Guiding Questions for Interview Dialogue

	Structured Interview Questions	Dichotomous Questions
Microsystem	Tell me what you would like to see happen at this school. What are your expectations?	Do you participate in parent activities or volunteer?
Mesosystem	What kind of activities did you and your family do? Can you tell me about your early childhood experiences?	Can you tell me if you attended an early childhood program?
	Tell me about a memory of you and your family at school as early as you can remember?	

The interviews provided me with the opportunity to understand the participants' thoughts about their own early childhood experiences and the expectations they had of the program.

Focus Group

There was one focus group during the year of data collection for this study. The group included all five Latina parents, and was approximately 90-120 minutes. It took place on the child care campus. I employed a first order narrative approach, in which individuals tell stories about themselves, and their own experiences (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), the first order narrative approach is best for capturing the detailed stories of participants. The participants knew each other, were comfortable, and spoke openly in the group discussion.

The purpose of the focus group was to allow parents to interact with each other, and share stories about educational experiences, interactions, and relationships. The focus group was another means of obtaining specific information and perspectives from the parents, and of developing my understanding of their perceptions about educational environments. It is imperative that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is one of mutuality and reciprocity. Organizations generally use focus groups in planning or evaluation, either to improve some specific product or service, or more globally, during the development of strategic plans or mission statements. Generally, focus groups answer questions collectively, as a result of discussion between group members. Ideas emerge due to the interaction, brainstorming, debate, and problem-

solving that takes place. Specifically, the focus group session in this study concentrated on:

- Gathering opinions, beliefs, and attitudes about educational issues

- Clarifying some assumptions from the interviews

- Encouraging discussion about the challenges, strengths, and weaknesses of the individuals on various topics related to their instruction

- Building excitement from the spontaneous combination of participants' comments Providing an opportunity to learn more about the experiences, interactions and relationships of these parents.

There was one focus group held in April of 2009. It followed a three phase format:

1. The opening was the time for me to welcome the group, introduce the purpose and context of the focus group, explain what a focus group is and how it is structured, and make introductions.

2. The question section was where I asked the questions. Questions were open-ended, and moved from general to specific events or experiences.

3. The closing section wrapped up the focus group. It included thanking the participants, giving them an opportunity for further input, telling them how the data will be used, and explaining when the larger process will be completed.

The questions used in the focus group were developed to elicit information concerning the micro- and mesosystems, according to the underlying theoretical assumptions of Brofenbrenner's systems analysis. The questions called for reflection and discussion. The discussion was guided, but the participants were encouraged to tell their

own stories, generating the information to support the interpretive nature of this work.

Table 3 shows the guiding questions in relation to the theoretical basis of this study.

Table 3

Focus Group Guiding Questions

_____

Microsystem	What evidence of your culture do you see in the school now? What do you wish you could see related to your culture at school?
Mesosystem	Tell me about your experiences before you started school?
	Tell me about a time when you felt that your race Influenced the way you were treated in school?

_____

Photo Elicited Interviews

  "Data can take the form of field notes, interview transcripts, transcribed recordings of naturally occurring interaction, documents, pictures and other graphic representations" (Coffey &Atkinson, 1996, p.4). Each participant was given their own camera. They took pictures of icons either from their own childhood or of their children's. They returned the camera to me, and I took the film to Walgreen's to be developed, and put on a disc for easy access. The participants scheduled another interview to review the photographs. During the second interview, the participants made

selections about which pictures were to be used for the research. Instead of starting with any predetermined categories, inductive thematic analysis strategies were used to develop categories representing the images found in the photos. The participants told me about their photos. They described what each photo represented in their lives.

For the overall coding the photos were divided into three categories: "cultural images," "social images," and "other". All photos within a given category were displayed at once, by spreading photocopies out in a room. Photos portraying culture specific images (such as those that conveyed images directly related to a country) were grouped together. For example, if a number of photos portrayed images of country specific items representing religious or celebratory customs, they were grouped together to form the "*Culture Specific Item*" theme. Once thematic categories were identified, all images were examined to look for overarching trends. This cross-case analysis resulted in the identification of major categories that transcended the photo groups.

Based on the analysis of the mothers' photos, the cultural influences from countries of origin were evident in the perceptions of the parents' connections to educational environments. Educational environments are also clearly associated with social interactions, in the eyes of these parents. The photos did not convey any evidence of language; possibly due to the difficulty of capturing language issues in photos. The photo analysis data is in agreement with the data from interviews, about the importance of culture to the participants. If the child's success in school signifies or represents a portion of the parent's self-worth, the degree to which this happens varies according to the parenting style (Burchinal, et al., 2002; Castro, et al., 2004), and context of the family

(Denham, et al., 1997; Minuchin, 1974; Walker, et al., 2005). The individual cultures of families should be considered when examining children's success.

Member checks were utilized directly after transcriptions after each the individual interviews, the focus group and the visual image descriptions. Member checking is a procedure of engaging the respondent in analyzing and confirming the data findings (Byrne, 2001). Transcripts of each interview and focus group were given to each participant to review, and to make suggestions or corrections.

Field Observations

Participants were observed over an eight week period; five days a week, during morning drop offs, meetings, conferences, and volunteer times, when parents were involved in program activities. Field notes were carefully written describing parent interactions. The field observations were analyzed by viewing parents' interactions with children, other parents, and other adults. The anecdotal notes consisted of my observations and thoughts as these interactions related to Brofenbrenner's Ecological Theory. One observation noted that if parents had questions, and could not communicate clearly, they began to look for other Latinos who could possibly assist with interpretation. See example below:

Example 1:

Parent comes into center and has a question.

The question is not fully understood by front office

Communication barrier existed

Parent seemed frustrated

The parent and front office began to look for assistance from another Latino

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Parent helps another parent

Memoing is analysis of the observations and recorded field notes (Glaser, 1998).

Memoing was used to record thoughts, ideas, and compare my notes to the data during

the research. Over the 8 week period, the most commonly observed scenarios were

organized into the following table (see Table 4), in which observations were linked to

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological System.

Table 4

Field Observations Based on My Notes

Observation	Other Systems
Frustration	
Parent assisting each other	Meso-system
Parents seeking each other out in meetings	Socio-cultural
Not converse with other parents	

The field note observations contributed to my research, and provided insight into the

daily interactions of families during morning drop offs. I observed parents talking to their

children, walking them to the classroom, and using their primary home language.

Ethical Considerations

According to Creswell (2007), "regardless of the approach to qualitative inquiry,

a qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues that surface during data collection"

(p.141). In order to best address ethical issues, I followed the recommendations and

requirements from the university and research community. Careful steps were taken to get approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the research. I started in the summer of 2008, and was approved in December 2008. After gaining the approval of the IRB, I met with my Latina advisor, and began to plan my approach, before speaking to the participants. I knew I would have an issue with gaining the trust of my participants, because I was asking them to share with me some of their personal thoughts and beliefs about childhood, and their culture. "Qualitative interviews rely on developing rapport with participants and discussing, in detail, aspects of the particular phenomenon being studied" (demarris, 2004, p. 53). This is why my Latina advisor was vital to this work. I explained the methods to her, that I wanted to use to conduct the interviews and the focus group. I was concerned that Latino parents would not openly share sensitive information with me because I was not an insider. Therefore, I sought the guidance of my Latina advisor on all interview questions, and my planned approach to collection information. Before conducting the research, I informed participants of all risks of participating in the study, and obtained their approval to be included in my study, by having each one sign a consent form. I maintained confidentiality by keeping my files in a locked cabinet in my office. My transcriber also signed a confidentiality agreement. The participants reviewed the transcribed information for accuracy and sensitivity, and I made changes if the participants did not want certain information included in the analysis. Participants were thereafter able to access the tapes upon request. All information was protected, and the taped interviews were fully disclosed to the participants. Appropriate measures were taken to ensure that the research was conducted in a professional and non-deceptive manner. My participants were made

aware that they could choose not to participate or withdraw from the study at any point. Parents were assured that if they chose not to take part in the study, it would not affect their child(ren)'s enrollment in the educational program.

I purposely kept all individual interview responses private, in order to ensure that participants would not know what others had said in each individual interview. In reporting my findings, I removed all materials that would identify participants, such as labeled tapes, cameras and photographs. Every precaution was taken to ensure the participants were comfortable with this study, including translating research materials to Spanish, done by my Latina advisor. I used pseudonyms when referring to the parents throughout the study. In exchange for their participation in the study, each participant was given a ten dollar gift card, and was treated to lunch after the last group meeting.

Data Transformation and Representation

Once the data was transcribed, I used a general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis for the interviews, photos, and field notes. Data that remain from this elimination process are considered relevant to the experience. Each category is discussed in detail in the following sections.

Inductive Analysis of Interviews

General inductive analysis is based on evaluating relevant frequent expressions in the transcripts, and determining consistent codes. Coding is grouping or labeling similar words, and putting them into themes and categories. The raw data was first coded to identify relevant pieces of meaningful data. For example, the following sentence was coded under language: "When my daughter went to school the teachers thought something was wrong with her, she didn't talk because she only heard Spanish at home

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(Elaina)." Similarly, several participants mentioned that they never went to an early childhood program. Mary said, "most Hispanics don't go to day care". The view of older generations, that early childhood was unnecessary, repeatedly surfaced as a category. When new codes were identified, changes were made to the overall coding schema to reflect the new structural information. The coded data was then categorized according to common ideas and expressions. Once the data was categorized, it was analyzed for emergent general themes, by closely studying the transcripts, looking for similarities and differences across subgroups. I frequently used line by line coding, in addition to examining entire paragraphs or statements to assist with developing themes, a technique perfected by Strauss and Corbin (1990). I also developed charts to visually represent and organize similar patterns (see Tables 5, 6, & 7).

I was assisted in analyzing the data by a peer debriefer, who is someone other than the researcher, who confirms the data. A peer debriefer should have methodological, theoretical or content experience, in order to validate the researcher's beliefs regarding the research. Additionally, the debriefer provided a fresh viewpoint for the analysis assessment (Byrne, 2001). After independently coding the passages, making revisions, and refining the system, we compared our findings. Many of the codes we arrived at individually were similar in content. Evidence of culture, education, language, and family were found to be the most important and agreed upon themes (see Table 5). Consensus was not easily agreed upon for some of the themes, such as the generational view of early childhood education, which the peer debriefer did not view as a relevant theme. A more rigorous and systematic review of the transcripts with the peer debriefer led to agreement on the identified theme.

Table 5

Examples of Codes and Categories from Interviews and Focus Group

Code	Category
Culture	Problems adjusting
	Acceptance
	Feelings of isolation
Education	Wants children to learn English
	Confused as to expected role
	Wants home culture included
	Teacher interactions
Language	Speaking Spanish in school
	Speaking Spanish at home
	Dual language
Family	Parent roles
	Primary caregiver
	Future hopes of children
	Shared caregiver

The themes were reviewed for similarities and differences. The researcher compared categories formed by each subgroup (language, education, family and culture) to determine if there were any links to their responses. Inductive analysis involves revisiting the data numerous times to refine, rethink, to document, and ultimately, to come to conclusions about recurring themes or patterns (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 2002). This method of continuous refinement contributed to the development of themes.

Analysis of Visual Images/Photographs

I conducted further analysis using cultural visual representation, field notes, peer debriefings, and member checks. The analysis consisted of visual representations of icons from either the participants' childhoods, or their children's. The participants were

given cameras to takes pictures of culturally meaningful and expressive items as sources of data presentation. The use of photographs and other visual data is widely accepted in qualitative research (Collier & Collier, 1986), as a method of gaining deeper insight into the experiences of participants. The role of photo elicitation is "establishing communication between two people, who rarely share taken-for-granted cultural backgrounds because it is anchored in an image that is understood, at least in part, by both parties" (Harper, 2002, p. 20). I compared photos to transcripts, and developed statements that had been associated with the photographs. I tried to create the most authentic representation of parents' experiences as possible; a true reflection of their lived experience. I also noted my thinking for methodological decisions, and attempted to convey my process for constructing knowledge gained from the study to the reader. Photographs, by themselves, do not provide information or insight. It is when they are used with the interview data, that their value and significance are discovered (Collier & Collier, 1986).

For the overall coding, the photos were divided into three categories: those containing cultural images, those containing social images and "other." All photos within a given category (culture, social and "other") were displayed at once by spreading the photocopies out in a room. For example, photos judged to be portraying culture-specific images, directly related to a country were grouped together. If a number of photos portrayed images of country-specific representations of religious or celebratory items, these were grouped together to form the "*Culture-Specific Item*" theme. Once thematic categories were identified for each photo, a cross-case analysis was completed. The

identified images were examined among all photos, to look for overarching trends. This resulted in the identification of major categories that transcended the photo groups.

Almost half of the photos were of images that were culture-specific, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe, a quinceañera doll, traditional clothing, etc. Twelve photos included social interactions (more than one human image performing activities together). Three of the photos were included in the microsystem category (depicting a teacher, family member, peer, or child). Two photos were included in the mesosystem group that directly reflected the home environment, including pictures inside the home, or other images of the home environment. The "other" category included images of toys which were not country of origin-related, or did not directly relate to specific cultures, or did not include social images. Three photos were included in this category.

Table 6

Categories used to code each individual photo.

Characteristics	Coding Categories
Culture-Specific Photo	Religious statue or representation
	Food specific to country
	Events or representations of specific
	cultural events
	Words in home language
	Culturally specific clothing
Social Interactions	More than one human image
	Interactions between human images
	Interactions in school environments
Social Microsystem	Family member image
Family, Teacher, Peer	Teacher image
	Peer image
	Child image
Social Mesosystem	Item found in home
Home Environment	Home picture (whole house, etc)

Analysis of Field Observations

Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995), define field notes as intense and involved accounts describing the experiences and observations of the researcher. This was done by collecting data from interviews, with field observations and notes. I noted changes in tone of voice, facial expressions, and hesitations in my field notes. My field notes were used to analyze, and compare observations and ideas about the data.

I followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985), advocacy for the use of multiple sources of data collection, or triangulation. Schwandt (2001) defined triangulation as "a means of checking the integrity of the inferences one draws" (p. 257). With all of the data sources, the research has well-aligned forms of representation. I looked for evidence of thematic categories across all sources of data.

The following chart is an example of data, and theoretical representations collected from interviews (I), the focus group (F), photo elicitations (P), and field observations (O) related to research questions:

1) What are Hispanic origin parents' perceptions of American schooling?

2) How do the cultural experiences and expectations of parents of Hispanic origin influence their view of early childhood education?

Table 7

Research Analysis Related to Questions and Theories

Questions	Data	Theme	Indicative of Socio-cultural
Question 1	Hannah: (I)- I " I used to write Ana because the teachers always used to say Ana instead of Hannah"	Language	No
	Mary: (F)-"I never went to daycare. Usually, you know, Mexican ladies would just take care of me and watch t.v. I like it here because you take them outside, they get involved and I really like it. My child has been here since he was a baby."	Culture	Yes
	Mary (F)-"I want my little Rosie not to get hurt and I don't want anyone to take her away at school. I think that is why Mexicans don't bring their children to school."	Culture	No
	Annie- (I) "Sometimes, I didn't know if the teachers liked me, especially when they saw my daddy. My daddy is Mexican and my mother is white."	Culture	No
	All participants-(O) Shared cultural activities in child's classroom such as food	Culture	Yes

(Table Continues)

Table 7

Research Analysis Related to Questions and Theories

Questions	Data	Theme	Indicative of Socio-cultural
Question 2	Hannah: (I)"I didn't have the experience with my nephew of going to headstart. I went directly into school and it was difficult. I didn't know English. I learned, but failed second grade."	Language	Yes
	Elaina: (P)-"I remember as a child thinking of when I would get to have my quinceara celebration. I tried to do well in school so my mom would give me a big celebration."	Culture	Yes
	Janie: (I)-"My Jon has learned a lot since he has been coming here. At the beginning, I was thinking they would just take care of him not teach him. So I took it upon myself to make sure he knew English and Spanish. Later, I found out that he has been learning both his later and colors. He also gets the Spanish culture at home. I was amazed."	Language/Culture	Yes

(Table Continues)

Table 7

Research Analysis Related to Questions and Theories

Questions	Data	Theme	Indicative of Socio-cultural
Question 2	Elaina (F)-"I had a very different perception about early childhood education at the beginning. I didn't have childcare there. I had my parents to watch my daughter."	Culture	Yes
	Hannah (F)-"See, I think that since like I'm Mexican in our culture it's like close minded that we don't want our children to go to school in a early age because we're scared something is going to happen to them."	Culture	Yes

There were 2,226 lines of transcribed data from individual, focus, and photo-elicited interviews, coded and categorized for emergent themes. My analysis of each category or code references language, schooling, cultural traditions and beliefs. The observations were done over eight weeks, five days during morning drop-off. The code and category is represented in the triangulation table below.

Table 8

Triangulation of Data

	Interviews	Focus groups	Observations	Photo-Elicited Interviews
Culture	394	295	560	131
Language	230	197	400	0

Issues During Analysis

Sometimes, situations arise during data collections, which were not anticipated. When this occurs, it is important to document the circumstances. One participant in this study decided, during the review of photographs, that she did not want her family pictures used in a dissertation. I respected her request, and returned the pictures to her. She did agree to discuss her photos, however, and the transcriptions were used in the analysis. The remaining participant's photos were included in the dissertation.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness and Rigor</div>

Establishing credibility is another way to enhance the quality of qualitative inquiry. It concerns the researcher's attempts to solve differences in representation of participants experiences compared to known experiences by the participants (Schwandt, 2001). In this study, this was done in two ways as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, I described myself in the research, as one situated among and coming to know a community of parents,-aware that I shape the study. I was open and honest with my participants. They were able to see me lock away transcripts and photos. Second, my analysis was subjected to peer debriefing. Peer debriefing occurs when someone other

than the researcher analyzes and confirms the data. According to Schwandt (2001), this procedure entails sharing ideas with colleagues concerning field work, and "sharing one's evolving attempts at describing and analyzing qualitative data to achieve some kind of consensual validation" (p.188). The Hispanic-origin assistant, and faculty mentor were active in the progression of data collection and analysis. The data is displayed in this final paper through descriptive narration, "so that readers can vicariously experience these happenings and draw conclusion" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p.439).

Chapter Summary

In chapter 3, the research is situated as a qualitative, interpretivist study of Latina mothers in a southern town. Some key scholars who have studied socio-cultural approaches are noted. A description of interviews, stories, photographs, and focus group elicitations were used to collect data from the participants. Finally, I explain how decisions were made to present the data, and draw implications from the conclusions.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings and themes are reported of the research conducted with five female Latino participants. The early childhood cultural experiences and expectations of Latino parents were investigated. The findings are synthesized based on my research questions; 1) What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of North American schooling? 2) How do the cultural experiences and expectations of Latino origin parents influence their view of early childhood education? The categories are explained as they relate to the findings. Each category and theme resulted from data that emerged through the research. The data was closely examined through inductive analysis. This was done in order to provide a key account of what the participants described in the interviews and focus group discussions. Words, phases, and paragraphs were labeled in order to organize similar codes into the best grouping. Descriptions of each participant's experiences were presented based on data collected from interviews, focus groups, photo elicitations, and field notes observations. For a better understanding and comprehensible account of the participants in the study, a description of the participants was provided. The respondents are representative of the following demographics: 2 Latinas were born in the US and 3 are native born (1 lived in the USA since age 5), 1 in Mexico, and one in Columbia. This has had an influence on their beliefs about education and their experiences in the education system. All of the participants are students at the local community college. There are 100 families who have children attending the early childhood program. Table 9 details the demographic information of each participant.

Table 9

Participant Information

Participant	Country of Origin	Generation	Relationship to Child	Number of Children
Mary	Mexico	1	Mother	1
Elaina	United States of America	2	Mother	1
Hannah	Mexico	1	Godmother/caretaker	4
Janie	Columbia	1	Mother	3
Annie	United States of America	2	Mother	2

Participant descriptions

Mary. The majority of Mary's life was spent in Texas after moving to the USA

from Mexico with her mother and younger sister. Mary is one of the first Latino origin

parents to bring her child to the early childhood program. She lives with her friend,

mother and sister in the southeast side of the city. Prior to moving to this area, Mary

attended a dual language school where she was an honor student. She is a full-time

student at the college and worries about the quality of time she spends with her child.

Mary is on the Dean's List at the college and passes on this zeal for education to her

child. She is however concerned about her child's preschool experience. Mary spent a lot

of time with babysitters because her mother worked hard to care for her family as a single parent. She is determined to finish school and provide a better life for herself and her family. Her aim has always been to become a professional and to make sure her child is cared for in what she considers to be a good early childhood environment.

Because of her ambitions, she constantly expressed how her studies interfered with her being able to spend the amount of time she desired with her child. Reassuring Mary of care has put her somewhat at ease and she eagerly agreed to participate in the research study. During the focus group discussion, she shared many of her deepest thought about her child care experiences and expressed how her being cared for by babysitters influenced her decision to enroll her child into the early care program.

When Mary came to the individual interview her live-in companion came with her. He did not participate, but was with her to support her. After the interview, both Mary and her companion seemed more talkative throughout the study. They were eager to read the notes and transcripts from the interviews and focus group discussion.

Elaina. Elaina is a student at the college and takes her child to the early childhood program at the college. She was born in the USA and moved from the Midwest to the south in order to be closer to her husbands' family. Elaina is very family oriented and wants her child's quality of education to be of supremacy. She also wants her daughter to experience both the American and Latino knowledge base in school. She has two children; a toddler and a pre-teen. She expressed how much she had learned about childrearing since moving away from her mother in the Midwest.

Most of Elaina's experience as a mother had been through guidance from her mother and other close friends in her neighborhood. Elaina noted how clueless she was

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with her older child and had no idea of what to expect. Elaina relied heavily on her support system in the Midwest. After moving into this southern town, she learned to take cues from the professionals at the early childhood program about child care techniques. She realized how much she had depended on her mother and now had to rely on her own abilities and skills as a parent.

During the interview, Elaina explained how she had only learned English after attending school. She could understand directly how many parents must have felt when they enrolled in the early childhood program with limited English skills. She offered to assist the staff with communication with dual language parents.

Elaina expressed how isolated she felt sometimes while taking classes at the college. This stemmed from being the only Latino in many of her classes. During a focus group discussion, she emphasized how she did not think of herself as being from the USA until she went to visit Mexico. The immigration officer asked Americans to stand aside, she did not move because she only thought of herself as Mexican. She said that was when she realized that she was from the Midwestern United States. Being so immersed in her cultural traditional practices and living in a Latino Neighborhood she only identified with her way of life. Participating in this research seemed to have given Elaina an opportunity to express her voice about her expectations about early childhood education.

Hannah. Hannah is the caretaker of her sister's children. She was born in Mexico and came to the United States as a child. She ponders heavily on the quality of education that her nieces and nephews are receiving. She desires that they have an educational experience that includes components of both the American and Latino culture. Hannah is a college student who works hard to stay ahead in her classes. Many of her early

schooling experiences seemed to affect her coursework even today. Because of her experiences, she was eager to participate in the study and voice her expectations for early programs in American schools.

Hannah is deeply rooted in her Latino culture and participates in many celebrations with her family. She speaks boldly about customs and beliefs about child care outside of the home. Hannah is very supportive of early care programs. She works in a Headstart program and is committed to helping Latino origin children to not have some of her destructive experiences with American School.

Feelings of being underrepresented and ill prepared have served as motivator of Hannah to assist others who send their children to preschool programs. Participating in this study provide her the opportunity to tell her story and give voice to harbored feelings. Hannah was so overcome with emotions during the interview. She expressed her overall concerns and desires for her niece and nephew through the American educational system.

Janie. Janie is a Mexican and Colombian mother of three. She was born in Columbia. After her parents divorced, she moved to the northeast to be closer to her mother and other siblings. She met her husband and they relocated to this area. Her family moved south for a better job opportunity and to leave the larger city. She attends the college and anticipates transferring to the local university. She was unable to speak English when she first arrived in this country and learned to speak fluently after having a child and working with a language program to improve her speech. She believes the opportunities are better in this country, but not necessarily the education. She was surprised when her child named letters and numbers after attending the early childhood program. She admitted that she doesn't spend much time with her children even at home

because she is studying. She said her children put pressure on her to speak English. She wants to preserve her Spanish language.

Upon completing her degree, Janie plans to attend a local university. It is important for her to do well in her classes to become eligible for scholarships. Janie is a proud mother and participates and volunteers in the child care program. She is enthusiastic about the research project. Her input provided an important voice about her cultural experience and expectations about early childhood education of Latino origin families.

Annie. Annie was born in the southern USA and has lived in this area most of her life. Her mother is Euro American and her father is Latino. Annie is married with two children. According to Annie, she has always been caught up in two worlds. She has always been more involved in her father's or her husband's way of doing things. Her husband has only been in the US for the last six years. She did not have the difficulty of speaking Spanish or English as a child. She attended preschool and had many fun experiences in school. Because she attended school, she felt that it was important for her children to attend school. She did not like the way people looked her when her father would pick her up.

Annie is very quiet and reserved. She knew how it felt to experience cultural isolation in school. She says she never seemed to fit in at school. Annie is a mother of two children and they both attended the child care program.

The participants collectively discussed family background, cultural concerns, language educational expectations and communication issues through multiple interviews and other data sources.

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Question 1

  What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of North American schooling?

  In this section, I discuss data from the interview transcriptions, focus group, photographic elicitation, and field observation, as related to the research questions. The first question that guided this research was: 1) What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of North American schooling? After carefully reviewing and comparing all data sources, the analysis revealed the following major theme: Language is more influential than cognitive ability in determining academic success or failure (see Figure 1). Three sub-themes emerged from the major theme: 1) Latinos are marginalized by academic failure based on language rather than cognitive ability; 2) North American schools use language to equate to cognitive abilities and this distorts their actual abilities; and 3) Latinos have not experienced North American schools moving towards developing a greater cultural awareness.
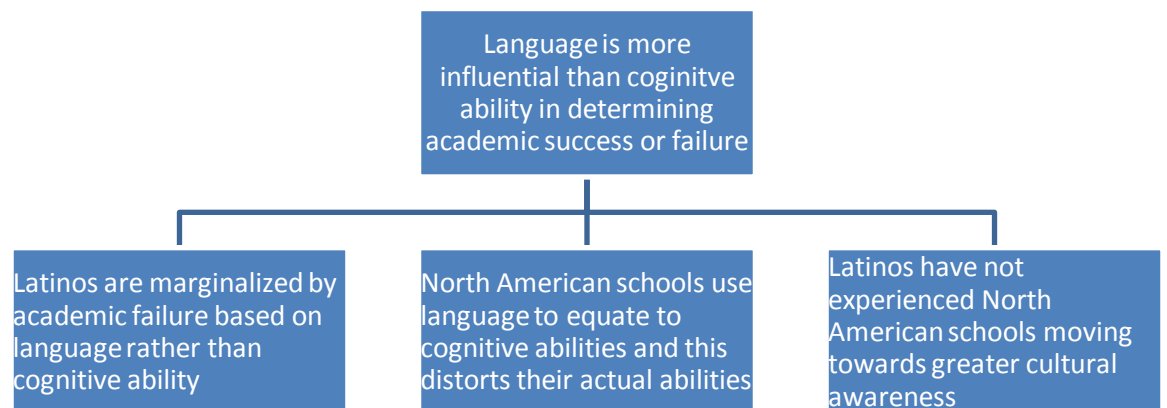

  Figure 1. Theme 1

Major –Theme

Language is more influential than cognitive ability in determining academic success or failure. Focusing on language rather than cognitive abilities indicates a judgment to parents about their children by teachers. These findings make the connection between speaking English in North American schools and the academic success of the participants. For each participant, being able to maintain her Spanish heritage, while learning to speak the English language, is noteworthy. Maintaining the language is a way of being connected to customs and beliefs. The findings denote how valuable speaking Spanish is to the respondents and how English is necessary for success in North American schools. Each participant spoke of their concern about the importance of Spanish communication as a means of maintaining the child's Spanish heritage; however they want their children to have exposure to the English language so that they can assimilate into their English-speaking early childhood program.

> But if they don't know English, it's difficult for the child to learn the correct way to say the words I think (Hannah, 2008).

> Sometimes they might not know their colors in English, but they know 'em in Spanish. It's just either because the mom don't know English. In most of the cases, the mom don't know English and the dad neither. So, that makes the child not know the abc's or the numbers in English it makes it difficult for the teacher to teach 'em (Hannah, 2008)

> It's real important that my son is here that he gets everybody's attention. I want him to learn English and be able to think. I want him to know Spanish too, but people respect you when you can talk to them (Mary, 2008).

> I think it's helped him being in school because you know before when I was with him, you know, I tried to teach him since I was also going to school. I focused a lot on just teaching him English. I tried to teach him a new word he doesn't know. I guess he'll learn, or he'll listen to that word and he'll say it all the time. When I first brought him here, he learned how to eat by himself and   now that he is in trains he's learning the potty train which I guess they have time to teach him. He

has to know how to say it in English. I don't have that much time to do it (Mary, 2008).

I knew English because I was, I guess, self taught or I learned it thru school because that's all I knew, I knew English thru school and I knew Spanish at home (Elaina, 2008).

My son doesn't talk. I have been trying to teach him Spanish that but umm sometimes he goes to sleep at night at nine and sometimes you know he'll wait for his dad to come to come home and umm I try to keep a routine but sometimes we don't follow it because it's really hard. I want him to speak both English and Spanish (Mary, 2008).

Because Spanish was all I heard and I lived in a Mexican neighborhood growing up, all I knew was what I Spanish. As a teenager, I went to Mexico. In the airport, immigrations asked me my nationality and I said Mexican. He looked at my passport and said you're American. I did not identify with the fact that I am American because I only thought Mexican (Elaina, 2008).

Understanding differences includes working with language and other barriers that may hinder school success. "Schools are often the first place where families and children experience cultures that are different from their own" (Kirmani, 2007, p. 98). Respondents suggest that recognizable connections must be made that contribute to building and enhancing relationships. Focusing on children's cultural context is essential for early care programs.

Sub-theme 1

Latinos are marginalized by academic failure based on language rather than cognitive ability. Participants viewed language and culture as the essence of who they are. Language and culture are intertwined and influence every aspect of their life. Language and culture are so integrated and interrelated into their lives that it influences every viewpoint such as family, early care, education and other qualities of existence. The Latinos are marginalized by language rather than their intellectual ability when language becomes a barrier in the educational setting.
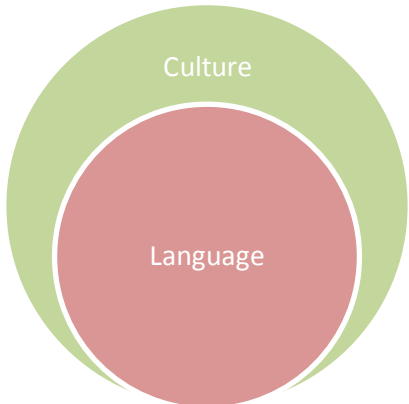
Figure 2. Language and culture are integrated and interrelated

Hannah repeated the second grade; Mary and Elaina describe similar experiences.

Throughout the interviews participants expressed how language may be a factor as to

why Latino parents are not bringing their young children to child care.

> I think either it's because their child just knows I guess Spanish and maybe
> they're afraid that when they come here that they are going to be lost, or they're
> not understand (Mary, 2008).

> My mom doesn't know English. She knows a little but not much so, when we
> communicate with her we communicate in Spanish I didn't know English but I
> learned and I failed second grade. You know of the English. I didn't know very
> much so, later on, I heard people talking and that's how I learned from the streets
> and watching TV (Hannah, 2008).

> My oldest daughter grew up with my mom, and she also grew up with this other
> lady that watched her. Their home environment was nothing but Spanish. So
> when I took her to kindergarten she did not really talk a lot. Her teachers thought
> she had a speech problem or even some kind of developmental problem because
> she did not know English. All she spoke was Spanish; she did not say anything
> until she was almost 6 (Elaina, 2008).

> My children have not had a problem with the English; it's the other stuff.
> Sometimes, people look at you and make an assumption (Annie, 2008).

When I went to school, I knew a lot in English. I knew my name, colors, and some sounds. My teacher would ask me questions, I would not talk so, and she thought I didn't know what she was talking about (Elaina, 2008).

Many educators are not working on creating positive relationships between diverse populations and their teachers who are often white and untrained in techniques that might lower tension and increase school success (Fuller, et al., 2006). These respondents have been an untapped source that could guide educators to a better understanding of beliefs and practices. More facilities and training programs need to reflect the diversity of American students. Teacher preparation programs need to prepare teachers who can communicate effectively with the parents in homes where another language is spoken (Orfield, 2009).

Sub-theme 2

North American schools use language to equate to cognitive abilities and this distorts their actual abilities. Data provided from the participants documented selective issues that affected them during their early schooling. Social- emotional issues and marginalization are apparent from their school experiences. Language barriers also misrepresent or mask cognitive abilities of Latinos in the school setting. This issue is further compounded as teachers serving economically disadvantaged, limited-English-proficient or lower achieving students compared to those advantaged students (Copley & Padron, 2004).

I started Kindergarten so I didn't have the experience like my nephew going to a head start. I went directly into school and it was difficult cause I didn't know English but I learned and I failed 2nd grade. I was really bad with spelling; I still am. Spelling is not my thing, so, that time I didn't know how to spell most of the stuff that you know little kindergarten children could spell, like sometimes I even forget how to spell my own name (Hannah, 2008).

The teachers spoke English and all she spoke was Spanish, she didn't say anything until she was almost six. The teachers assumed that Elaina's child was special needs (Elaina, 2008)

In Spanish you learn the sound of the letter and then you combine and it makes a word. It's different than English because in English the letter make a different sound than it is the name so it's easier in Spanish. We learn our colors and numbers in Spanish (Janie, 2008).

She grew up with my mom, and she also grew up with this other lady that watched her, their home environment was nothing but Spanish. So when I took her to kindergarten or preschool. She really didn't talk. A lot of her teachers thought she had a speech problem or that she had some kind of a developmental problem because she did not know English and all she spoke was Spanish (Elaina, 2008).

My little sister don't not know Spanish to good, she understands some things. She is in the special classes at school. I don't know why. I think she's smart, she may be confused. My mama don't speak English too good. My little sister don't understand my mama sometimes. My mama is always working and don't spend time with my sister. She tells me to speak English (Mary, 2008).

Most educators think of themselves as experts in educating children and families because of all of their training, experience and accolades. The teacher is viewed as the keeper of knowledge and dispenser of knowledge which directly influences their instructional approaches. Personal epistemologies may affect and impact their ability to determine cognitive abilities of diverse students. Most of the participants started school with knowledge of letters and numbers, but were not able to communicate effectively to the teacher; this contributed to a major distortion of actual abilities.

Sub-theme 3

Latinos have not experienced North American schools moving towards developing a greater cultural awareness.

Figure 3. Performance

North American schools have incorporated various activities to acknowledge other cultures such as diversity week, celebrating Cinco de Mayo, and other short term initiatives (see Figures 3, 6, & 7). However, they have not moved beyond a superficial acknowledgement into an ongoing continuum of cultural integration that is representative of home languages and cultures (Banks, 2006). According to the participants, the school should be an expansion of what is being done in the home. The children should have someone available that looks like them and talks like them. Toys and books should represent them and their home or school environment. During the second interview, while reviewing photographs, Mary selected two pictures of her son's favorite monkey (see Figure 4). She reflected on the money.

Figure 4. Monkey   *Figure 5. Child and monkey*

His dad gave me a monkey when I got pregnant. I gave it to him for Valentine's Day. That was his valentines present and then I think that following year, no, I think I was pregnant and I gave it to him. Somehow, when I got pregnant, I got really attached to the monkey. My mom wasn't home; no one was home with me. His dad was at work. So, you know just a monkey was there with me so, I got really attached. Actually, everywhere I would go I would take the monkey with me I know (giggle).

 I just got attached to it and then somehow. I was going into labor. I took the monkey with me, it was just there sitting with me. Then Aaron was born and you know the monkey was just there sitting next to his crib you know but he he never like I guess he was just too small and didn't pay much attention and he was already six months seven months and he really didn't pay attention. I took a trip to Mexico and I took the monkey with him with me and when I got there to Mexico he got really attached to it. I guess it was a different environment and he saw that it was the only thing that he memorized with home. So from that trip we came back he never let go of that monkey. Just really attached I guess he saw that you know that wherever he was that monkey would go with him too.

Being able to bring a favorite toy or stuffed animal is another way home comfort

is extended. Parents and teachers work together for the good of the child's development.

The participants want an environment that makes a child feel secure. The child having a

toy directly reflects the comforts of the home environment that is integrated into the

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school. Naptime was a perfect time to allow the child to have the toy for relief of any anxiety felt before or during rest time. This was a way of being responsive to children attending the early childhood program.

According to The National Association for the Education of Young Children, "the nation's children all deserve an early childhood education that is responsive to families, communities, and racial, and cultural backgrounds "(Kirmani, 2007, p. 98). The families would prefer to have teachers who look like them and more cultural representation in the classrooms. Maintaining relationships between the student and the teacher is necessary for academic success (providing good social- emotional development is necessary for positive growth and development, racial equity and feelings of security) within the school. "Parental experiences with the schools dictated the type of support that they were able to access for their children" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p.506). Latino's may be concerned with their children being someplace where the language (Spanish) is not spoken. Teachers who are not adequately trained and have personal biases affect school performance of Latino children

A more comprehensive view of involvement is presented by Epstein's (1992) model which supports the work of Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework. He discussed how children learn and grow through three overlapping spheres of influence: family, school, and community. These three spheres must form partnerships to best meet the needs of the child. Janie describes her school experience in her home country:

> In Columbia, I lived in the city. Yeah, they have a lot of school around the neighborhood but this one was around the corner of my house so I really liked it. They have like meetings with the parents, but in the meetings the child have a little program they sing, they dance, they say poetry, and it's cute because the parents get excited to see their child so little doing that things and it helps the children not to be shy from the people.

There is not a lot of Hispanics that come to daycare. I don't know if they can't afford it. Maybe, that's why they go to the Mexican ladies or other people that they know to take care of them. I think either it's because their child just knows I guess, Spanish and maybe they're afraid that when they come here that they are going to be lost or they're not understand or either it has to be the money problem because daycare is kind of expensive (Mary, 2008).

It's different over there it's much better. We play a lot of games, we get lot of games with the all the kids. Right here they teach like basic like the square the shapes the colors and the letters, but they don't learn how to dance or about celebrations (Janie, 2008).

We really had fun and also they teach like dance as day and like in the middle of the year we showed the parent what we learned; the dances we learned it was nice (Janie, 2008).

Figure 6. Performance 2

Figure 7. Cultural celebration

Parents of immigrant origin are expected to assimilate and adapt to American culture and educational systems. Developing a more cultural awareness may include adaptation of some of their beliefs as well as their sense of belonging in the process. Collecting information from the participants served as an important source of information. Their experiences and beliefs about the educational system demonstrated a need to address the changing school population.

Greater cultural awareness can reduce underrepresentation and misrepresentation in the school setting. Inequity in the classroom was described during the focus group. The participant did not know how to phase her experience, but knew it was an unfair and unfounded experience for her. During the focus group, a vast amount of the discussion was on acceptance of ethnicity in the schools. As children, the dissonant acculturations of the participants lead the participant or a family such as a child or sibling to face poor academic or social-emotional results. Expressions of insecure feelings or being made to

feel different surfaced through-out the interview and focus group discussions. The subtle

infractions in schools were only identified as the conversation became more intense. The

participants were able to describe the interaction between the teachers and the child more

articulately during spontaneous conversations. Often, I just let them talk without asking

any questions. The focus group conversations were in-depth and often strayed away from

the interview protocol.

> Mary (2008), sometimes you know maybe racism, but like you feel … like their race is better than the other race. Because I guess there is more of them then you're the only one that' there.

> Hannah (2008), when I was in school I used to write A.N.A. for short and cause I know the teachers always used to say what name do you prefer me to call you instead of calling your name. Well, I would say Ana because most people can't pronounce my name correctly.

> Sometime, I felt like the teachers didn't like me because my mom is white and my dad is Mexican. I tried t do what they wanted me to do (Annie, 2008).

> So, it's kind of hard and its very its interesting to see how a second language affects a child cuz I know hands on how it affected her(Elaina, 2008).

Most of the participants did not attend child care. Many were confused about

expectations, and felt as though there was no respect for their culture. They went to

kindergarten and faced many hardships. It seems difficult for most immigrants to

continue practicing values and beliefs since they are not valued (Cortez, 2008). If they

don't feel valued in the educational setting, then it is difficult to trust that customs would

be honored.

Question 2

How do the cultural experiences and expectations of Latino origin parents

influence their view of early childhood education? Once the participants' perceptions of

North American Schooling was explored, a second question was used to explore the

experiences and expectations that contributed to those perceptions. It was determined

that early child care was viewed through a generational lens that differed between

younger and older generations (see Figure 8). It was also evident that for both older and

younger generations, family is considered the primary educator of young children.

Younger generations were open to the inclusion of early childhood education and older

generations were more reluctant.
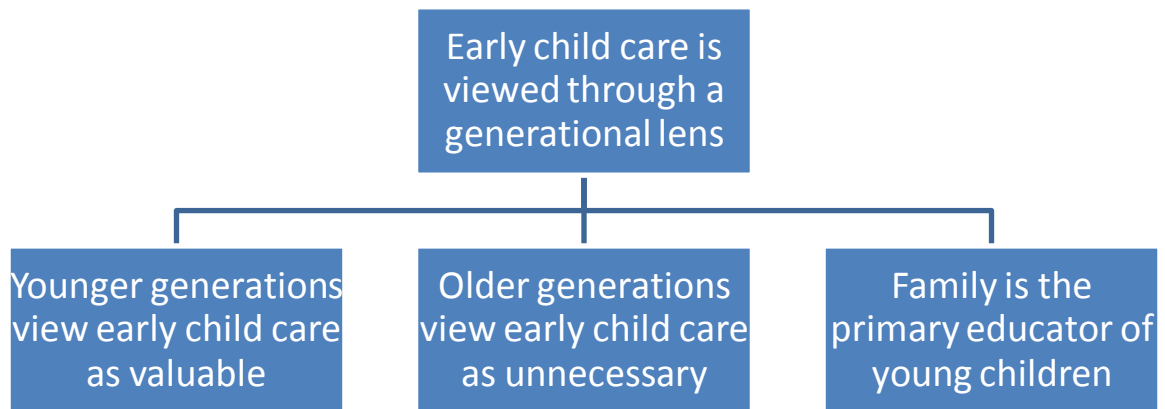
Figure 8. Theme 2

Major-theme

    Early child care is viewed through a generational lens. The older generations

pass on culture not only through language but through daily interactions. They fear that

through all of the emphasis on English being spoken in the school and the community,

that their language and culture will become less important. This belief directly impacts

the reasons why the older generation views early childhood as unnecessary. Wong

Fillmore (1991) described what happens when learning a second language means losing the first:

> When parents are unable to talk to their children, they cannot easily convey to them their values, beliefs, understandings, or wisdom about how to cope with their experiences. They cannot teach them about the meaning of work, or about personal responsibility, or what it means to be a moral or ethical person in a world with too many choices and too few guideposts to follow. What is lost are the bits of advice, the *consejos* parents should be able to offer children in their everyday interactions with them. Talk is a crucial link between parents and children: It is how parents impart their cultures to their children and enable them to become the kind of men and women they want them to be.

Sub-theme 1

Younger generations view early childhood education as a valuable vehicle that allows early access to an educational system that will influence the likelihood of school success for their children. Learning has high importance for these participants. All of the participants have expressed how a good foundation for education is necessary for survival skills. Since they are all college students and have experienced some hardships, they are committed to the early childhood program. Collectively, the participants are insistent about their children learning at an early age. This could be because they are all students themselves and realize in order for them to go to the university they must have a good academic foundation.

Elaina is a college student that shows persistence and motivation for her children to succeed. The participant seems to understand the challenges her child will face if she does not key in on the language development of her toddler. Elaina explains her feelings about English and Spanish by comparing her personal experience and her daughters.

> That was quite interesting, because I also spoke Spanish to her at home so, I didn't realize it was going to affect her now that's she's 12. She's still having problems trying to read English. So, it's kind of hard and it's very interesting to

see how umm a second language affects a child cuz I know hands on how it affected her.

I'm not going to choose for him. I want him to you know be able to like school, go to college and pick a degree that he wants (Mary, 2008).

My opinion is prolly like to teach them at an early age to make sure they are prepared for the future. I guess for the instead of a child being at home all by themselves with the mom for them to be in school and learning something new each day; knowing about the environment, knowing about what's actually outside instead of being just at home. So, I think it's like we providing them new things that probably that child had never seen before. Especially, meet new people new children so they will know that maybe they aren't the only ones in the planet that's other ones and I think that's basically it (Hannah, 2008).

Elaina discusses how she had little knowledge of child care, but the teachers were knowledgeable and how she listened to their cues.

My experience as a parent at the early childhood center here has been wonderful. I haven't had any issues with any of the teachers; I haven't had any issues with other parents either.I did not raise my daughter. I did not know that there are different stages of food to give this child so for them to give me insight on that is great I really like that.

Mary desires that her child's educational experiences be similar to the experiences he acquires at home. She spoke of how the teachers in the early childhood program were responsive to his needs and extended his learning to the outdoors. Annie believes that teachers need to recognize how important families are. She wants her children to have a better than average education and to be protected at school.

I want my little Rosie to not get hurt and I don't want anyone to take her away at school. I think that is why Mexicans don't bring their children to school. We don't want our children to get hurt or nobody to take them. I want the teacher to at least, like my child. Sometimes, I didn't know if the teacher liked me; especially after they saw my daddy. My daddy is Mexican and my mother is white.

Although it is not customary that Latino children attend child care programs, Mary explains why she brought her child to the program. She expects the center to care

for her child in a nurturing way during her absence. Another interesting factor, Janie

notes that her education was better in her home country, but the opportunities were better

in the USA.

Elaina clarified her position on speaking Spanish in the home by stating the

following:

> I think I'm going to do it a bit differently with my son now that I understand a
> little better about how it's going to have effects on them in the long run. With
> Melody, she learned nothing but Spanish in the home. That's all I spoke with her
> is Spanish. When she started school she didn't know much English, if any. I had
> to help her with, you know; the adjectives and the verbs and you know those
> things. You know when you are talking in Spanish you say car red, not red car.
> We had to learn everything in a different way. I am trying to teach her that way so
> she understands how that works out. Now she's taking Latin and I keep telling her
> you know it's hard. You have to learn the rules. That's how English is. You need
> to learn the actual English rules to be able to speak English. See in Spanish I don't
> think about it anymore, you know when I talk Spanish I just talk it I don't think
> about it anymore. When I talk English I have to think about it and make it sound
> right. It's something in the brain that has to connect.

Elaina concluded that speaking Spanish is important, but she is going to expose her child

to English earlier and more frequently to ensure success in school. Learning has a

different meaning, she believes, and she wants her children to have not only good, but

exceptional educational experiences.

> Well, I want them to have a good education. Good not meaning regular good; I
> want exceptional; an exceptional education (Elaina, 2008).

> For my son, I just want you to provide him like the love when I'm not here and
> the education (Mary, 2008).

> My son Ceasar came to the child care. I was afraid at first cause he had been at
> home with my mom and my sister; then everybody was so nice. When I had my
> Rosie, I wanted her to come here. I am a student at the college. I am not doing so
> good. I want them to do better. I want my children to go to college and get a good
> job (Annie, 2008).

For these respondents, education is a vehicle through which success can be achieved.

Early child care offers an opportunity for their children to experience that success.

Sub-theme 2

Older generations view early childhood education as unnecessary and a threat to cultural traditions. The older generations' view of early childcare education as unnecessary demonstrates an effort to control the external influences of acculturation that attempt silence their traditions. Through informal care in the home, they are able to control the extent to which the children are exposed to language is spoken in the home and religious beliefs, ceremonies and values are introduced at an early age (see Figures 9, 10, 11, and 12).

Figure 9. Quinceneara Doll

Figure 10. Childhood clothes

Figure 11.   Childhood photo

Figure 12. Religious display

Right now, I work in Headstart and I have a parent who got her child out of Head start because the grandmother said that the mom was crazy putting her in head start being the age of three (Hannah, 2008).

I think it would it have if I went preschool because I would have been more prepared for kindergarten it would have been a lot better me knowing my abc's and numbers and telling my teachers ok I know this and this so the teachers would spend time I guess spend more time on the ones that really need the help instead of the ones that because the moms didn't want to let her go to headstart or something like that I think it would have helped me better

The older generations pass on culture not only through language but through daily interactions. They fear that through all of the emphasis on English being spoken in the school and the community, that their language and culture will become less important. This belief directly impacts the reasons why the older generation views early childhood as unnecessary. Traditionally, Latino families do not send their children to child care. One participant noted that the fear of not being understood was a factor. Cultural values and beliefs can influence whether children attend early care programs such as child care, preschools or Headstart programs. The respondents felt confident in saying that feeling valued for their language and culture helps them to understand their connection to others.

Mary states:

There is not a lot of Hispanics that come to daycare. I don't know if they can't afford it. Maybe, that's why they go to the Mexican ladies or other people they know to take care of them. Maybe, they are afraid that when they come here they are going to be lost or they not understand and not treated good. I don't know it could be money.

To further emphasize that there are not of Latinos in school, even in her college classes

Mary continues:

You see in my in my class the majority is white there is about three four black and I'm the only one Hispanic and then the class that is about to graduate their umm

basically white about two three black it's the same thing so umm there's not a lot of Hispanic people that umm I know.

There are not many Mexican Americans in my class. One night I was looking around and I'm the only one (Elaina,2008).

These feeling of exclusions could also contribute to lack of attendance. Hispanic families may be concerned with their children not being exposed to cultural values, or that their language will be devalued (Garcia-Coll & Vazquez-Garcia, 1996; Harrison, et al., 1990; Ogbu, 1995). Many participants expressed an interest in continuing to speak their home language in the home as well as school.

I think either it's because their child just knows I guess Spanish and maybe they're afraid that when they come here that they are going to be lost, or they're not understand (Mary, 2008).

I didn't know English but I learned and I failed second grade. You know of the English. I didn't know very much so, later on, I heard people talking and that's how I learned from the streets and watching TV (Hannah, 2008)

You know when I really thought having a second language was important and that you know teaching her Spanish at home and that's how my mom taught me so and so. I thought it was going to be a good thing and I still think it's a good thing, but I think I'm going to do it a little bit differently with him now that I understand a little better about how it going to have affects on them in the long run (Elaina, 2008).

My father and friends spoke Spanish at home (Annie, 2008).

I've noticed about a lot of daycares because when I was growing up I didn't go to daycare and I know a lot of friends and they don't take kids to daycare and I think either it's because of the umm language and also because of umm the money.

Since my hair and skin were different from the other children, I believe children should have toys that represent them in the classroom (Annie, 2008).

The extension of the family mothers, fathers, grandparents, aunts and uncles brings focus to tradition and heritage through daily interactions. Consejo*s,* meaning respect is one aspect of culture that is transferred through the generations. In the school

setting this idea of Consejos may cause Latino students to experience misrepresentation. Growing up in a home where respect for elders was mandated, Hannah would never correct teachers who pronounced her name as "Anna" instead of its correct pronunciation of Hannah. She recalls one experience vividly:

> Like when I was in school I used to write Ana because I know the teachers always used to say Ana instead of Hannah. Most people can't pronounce my name correctly. I'm in college now and sometimes I will still write Ana, even though the teachers ask me to write my whole name completely. I'm so used to Ana Ana Ana all the time.

Hannah did not understand the language; "young children learn respect in the form of *consejos,* which is a form of intergenerational communication" (Cortez, 2008, p. 97). Because of the rules of respect that her parents instilled in her, she never corrected teachers who mispronounced her name. This caused Hannah to experience confusion about her role in school. She felt as though their incorrect pronunciation of her name was a clear sign of disrespect for her and her culture. This is an example of what the older generations try to avoid by keeping the children in the home to spare being hurt and continuously misrepresented. The participants further expect the early childhood program to be responsive to their children's needs and their history. Mary states:

> I've liked it because you know I never went to day care. Usually, you know like Mexican ladies would take care of me and we just watched TV. There you do the basic and here I like it because they get involved with them they take them outside and they learn so I really like it. My child has been here since he was a baby. He had just turned one when I brought him here. I like it and I also like to get involved with you know his teachers and see what's going on and I like it.

Hannah makes several important points about early childhood, culture, family, school and communication in the transcript. Hannah explains that many Mexicans stay home with their children before the age of 3.

Well ,umm let me see; I think that since like I'm Mexican in our culture it's like close minded that we don't want our children to go to school in a early age because we're scared something is going to happen to 'em .Right now, I work in Headstart. I have a parent who got her child out of Headstart because the grandmother said that the mom was crazy putting her in Headstart being the age of three. They should be older…….. before going to school. They didn't do that and its true. Most of the moms right now when you get married, you're at home, you know you stay at home most of the time, so, they don't they don't send their child to school because either the husband don't let them work or say you know you gotta stay home. You wanted to be a mom you stay home and take care of the kids until they go to school. They don't know that children can go to school at the early age so they can learn. I think that it helps them learn faster at the age of three to five and then you know from five they go to kindergarten; so they'd be more prepared for school. Instead of like myself, went directly into kindergarten didn't know nothing, and then it's difficult if you don't know nothing. They trying to teach you and you can see the difference if somebody went and somebody didn't. Cuz if somebody went to Headstart then they would say oh, ok, you know your ABC's you know your colors you know your numbers one to a hundred and then they have these other child's like myself who didn't know anything so it's difficult for the teachers and difficult for the child.

Sub-theme 3

The family is the primary educator of young children. Upholding family values, customs and beliefs are essential to Latino families. Hispanic or Latino parents may prefer a place where caregivers are familiar or have similar backgrounds (Fuller, et al., 1996, p.3325). There are several factors related to family history and structure that are important to consider (Ovando, et al., 2003) in relation to the socio-cultural environment of educational systems. During early processes of socialization, families model and shape the child's behavior and sense of identity. This sense of belonging occurs when the child makes accommodations that adapt to the family/group; and may consciously or unconsciously commit to perform patterns within the family. The sense of separateness and individuation develops through participation in different family subsystems within different family related contexts and in groups that are linked to the family but are external to the family system (schools). Although they are connected by one language the

family structure among Hispanics is diverse. Families in certain ethnic groups sometimes withdraw themselves from organized preschool programs and choose home care for their young children.

The participants suggest that home communication is a way families can maintain structure. All of the participants reflected on their early childhood memories. They had similar expressions of the use of language whether in the home or school. Similarly, "Families who have emigrated from countries are often unsure about the expectations of the new school and may hesitate to join in school activities or become involved in school events" (Kirmani, 2007, p. 94). These participants acknowledged the importance of learning English but noted that it was challenging and teachers could have been more responsive. They experienced teachers who were not accepting and did not understand the beliefs and values of the students.

Elaina states:

She really didn't talk a lot to her teachers. They thought she had a speech problem or that she had some kind of a developmental problem because she did not know English and all she spoke was Spanish; she didn't say anything until she was almost six.

I've liked it because you know I never went to day care. Usually, you know like Mexican ladies would take care of me and we just watched TV. There you do the basic and here I like it because they get involved with them they take them outside and they learn so I really like it. My child has been here since he was a baby. He had just turned one when I brought him here. I like it and I also like to get involved with you know his teachers and see what's going on and I like it (Mary, 2008)

Janie (2008), I want them to be smart and responsible; umm like, I want them to be care for the people, like, no hurt their feelings, umm intellectual, I want them to be smart learn a lot of things.

Mary (2008), I'm not going to choose for him. I want him to you know be able to like school, go to college and pick a degree that he wants.

Hispanic or Latino parents may prefer a place where caregivers are familiar or have similar backgrounds (Fuller, et al., 1996, p.3325).   Jenny explains what she wants for her children.

> I want them to be smart and responsible. I want them to care for the people like no one hurt their feelings, intellectual I want them to be smart learn a lot of things.

Annie is very concerned about having people who work in the program that speak Spanish and that her child can relate to. She explains how seeing other Latinos make her feel more secure when leaving her child at school.

> My little Rosie is happy at school. She always tell me when someone talks to her in Spanish. She says, "Hector's mom spoke to me today and I smiled at her." This is a good school, but it helps to see people that look like you. I like it when you invite parents to volunteer (Annie, 2008).

Latinas want the school to be an extension of home can best be demonstrated by Mary's illustration of her family adjusting to the early childhood setting.

> I think it's helped because you know before when I was with him, you know I tried to be go out with him since I was also going to school. I tried to focus a lot on just teaching him. Since he's been here, it's like he goes home and he learns maybe a new word he doesn't know. He doesn't talk much, but I guess he'll learn. He'll listen to that word and he'll say it all the time. When I first brought him here, he learned how to eat by himself. Now that he is in trains, he's learning the potty which I guess they have time to teach him, and maybe at home, I don't have that much time to do it (Maria, 2008).

> This is a good example of transitioning between home and school. The teachers assisted the family with her child learning self help skills. The mom is in school and admittedly said she didn't have much time to work with the child. Providing a school environment that is appropriate for children to grow and develop without stress is instrumental to successful home school partnerships and provides a safe alternative for care when parents are not available to be home. Annie and Janie further discuss their child's interactions at school.

> I like doing more homework like have the notebook and if they teach the letter T then send some home with a letter T make paint a T there and then make him to paste like papers or write or something and make it nice and then return it or cut from the newspaper T's and paste it so they would recognize more the letters (Jenny, 2008).

> When Rosie comes home I ask what you did today. She tells me about the stories and snack. She made some cookies at school. She wanted me to make some cookies. My mom made cookies with her (Annie, 2008).

Mary describes her mother, a single parent who worked, but did not choose to allow her children to attend school. Her mother wanted her close to people who looked like her and could provide the nurturing of a family. Mary explains:

> My mom was a single parent. So, all the time she would work and I would be at baby sitters house and just go to different baby sitters; like maybe one in the morning or in the afternoon. I had a hard time seeing my mom because she was a single parent so, while I was there with the families it was like really different.

Mary did not find pleasure in this. She stated that all the babysitters did was watch television or even ignore her if they happened to have other children. "I really didn't like it" (Mary, personal communication, (February, 2008) She wanted more time with her mother. Strong family bonds are essential to the Latino culture, and this further explains the identification of this theme.

Strong family bonds are also well documented in the transcripts. Elaina describes how her mother cared for her daughter while she worked or was in school.

> I had a very umm different perception about childhood, early childhood education at the beginning I am from Chicago and I didn't have childcare there. I had my parents to watch my daughter. She knew when she was sick, she knew what she needed to eat, she knew how to change her diaper, I didn't do any of that you know I had no idea for 5 years.

Elaina's reliance on her mother indicates a sincere concentration on family. Hannah had similar experiences. When asked about her mother's presence in her life, she stated:

Well umm she was most of the time, but most of the time I didn't know that she was involved but she says umm she was umm she says when I was growing up she said she would go almost every week once a week to check on myself and my brothers but I didn't know cause I never saw her in school but she said she used to go and check just to see how we were doing without us knowing she was there so if we act bad or if we were good she would know. She always would peek through the door and we didn't even know. Then when we used to get home she used to say I saw you doing this and this and you were acting like this so I was like oh, ok and she did it until like I graduated from high school.

Although Hannah adored her mother's presence in her educational experience, she was not as fond of early childhood education for her nieces and nephews. When asked about how her home life influenced her views on child care, she stated:

See I think that since like I'm Mexican in our culture it's like close minded that we don't want our children to go to school in a early age because we're scared something is going to happen to them like right now I have I work in head start and I have a parent who got her child out of head start because the grandmother said that the mom was crazy putting her in head start being the age of three that at the old age before they didn't do that and its true like most of the moms right now when you get married you're at home you know you stay at home most of the time so they don't they don't send their child to school because either the husband don't let them work or say you know you have to stay home you wanted to be a mom you stay home and take care of the kids until they go to school.

Hannah had to repeat the second grade, and Elaina recalls a similar experience. Here she recollects on her daughter's early childhood experience:

My oldest daughter grew up with my mom, and she also grew up with this other lady that watched her. Their home environment was nothing but Spanish. So when I took her to kindergarten she did not really talk a lot. Her teachers thought she had a speech problem or even some kind of developmental problem because she did not know English. All she spoke was Spanish; she did not say anything until she was almost six.

The participants are in favor of education; however, they equally emphasize the importance of family.

My little nieces attend a school in New York that is similar to my school in Columbia. I like it because they teach like how to cook. They cook like empanadas and arrepas, all like Colombian typical foods but easy to make for the

child. One day when they came here I was making like a tortilla but they are a little bit fat and I stated doing that they came and said aunt I want to help you and they started doing that and doing it perfect. Allison, attend in New York she went to like a church and she was there like two days a week for three hours and she learned to speak English but she didn't learn anything else. I want her to learn how to do other things that can be done at home (Jenny, 2008).

They connected the family to every aspect of the child's development. One participant did not understand how to care for her new child because she had lived in a city where her mother had an intricate role in her child's care. Either her mother or a "Mexican lady" in the neighborhood took care of them. While growing up, all but one participant's parent believed that home and family were better for the children. Because of this thought process, many of the participants did not attend preschool and did not learn to speak English until they went to school.

I liked it because you know I never went to day care. Usually just you know umm like Mexican ladies would take care of me and we just watched TV there you do the basic and here I like it because they get involved with them they take them outside and they learn so I really like it (Maria, 2008).

I don't know why but she was behind all the kids when she was in first grade and I had to buy a program to teach her how to read. Even though I didn't even know any English I had to start with learning with her. Like the letter sounds about the program …I don't remember the name that comes in the name of the boxes. Hooked on phonics! Its good and it helps us to have to learn how to read because I learned too. Josh is learning. All she learned is how to speak English which was good, but she didn't know the letters and the colors and anything shapes (Jenny, 2008).

Mutual understanding of cultural differences can contribute to improved relationships between families and schools. Involving all parents and making them stakeholders in their child's education could contribute to designing a culturally responsive program. Early childhood programs should reflect and support all of the children and families who attend. "An ideal society would include humility, respectful

knowledge of one another, and deeper understanding of unique cultural differences"
(Cruz, 2005).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, transcripts were presented to support the findings: The information was selected from single interviews, photo images and focus group discussions. Each respondent described her cultural perceptions of early childhood education. The information presented document accounts of Latino families experiences and expectations for early care. The dialogue was thought provoking and insightful about language, culture, traditions and early care programs and schools. The main emphasis in the chapter is on understanding differences and connecting language, home, school and culture. This chapter gave information that promotes respectful relationships with parents. A strong connection was demonstrated between the photo representation and culture. Charts and tables that represented findings from the field note observations and visual images were presented. In the following chapter, a comparison of existing literature, conclusions and implications for the future will be presented.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

My motivation for this study was to understand more deeply the cultural experiences of Hispanic parent's perceptions and expectations of early childhood education. The specific research questions that guided the study included the following:

1) What are Latino origin parents' perceptions of American schooling?

2) How do the cultural experiences and expectations of parents of Latino origin influence their view of early childhood education?

My approach to the study was as an interpretivist which allowed me the opportunity to conduct interviews and to have in-depth conversations with a small group of participants. Through the use of peer debriefing and member checks, I sought to ascertain the trustworthiness that is essential for a significant qualitative study. A positive rapport with the participants was established. They were encouraged to make comments and offer feedback throughout the research process. This gave the participants an opportunity to have meaningful participation and dialogue about their descriptions as it related to the overall study. I also engaged in important discussions with my faculty mentor and other researchers to give others the opportunity to assess and review my analysis and findings. The thoroughness of the researchers provided the rigor needed to ensure my findings were credible. The following details my discussion and implications of the findings.

The perceptions of the parents involved in this study have given insight into the issues educators need to address to ensure all children have the opportunity to develop their potential. The learning gap among certain groups of students, mainly children of

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color versus white children and children from lower socioeconomic status environments versus higher socioeconomic environments does not stand in isolation. It is a social system of subtle interactions and interpretations of individuals which form the whole educational environment develops. This issue is further compounded as the highest percentage of lower-income families being those from diverse populations are often families where English is not the primary language in the home. It appears that it is not an emphasis on working to create positive relationships between diverse populations and teachers; who are often white and untrained in techniques that might lower tension and increase school success (Fuller, et al., 2006). This discussion is not an attack on teachers but a study of how the educational system is perceived by parents of Latino origin.

The school is the primary setting for educating children, but the family is a primary force in a child's development" (Orozco-Suarez, et al., 2008, p. 21). The Latino parents in this study have confirmed the belief that education, culture and language are continuously interacting to support or not support learning. There are possible cultural conflicts based on social norms among groups of people. One simple example of possible cultural conflict could come from my field observations of the study parents' walking their children to the center and their classes. This might be interpreted as "babying" or "demanding dependence from the child" as most North American schools believe independence is developed by sending children into a school or having them ride a bus. Simple interactions like this can slant teachers' perceptions of the Latino culture and support stereotypical assumptions about this group of parents. From the parents' perspective this demand for independence might be considered uncaring or non-supporting of a child.

Discussion of Themes as Related to Research

There were two major themes and six sub-themes identified during the study. Major theme: 1) Language is more influential than cognitive ability in determining academic success of failure: a) Latinos are marginalized by academic failure based on language rather than cognitive ability; b) North American schools use language to equate to cognitive abilities and this distorts their actual abilities; and c) Latinas have not experienced North American schools moving towards developing a greater cultural awareness. Major theme 2) Early childhood education is viewed as a means of control that is negotiated through a generational lens; a) Older generations view early childhood education as unnecessary and a threat to cultural traditions; b) Younger generations view early childhood education as a valuable vehicle that allows early access to an educational system that will influence the likelihood of school success for their children; c) The family is the primary educator of young children.

Theme 1

Language is more influential than cognitive ability in determining academic success or failure. The idea that their educational experiences focus on language rather than cognitive ability can indicate to parents that the schools do not focus on the individual's ability but make judgments on the ability to speak a language. This would strongly influence the Latino family's educational focus to learning a language versus learning for understanding. If teachers think about the implication of this theme and what it says about their personal epistemology it might help them better understand their actions and approach to teaching. This "if I can't understand what you are saying so you must not be smart" is a poor reflection on the teachers and their training.

Sub-theme 1

Latinos are marginalized by academic failure based on language rather than cognitive ability. Participants viewed language and culture as the essence of who they are. Some felt that because of the language barrier, they are powerless to make a difference in their children's education. Teachers are viewed as the expert and it is not appropriate to question decisions that are made about their children. Individual who unconsciously apply their own rules to another culture system are bound to make mistakes. Putting your own value system to another's culture or belief often leads to grave misunderstandings (Ariza, 2002). More drastic implications of this approach is the labeling of Latino children as special needs children which limits access to higher level curriculum and keeps them locked in lower level thinking coursework. "Parental experiences with the schools dictated the type of support that they were able to access for their children" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, p.506). Paratore et al. (1999) found evidence suggesting that despite limited English proficiency, low levels of education, and few economic resources, when parents were provided opportunities to learn from and collaborate with teachers, all were willing and able to do so consistently and effectively. The parents wanted their children to learn English and keep their home language and this may interfere with the popular approach to what appropriate language means. According to the participants in the study, most expressed an interest in continuing to speak their home language in the home. Having a recognizable, workable system in place to assist in meeting the needs of immigrant families is a way to help defeat poor academic performance and keeping children in school (Johns, 2001).

Sub-theme 2

North American schools use language to equate to cognitive abilities and this distorts their actual abilities. Culture is an emotionally packed concept for all groups of people. When schools do not accept cultural differences they are indicating a judgment of quality and worth. This indicates that Latinos as a whole do not have a valued culture. This type of judgment would definitely influence respect for any educational environment. It is unlikely that any group of people would accept information from an environment where their cultural and social norms are considered sub-standard. From another view, how would we all react if we moved to another country and were expected to give up our culture and language? More than likely we would not respond to this demand in a positive manner. If we accept the idea that the child's success in school is believed to signify or represent a portion of the parent's self-worth, the degree to which this happens varies according to the parenting style (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta, & Howes, 2002; Castro, Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg, 2004) and context of the family (Denham, Mitchell-Copeland, Strandberg, Auerbach, & Blair, 1997; Minuchin, 1974; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005), then we must address the individual cultures of families. Early childhood programs should reflect and support all of the children and families who attend. "An ideal society would include humility, respectful knowledge of one another, and deeper understanding of unique cultural differences (Cruz, 2005).

Sub-theme 3

Latinas have not experienced North American schools moving towards developing a greater cultural awareness. It is common practice in European schools for

children to learn multiple languages rather than one language. The idea that English is the only language is absurd in light of studies which indicate that there are more Spanish speakers than English speakers in the world (Weber, 1997). Teachers may need to move beyond school being aware of different cultures into developing or integration of their particular culture into academic setting. This would include language, books, dolls, puppet, music and Latino teachers. Having different cultures integrated into the interactions and curriculum might benefit teachers, schools and the children. They fear that through all of the emphasis on English being spoken in the school and the community, that their language will become less important. Participants feel that maintaining culture in communication-within the home (children speaking Spanish and keeping Spanish heritage) and the school setting (centers being culturally sensitive) by incorporation of language, dolls, books, and seeing folks that look like them is crucial to academic success. Latino families may be concerned with their children not being exposed to cultural values, or that their language will be devalued (Gacia-Coll, &Vazquez 1996; Harrison, et al., 1990; Ogbu, 1995). The respondents emphasized their expectations for the early child care centers. They hope that they will be open to the needs of the children and their history.

 Major-theme 2

Early childhood education is viewed as a means of control that is negotiated through a generational lens. Older generation Latinos influence the view of early care for many of the younger generation Latinos. Differences related to the shared values and beliefs among Latinos often sway their view about child care and the purpose it serves. In reference to ethnicity and household practices, families in certain ethnic groups

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sometimes remove themselves from early childhood or preschool programs and choose to care for their young children at home. A significant quantity of literature documents a consistent relationship between childrearing practices, family income and education of the parent (Buriel, 1993). Many participants, who are second generation, college students, agreed that attending the early childhood program is the choice they would make for their children. This represents a change in customs for the younger generation. Nevertheless, they still want to include cultural values, diverse toys and books into the early childhood program. Many felt that it is important to uphold family customs, as well as to accept new approaches to early care for their young children. The participants expect early care programs to continue many of the practices from home in the school environment.

Sub-theme 1

Younger generations view early childhood education as a valuable vehicle that allows early access to an educational system that will influence the likelihood of school success for their children. Families in certain ethnic groups sometimes withdraw themselves from organized preschool programs and choose home care for their young children. Hispanic or Latino parents may prefer a place where caregivers are familiar or have similar backgrounds (Fuller, et al., 1996, p.3325).This idea builds on the earlier theme that different cultures are not supported in educational environments in a meaningful manner. The field notes indicated that these parents selected other parents from homogeneous cultures and home language when gathering in meetings or when waiting for children. The observations of parents using other parents or children as translators could indicate a comfort zone or a sense of not being accepted in the mainstream of educational environments. The respondents felt confident in saying that

feeling valued for their language and culture helps them to understand their connection to others. Cultural differences may be the result of an attempt to protect against prejudice, discrimination and oppression of a dominant group (Ogbu, 1995; Phinney & Landin, 1998). The participant discussed a concern for the children being misunderstood and having hurt feelings and not being treated right as reasons Hispanic parents may not send their children to preschool. In a majority of instance, culturally sanctioned beliefs of the individuals within the power structures, though well intentioned, resist reorganization and institutional change because it may not be in their perceived best interest for conforming to their accepted norms of behavior (Ladson- Billings, 1998).

Sub-theme 2

Older generations view early childhood education as unnecessary and a threat to traditions. "Hispanic children are much less likely to attend preschool" (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005, p.170). It was evident from the transcriptions that there is a difference between generations as to the value of acquiring English and the need for early childhood education through school environments. Second generation Latinos in the study were more supportive of children enrolling in educational programs outside the home. Older caregivers and first generation parents perceived the home was the first and most important educational environment. This is not due to limited access of educational programs in countries like Mexico where a full system of early childcare programs have been in place for many years. Feelings of insecurity about not being able to adopt the accepted ways within society may also contribute to why there are fewer Hispanic children in early care than the loss of culture (Ogbu, & Simmons, 1998).

Sub-theme 3

The family is the primary educator of young children. Often families are confused about what is expected of them in school. School for many Hispanics is their first time being out of the home. Bronfenbrenners Ecological System (1989) believed that the immediate classroom environment is a Microsystems and reflects relationships that directly impact an individual (i.e., family, peers, teachers); a mesosystem is that which directly links to the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a child's home environment); an exosystem is that which indirectly links but may affect the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a parent's work, relationship, financial situation); and a macrosystem is the much larger cultural context that can impact the classroom environment.

Interviews with parents across generations indicated that the home environment is consistently viewed as the first and most important influence on a child's education. A traditional view of schools is a place where children learn skills but the home is where children are educated. One participant did not understand how to care for her new child because she had lived in a city where her mother had an intricate role in her child's care. Either her mother or a "Mexican lady" in the neighborhood took care of them. While growing up, all but one participant's parent believed that home and family were better for the children. Because of this thought process, many of the participants did not attend preschool and did not learn to speak English until they went to school. During early processes of socialization, families model and shape the child's behavior and sense of identity. This sense of belonging occurs when the child makes accommodations that adapt to the family/group; and may consciously or unconsciously commit to perform patterns within the family. DeCarvalho (2001) suggests, teachers are experts in child

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development and curriculum and parents are experts in their own children. The sense of separateness and individuation develops through participation in different family subsystems within different family related contexts and in groups that are linked to the family but are external to the family system (schools).

Contributions to Existing Literature

This interpretive study allowed me to investigate comprehensive experiences of a small number of female Latino origin parent's cultural experiences and expectations of early childhood. While my findings denote a connection between family, education, culture, race and equity, it points toward a number of unanswered questions that further research could explore and build upon for additional knowledge about Latino socio-cultural experiences in early childhood.

Significant outcomes of this study will impact early childhood programs and enhance its positive effects on diverse families. The participants all agreed that:1) education is extremely important; 2) schools should have a more inclusive environment that consist of ethnic dolls, books, music, toys and people who look and talk like them; 3) they would like for their children to speak Spanish, but understand how not being able to speak English may affect school performance; 4) teachers need to provide more than a few days of discussion about customs, beliefs and traditions; and 5) early care programs should be an extension of home. Furthermore, the benefit of this important research could become essential to improving and broadening the scope of public school teachers and others in the community that work with different cultural groups. These significant outcomes reflect the thoughts and ideas of the participants. The research has given me a

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visual image of their perceptions of early care, desires for their children and personal ambitions for success.

Children and families of different cultures will comprise a new majority within this country (US Census, 2006). Early childhood educators, child and family professional must be prepared to meet the special needs of the families. Children of color are often underrepresented or misrepresented in child development research (McLoyd, Aikens, & Burton, 2006). Since the minority is soon becoming the majority, this research will provide information for a more responsive early care environment. This research used real voices of female Latino parents to dialogue on their perceptions of early care. The dialogue offered positive cross cultural significance to this investigative study. Understanding various cultures can contribute to knowledge and appreciation of differences; and offset confusion when behavior is different from the norm. Learning to value cultural diversity can increase professionals' ability to interact more appropriately with families and teach more effectively.

<div align="center">Implications/ Recommendations</div>

In response to the purpose for this research, these finding address the research questions about generational practices, cultural experience, expectations, customs and beliefs of female Latino parents. I have a deeper, richer understanding of the Latino parent's perception of an early childhood program in a southern town. When combined with existing literature on culture, early childhood experiences and expectations, this research has the following recommendations for further explorations by researchers in order to improve North American educational communities:

1) Home and school partnership is essential for school to become an extension of home. More importantly, educators should become better equipped (better trained) to meet the needs of diverse families.

2) Caregivers and teachers need to become more responsive to a diverse community of children and families.

3) Mutual understanding of cultural differences can contribute to improved relationships between families and schools.

4) Involving all parents and making them stakeholders in their child's education could contribute to designing a culturally responsive program.

5) The Latinos believe that school should encompass components of their language and culture.

6) Language and culture are intertwined and influence every aspect of their life.

7) Early childhood programs must recognize the importance of meeting parents where they are in incorporating school practices, philosophies and teachings into a systemic way of connecting home and school.

Conclusion

Each family represents a whole unit to the socio-cultural learning situation. This whole is essential to a social construction of knowledge, which according to Smith (1993) is the essence of intellectual development that occurs in a "fully social – that is, public-collective – world" (p. 127). We know children come to school with strong development based on their home environments. Understanding how to respond to cultural diversity is one key to successful interaction with young children and their families (Barrera, et al., 2003). School for many Latinos is their first time being out of the home. Bronfenbrenners

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Ecological System's (1988) believed that the immediate classroom environment is a Microsystems and reflects relationships that directly impact an individual (i.e., family, peers, teachers); a mesosystem is that which directly links to the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a child's home environment); an exosystem is that which indirectly links but may affect the immediate classroom environment (i.e., a parent's work, relationship, financial situation); and a macrosystem is the much larger cultural context that can impact the classroom environment. The literature indicates that family involvement is a positive attribute to the child. However, it is the combination of relationships and involvement that creates a bond for home and school. A more comprehensive view of involvement is presented by Epstein's (1992) model which supports the work of Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework. He discussed how children learn and grow through three overlapping spheres of influence: family, school, and community. These three spheres must form partnerships to best meet the needs of the child.

There is a need for change within the educational institutions. The participant's cultural perceptions of early care program echo the connection between education, culture, race, family and equality. By breaking the silence and allowing parents of Latino origin to tell their story, researchers can document ways to construct and eliminate some of the limited social conditions in education. No longer would their ideas about interactions and relationships in early childhood programs be taken for granted. According to the participants, the school should be an expansion of what is being done in the home. The children should have someone available that looks like them and talks like them. Toys and books should represent them and their home or school environment.

Future research will contribute to having responsive classroom and improved parent

involvement.

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Appendix A

Non-Disclosure and Confidentiality Agreement

Participant hereby agrees that all research and all other research information that it has and will receive from the Researcher is confidential and will not be disclosed to any individual or entity without prior written consent.

WHEREFORE, the parties acknowledge that they have read and understand this Agreement and voluntarily accept the duties and obligations set forth herein.

_____   _____

Participant   Date

_____   _____

Researcher   Date

Appendix B

Monthly Time Line	Time (in days/weeks)	Duration of activity	Description of activity	Participant's role
Fall 2008		One hour	Submit paperwork to U of M IRB Department.	None
		Hours	Get Permission from VP to conduct study	None
January	Week 1-2	Two hours	Observe parents and select participants	
	Week 1-2	One-three hours	Contact participants Contact transcriber	
	Week	One – five hours	Interview participants Five interviews at scheduled times throughout the day Give each participant a camera	Ask questions about study, set future dates
February	Week	Two hours	Meet with transcriber to turn over transcripts	None
	Week	Four – six hours	Transcribe	None
	Week	One – hour One – five hours throughout the	Observe participants Member checks Data Analysis	Respond to transcription

		day		
	Week	One – two hours	Member checks Focus Group Meeting	Ask questions about study
March	Week 8	One –two hours	Meet with transcriber	None
	Week 8	One to three Hours	Member checks Data analysis	Respond to transcription
	Week 9	One- Two hours Endless hours	Observe participants Data Analysis	None
	Week 10	One-Three hours	Interview of Visual Images Make Modifications Meet with transcriber	Respond to questions
	Week 11	One- two hours	Observe participants Review notes	
	Week 12	Endless hours	Analyze Data	
	Week 13		Member Checks	Respond to transcriptions

		Endless Hours	Analyze Data	
	Week 15	One – Two Hours	Meet with dissertation Chair	Respond to transcription
	Week 16	One –two hour	Meet with faculty mentor Peer debriefing	Respond to transcription
	Week 17	One- two hours	Meet with faculty mentor	Respond to transcription
	Week 18	Two months	Finalize write-up of data	None

Appendix: C

Interview Protocol

Topic:

An Investigation of Cultural Experiences of Parents of Hispanic Origin Early Childhood Education in Relation to Their Expectations and Experiences with American Educational Communities

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Position of Interviewee:

Interview Questions:

Can you tell me about your early childhood experiences?

Tell me about a memory of you and your family at school as early as you can remember?

What kind of activities did you and your family do?

Tell me what you would like to see happen at this school, your expectations

Can you tell me if you attended an early childhood program?

Do you participate in parent activities or volunteer?

Appendix D

Dear Parents,

As part of my research at the University of Memphis, I am seeking participants, specifically Hispanic parents to interview for my dissertation project. This research will be conducted over the next few months to investigate perceptions and expectations from parents of pre-school aged children focusing on their achievement in an early childhood education setting. During this research, I seek to find what parents perceive as standards of care for young children, specifically infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

The benefits of this research will provide a more in-depth understanding of the cultural experiences, perceptions and expectations of Hispanic families with American educational communities. There are no risks involved in this research. If you agree to participate in this research, and decide that you no longer want to participate, you may withdraw at anytime without any further obligations.

All information will be kept confidential and you will have the opportunity to read transcripts and provide feedback. Part of this study will include interviews, focus groups and group meetings. All tapes and individuals transcripts will be reviewed by each participant; archived unless participants request that taped information is not made public and destroyed at the end of the data compilation.

Once you agree to participate, an individual meeting will be scheduled to discuss specifics, answer questions and review purpose of the study. If additional information is needed, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at, 901-333-4500 or e-mail me, mpalmer@southwest.tn.edu.

Sincerely,

Mary Palmer

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