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A Case Study of Mexican Immigrant Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Education

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A Case Study of Mexican Immigrant Parents' Involvement in Their Children's Education

by

Evelia Vega

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the misconception that is occurring in schools today about Mexican Immigrant parents' involvement. Using the Sociocultural and Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) theories to ground this study, I conducted in-depth phenomenological semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2006) with six participants. The participants were Mexican Immigrant parents who resided in a specific Oregon county where their children attended school. They shared their perceptions and experiences about being involved in their children's education. The analysis led to three themes in the findings, which were: Perceptions, Culture, and Communication. The first theme provided a glimpse into the participants' lived experiences and their current views about engaging in their child's school, which was revealed to be heavily influenced by their socialization process in Mexico before immigrating to the US. The theme of Culture encompassed the cultural and linguistic traditions, values, beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. This showed up as demonstrating *respeto* (respect), being *buen educado* (well mannered), and the responsibilities they felt toward their family and kin. Regarding Communication, the third and final theme, participants understood that communication was a critical part of parent involvement. However, from the interview data, it appeared that communication was the most challenging aspect of being involved. This was a scenario where misunderstandings emerged. This study provided me an opportunity to hear the voices of immigrant families and to help reveal the misunderstanding that often blames Mexican Immigrant parents/families for the gap in their children's educational achievement. The

importance of culturally responsive teaching isn't just an educational fad or the newest strategy to try in the classroom. I believe that at its' core - understanding and valuing the cultural funds of knowledge that students and families bring to the classroom and school setting are essential and foundational for all educators to implement.

Dedication

Este proyecto está dedicado a mi familia. Moises, esposo amado, gracias por toda tu paciencia y amor en todo este trayecto. Mis hijas, Esther y Claudia, mis tesoros y mis regalos de Dios, gracias por su amor y comprensión. Sin ustedes mi brújula se habría desorientado y no habría encontrado la inspiración para terminar este proyecto que representa las voces de aquellos que no tienen voz.

Para Amelia, mi madre y Agustin mi padre, por ustedes estoy aquí y sin ustedes no tendría un motivo de vida. Reciban en el cielo mi gratitud.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

In the United States the public schools are enrolling an increasing number of immigrant students including students of Hispanic or Latino origin. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), 62.1 million (or 18.7 percent) of the 331,449,281 million people residing in the United States on April 1, 2020, were of Hispanic or Latino origin. The Hispanic or Latino population, which includes people of any race, was 62.1 million in 2020. The Hispanic or Latino population grew 23%, while the population that was not of Hispanic or Latino origin grew 4.3% since 2010. It is clear that the Mexican population is increasing in the United States and that means more students with Mexican heritage and background are enrolled in the public schools.

Many of the students come from families who are recent immigrants from Mexico to the United States and often have no experience of American schooling. The Mexican immigrant families, as described by Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, (2005), tend to have different ways of thinking about “parental involvement” than mainstream American parents (those who have gone to American schools. Sometimes Mexican Immigrant parents unknowingly leave an impression that they are not interested in their children’s schooling. This misconception emerges because parental involvement is more often measured by US educators as attending a general school meeting, attending regularly scheduled parent–teacher conferences, attending a school or class event, acting as a volunteer or serving on a school committee, and participating in school fundraising

(Vaden-Kiernan, McManus & Chapman 2005). There is a need to better understand the perceptions of Mexican Immigrant parents' views on being involved in their child's education in order for schools to include their voices and meet their needs in supporting their child's educational journey.

Background of the Problem

It is a common held believe that parents play an important role in their children's education, and young students experience greater success when their parents are involved (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, & Wilkins, 2005). Parental involvement from the perspective of Mexican immigrant parents, however, is different from mainstream views. Mexican immigrant parents view their involvement in raising their children in terms of providing nurturance and teaching morals, with added emphasis on respect for others and on having good behavior (Lopez, 2001). The educational problem this study hopes to address is that there remains a difference in perspective about what it means for a parent to be involved or engaged in their child(s) education. Culturally, Mexican immigrant parents view their role as preparing the child for school by providing a safe home environment and nutrition and then hand him/her off to the school to gain knowledge, because education is an important aspect of their lives. This contrasting understanding of what "parent involvement" means to Mexican immigrant parents is an important place for educators to bridge in order to provide a more equitable and culturally responsive education.

Parents who did not go to school here in the US will not intuitively understand US

school expectations around their participation or involvement (Gonzalez et al., 2005). This can be traced to Mexican Immigrant parents who grew up in communities where home/school practices were different from the mainstream American families. School-based forms of parent involvement such as reading to children, volunteering at the school, contributing to the school parent club, and attending field trips are not the norm for Mexican Immigrant parents.

Another consideration is that often Mexican Immigrant parents see the school's role as instilling knowledge (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield & Quiroz, 2001). Schools in the United States have adopted a more engaged expectation for the role of parents that is different from that of the Mexican immigrant parents and because of the different perspectives on "involvement" or "participation" the Mexican immigrant parents are viewed as not involved or not participating, and hence viewed as deficient by many school staff and administrators.

In general, the literature shows that U.S. school culture holds expectations of parents and families that are often quite different than those within Latino culture, which include Mexican Immigrant families (Valdés, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Latino parents are shown to trust schools more than mainstream families, often deferring to teachers in matters concerning the formal education of their children while focusing their attention on the moral upbringing of their children (Valdés, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991). Yet, Latino parents are often characterized by educators as uninvolved in school and in the formal education of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdés,

1996). While research indicates otherwise, stereotypes still exist among many educators that students of Latino or Mexican heritage do poorly in school because their parents do not care (Valdés, 1996; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). However, even within the immigrant Latino community there are some parents who are more involved than others and in ways that are more acceptable by school institutional standards.

In addition, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) found that cultural misunderstanding between schools and families negatively impacts the achievement of students with Mexican heritage. Schools and teachers are often frustrated because they believe the Mexican immigrant families are not involved in schools, while the families are perplexed because they believe that they are truly involved. Valdés (1996), in her study of Mexican families in US schools confirms that schools in her study perceived that parents have low formal education and lack of knowledge. Although most families in her study come to the US from rural, traditional Mexico, the highest education level, on the average, attained by the adults was 4th grade. Cultural misunderstandings and a lack of formal education should not be interpreted as not being interested or involved in their children's education. It has been also asserted that immigrant parents are hesitant to become involved in their children's school especially if they are not proficient English speakers and have little education.

The topic of Mexican Immigrant parent/family engagement with schools is important and is supported by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ESSA replaced the No Child Left Behind Act in 2015 and was reauthorized in 2021. ESSA made parent and

community engagement one of the four key levers or opportunities. Through ESSA, the Oregon Department of Education believes in fostering ongoing engagement and provides a “Call to Action” for “a collective commitment, from all of us, to share responsibility and work together to create a more equitable, well-rounded, and engaging education that can sustain change within each local community’s unique context across our state” (Oregon Department of Education, 2017, p 11). The ESSA federal mandates states to be more collaborative with stakeholders in the educational community, including parents.

Delgado-Gaitan, (2004) describes a number of barriers that exist between schools and immigrant Latino parents, such as the perceived lack of participation at school sites which is sending a deficit message to educators who may not understand the complex role of culture in Mexican Immigrant’s approaches. This difference of perspective is at the root of the problem this dissertation hopes to address.

Statement of the Research Problem

My research problem centers on the misunderstanding between Mexican Immigrant parents/families and school personnel. This misunderstanding is primarily emerging in the schools, from the perceptions of teachers, and reflects a greater political climate in the United States today. Unfortunately, the low academic achievement scores of students of Mexican heritage are used as a rationale for blaming the parents. This study hopes to bring the voices of Mexican Immigrant parents to the surface, to hear their stories, to understand their perceptions and lived lives in order to improve the educational experience of their children. In education and in society today, there is much taken for

granted as the “norm” and typical practices all parents should do to help their child succeed. And yet there are barriers that are unseen or not understood that contribute to the misunderstanding of mainstream America. There are linguistic, economic and social-political contexts of Mexican Immigrant parents and families’ lives that we need to understand in order to truly provide equity and access to the children and families for a more just schooling and educational experience.

I chose to focus on Mexican immigrants because they are not only the nation’s largest and fastest growing immigrant group, but they are also a subgroup of one of the lowest academically achieving ethnic and racial groups in the U.S. (UnidosUS, 2022). While we know that parent involvement helps with student achievement, we have not yet fully understood how to engage Mexican Immigrant parents in ways that will benefit their children in schools.

The Purpose and Significance of the Research

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the misconception that is occurring in schools today about Mexican Immigrant parents’ involvement. In particular, the views and perceptions of Mexican immigrant parents’ involvement with their children’s education will be explored.

The significance of this study lies in understanding the phenomena of the cultural mismatch between Mexican Immigrant parents/families’ view about what it means to be “involved” in their children’s education. It is anticipated that this study will provide an opportunity to hear the voices of immigrant families and to help reveal the

misunderstanding that often blames Mexican Immigrant parents/families for the gap in their children's educational achievement. This phenomenological case study is critically important to help combat the stereotypes and mischaracterization of Mexican Immigrants being promoted in today's political arena. The benefits that can emerge from this study include promoting understanding and implementing strategies that will lead to a more equitable education for Mexican Immigrant families and their children in schools.

Research Methods and Questions

This research study will use a qualitative design to identify how Mexican immigrant parents are involved in their children's education at early years. Using a phenomenological case study approach, I will pursue the following research questions:

1. What do Mexican immigrant parents understand as parental involvement/participation in U.S. schools?
2. How do Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to support their children's education at home?

Qualitative methods will allow me to better understand the phenomena of the *misunderstanding* between Mexican Immigrant parents/families and school personnel regarding how to participate and become involved in their child(s) education. Using interviews and observations are part of the qualitative research methods that will help me to understand the lived lives and experiences of Mexican Immigrant parents/families. An in-depth understanding can be achieved through conversations and by listening to their stories, and by having face-to-face interactions with Mexican Immigrant parents/families.

As a long-time educator, I have had access to the world of school personnel and carry their words and views inside my head. This phenomenological case study will allow me to unpack and view the Mexican Immigrant parents' views on "home-school involvement" through Likert scale survey instruments with open-ended questions. The data gathered from both the survey and interviews will allow me to see in a more holistic way – to begin to unravel the origins of misunderstandings between these two groups of people who care about children; parents/families and school personnel.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

The promise of parental involvement is promoted by some educators, policymakers, and practitioners alike as a key mechanism for educational change and improvement. The current rationale for parent involvement has been framed in the literature as a resource for improving individual student success, minimizing inequality by counteracting minority group failure, raising educational standards, and building family and community relations (Epstein, Sanders & Sheldon 2007). Although many researchers have identified a correlation between parent involvement and student achievement, there are certain limitations to these studies, particularly in schools that enroll a large percentage of children of Mexican Immigrant parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Shannon, 1996).

Even though researchers have shown that parent involvement may provide a student with academic benefits, there is a need for further study, particularly with minority groups (Lareau, 1987). The following section will explain the conceptual framework that will guide this study. The literature review begins with an overview of the history of parent involvement in schools and is followed by a description of a traditional framework for involvement of parents in schools. Then two different models of engagement will be explored, along with what the literature says about the benefits of parent involvement. Finally, a more in-depth discussion of research which particularly explores the involvement of Mexican immigrant parents will also be undertaken.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework that guided this dissertation study is the Socio-cultural theory of human development. Sociocultural theory grew from the work of psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1978), who promoted the idea that cognitive development is influenced by social interaction between parents, caregivers, and peers. A child is socialized into their community by interacting with those around them and this then becomes part of the child's social and cognitive development. In other words, their experiences and interactions become integrated into their beliefs and cultural values. The Funds of Knowledge theory (Gonzalez et al., 2005) is aligned to the sociocultural theoretical framework. The authors explore concepts of culture, and how we can come to a deeper recognition of the powerful and outgoing conditions of lived experiences without stereotypical notions of culture. The authors ground their funds of knowledge theory from a sociocultural perspective that views the everyday practices of language and activities as constructing knowledge. Sanderson (2010) proposes that a sociocultural perspective is a perspective describing people's behavior and mental process as shaped in part by their social and/or cultural contact, including race, gender, and nationality.

Culture. Gonzalez et al. (2005) attempt to conceptualize the two terms of culture and funds of knowledge, which are not synonymous. Whereas culture has been a powerful mechanism in the field of anthropology to explain how groups of people share values, beliefs, traditions, and norms, we now have a different view of culture. Sonia Nieto (2019), a multicultural education scholar, posits that culture is a dynamic,

multifaceted construct that should take into consideration the context and influences of social, economic, and political factors. Ultimately, understanding culture is an organic process that is created and socially constructed; that is learned and dialectical (Nieto, 2019). The funds of knowledge of a community are not a long list of immovable cultural attributes, but instead, they are the unique experiences and knowledge that individuals bring as resources to any given situation. Aspects of Mexican culture are reflected in the immigrants' day-to-day experiences. These can be seen through their beliefs and actions related to concepts such as *respeto* (respect), *ser bien educado* (to be well-mannered), *dichos/consejos* (sayings/counsel), and *confianza* (trust) (De La Vega, 2007). Culture is an integral part of every context and plays a significant role in the way that people function. But cultures vary from place to place, and from time to time. The United States, which is a land of immigrants, (besides the Native Americans) presents an extremely complex case; people from various cultures from all over the world and social strata have settled here over the years.

Acculturation. The socialization process, often referred to as *enculturation* and is something that happens naturally in a society, among families and communities, and transfers into their cultural way of being. However, when one culture interacts with another, such as a Mexican Immigrant person coming into a USA culture, this process is called *acculturation*. The Merriam-Webster dictionary cites acculturation as “cultural modification of an individual, group, or people by adapting to or borrowing traits from another culture *the acculturation of immigrants to American life.*” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). School plays an important role in acculturation of immigrants especially with

regard to academic outcomes of Mexican origin immigrant families in the United States (Plunkett, 2003). Generation status and language spoken at home are two acculturation variables that are commonly used in research studies. In Plunkett's (2003) study, only one of the two variables (language spoken at home) was found to be significantly related to academic outcomes. He also found correlations that "acculturation and parenting were related to academic motivation and educational aspirations" (p 233).

Delgado-Gaitan (1992) observes that the transmission of cultural knowledge and values is at the foundation of the problems that immigrant families experience especially in the adjustment and academic achievement of ethnically and linguistically diverse students. This insight is related to the act of acculturation that both the families and students undergo. Delgado-Gaitan's study of parent involvement in two different California schools showed that underrepresented parents and in particular, Spanish-speaking parents, were not involved in school activities for a variety of reasons. Her study suggested that Spanish-speaking parents must be understood and given the opportunity to bring their voice to the agenda, in order for them to find the meetings meaningful. By providing a space for Spanish-speaking parents to share their ideas and concerns, one California school validated the social and cultural experience, which allowed parents to feel part of and active in their children's education thus becoming empowered (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). This small shift in power allowed the Spanish-speaking parents to become acculturated into the schools' way of participating and being involved. In conclusion, the concepts of culture and the process of acculturation are firmly situated in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which guides the framework of

this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the misconception that is occurring in schools today about Mexican Immigrant parents' involvement. This problem of practice occurs in schools where there are Mexican Immigrant parents/families who are misunderstood by school personnel due to the behaviors exhibited that do not match what educators believe parent involvement is supposed to look like in the school. The educational system has long seen linguistically and culturally diverse students and families from a deficit perspective. This study attempts to shift and use a "resource" or a "funds of knowledge" perspective to dismantle and counter the deficit perspective which has not served minority children in the USA well.

The social-cultural view of learning (which includes funds of knowledge theory) says we "socially" construct knowledge and this happens naturally in family structures, in communities we live in. This foundational way of seeing the world is predominantly set in a person by the time they enter school at 5 years old. Therefore, parent engagement with schools when their children enter the school system is already set up for mainstream, English speaking, families. This is where the problem occurs and the misunderstanding between Mexican Immigrants and school personnel emerges.

A funds of knowledge framework allows us to view Mexican Immigrant parents/families with an asset approach. According to Gonzalez et al. (2005) Latinos have tremendous resources to contribute to schools and could help lead educational change and improvement that would provide a more equitable, just, and meaningful

education for bilingual and minority children. The definition of success through a funds of knowledge approach would appear to be an enculturation process where two cultures come together and benefit from each other in a school setting. Contrary to this, schools and society have long-held the belief that test scores will indicate success or not. This belief is based on a positivist view of education, not a social-constructivist view. Mexican Immigrant parents are often blamed for their child's educational deficits and a school system does not appear to take responsibility for changing. This study hopes to uncover the funds of knowledge that Mexican Immigrant parents/families bring that can help change our educational system for the better. A broad understanding of parent involvement in education is fundamental for this study and a historical overview provides context for further discussion.

A Historical Perspective on Parent Involvement

Encouraging parent involvement in their children's education is not a new endeavor. This complex relationship between parents and school personnel has existed from the earliest formation of the educational system. In this book on the early American common schools, schools organized to serve children in a given area, Kaestle (1983) described the long-standing connection between schools and families. For example, in many small rural community's teachers were likely to live with the family of one of their students. Parent involvement was called for when families were invited to an open house or parent night. Kaestle described the request made by schools for parents to attend school exhibitions as long as the middle 1800s.

Waller (1932) in his book *The Sociology of Teaching*, wrote about education

during the early part of the twentieth century. Waller portrayed parents and teachers as “natural enemies” (p. 68). In addition he spoke of parent/teacher work as futile. For Waller the separation of these two spheres was natural and useful. He believed that schools exist to educate and families exist to nurture. He did, however, envision positive outcomes if parents and teachers could develop relationships and communicate openly. The resulting school modifications “would revolutionize the lives of children everywhere” (p. 69).

Toward the end of the 19th century an association was formed to encourage parent involvement (National Parent Teacher Association, n.d.). In 1987, 2000 members attended the first meeting of the National Congress of Mothers. This congress eventually became the National PTA. At the national meeting in 1901, methods for encouraging parent-teacher cooperation were generated and disseminated. In 1996, parent involvement in education became one of the National Education Goals.

In the late twentieth century methods for involving parents have been the subject of increased research over the last few decades. According to Carvalho (2001), the increased focus on parental involvement gained force during the politically conservative period of 1980s. The importance of parent involvement was demonstrated when the American Education Research Association (AERA) sanctioned a special interest group named Families as Educators (Carvalho, 2001). This group was formed in order to study and disseminate information on home-school relationships that encouraged educational success for children. In addition, during the Clinton presidency, research demonstrating the benefits of parent involvement in schools influenced government policy. Currently,

the benefits of parent involvement in their children's education are well accepted in educational research and practice, and supported by federal, state, and local policies.

A Traditional Framework for Parent Involvement

The framework for involvement has been designed to guide educators in the development of comprehensive programs and policies for the creation of school and family partnership. Epstein, Sanders, Simon, Salinas, Rodriguez, and Van Voorhis (2002) created "The Framework of Six Types of Involvement for Comprehensive Programs of Partnership", which has become a commonly accepted model of parent involvement. In their handbook, they began by saying. According to Epstein et al. (2002), parental involvement policies and practices should provide for all six types of involvement.

The six types of involvement are as follows:

- Parenting
- Communicating
- Volunteering
- Learning at home
- Decision Making
- Collaborating with Community

Epstein et al. (2002), proposes that parental involvement policies and practices should provide for all six types of involvement. The authors are known to be strong advocates for parent involvement in education.

Parent involvement in schools has typically been explored through a positivist

perspective (Epstein and Sanders, 2006). Delgado-Gaitan (1992), proposes another way to explore parent involvement. She notes that it is the transmission of cultural knowledge and values that is at the foundation of how immigrant families build upon their “involvement” in their children’s education. Delgado-Gaitan also notes that this cultural foundation often becomes a conflict with their experiences with USA institutions such as schools. Institutions such as schools often perceived that underrepresented parent, and in particular Spanish-speaking parents, are unable to become involved in their child’s education.

Joyce Epstein is a leader in the field and has been published in numerous articles and an extensive handbook has been written to implement these ideas in school. She directs the Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships at John Hopkins University, as well as the National Network of Partnership Schools, which maintains a website for members interested in home/school partnerships.

Not all educational researchers agree with Epstein’s theory and advancement of parent involvement policies (De La Vega, 2007; Laureau, 1987; Degado-Gaitan, 2004). It is believed that parent involvement from linguistically and culturally diverse parents/families may not even show up as a participation that matches each of Epstein's types. Epstein’s work causes some educators to question the issues of power, access, and socio-cultural contexts and where they exist in her framework?” Most school personnel hold a narrow view of parent involvement, often failing to see the variety of hidden ways parents support their children’s education. Researchers have found that accepted

behaviors of parent involvement are more easily accomplished by middle and upper-class parents (Lareau, 2000). For some parents, getting children up and off to school in the morning is perceived as parents being involved, yet this behavior can be unseen by school personnel. Consequently, schools adopting Epstein's model may not recognize attempts at involvement made by some parents.

Generally, parental involvement in U.S. schools implies that parents are on the campus of the school site or in direct contact with their children's school personnel. Parents follow a prescribed role endorsed by the school in which they need to perform certain duties. They are involved in fund raising activities such as bake sales and raffles, PTA/PTO, and back to school nights (Lopez, 2001). Parents are also expected to accompany their children to school events, volunteer for school activities, intervene in educational activities at school, and assist students with their academic assignments (Lareau, 2000; Lopez, 2001). Variables of social and cultural capital such as high income, high levels of education, and time availability, facilitate parents' effective participation in the roles assigned by the school or negotiated with it (Lareau, 2000). In this paper, I refer to these practices of parental involvement as traditional parental involvement.

By referring to a series of practices as parental involvement, educators give the impression that these practices are shared and accepted by most parents in U.S. schools and that the practices are successful. Even though schools may prescribe these practices, they do not represent the views of linguistically and culturally diverse parents.

Traditional parental involvement is not really parental involvement in the real sense of the word. In reality, parents could assist in some activities but may not be not involved in the decision-making process that affects their children's education. Involving parents in the school decision-making process is fulfilling the democratic ideal (Comer, Ben-Avie, Haynes, and Joyner 1999; Epstein & Sanders 2006). And in those cases where there has been involvement of some parents in the decision-making process, it has been pointed out that those parents who participated had a mainstream view and as a result did not represent the views of linguistically and culturally diverse parents (Lareau, 2000). In sum, traditional parental involvement has been interpreted to mean supporting the school programs and helping their children fulfill the expectations of the school. The next section will look at parent involvement models educational researchers have designed.

Parent Involvement Models

As evidence of the benefits for students with involved parents has grown, models have been developed for implementation in schools. Models created to enhance parent involvement in education have been handed down from state or district boards of education or may have grown out of local movements. Two models were prevalent in the literature; the Parent Empowerment Model, and the School Development Program.

The Parent Empowerment Model. Delgado-Gaitan (2004) describes an empowerment model, whereby parents become engaged and participate in their child's education. She explains: "Empowerment is an ongoing intentional process, centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring and group

participation throughout which people lacking in equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources” (p. 23). This model emerged from her study of one California school district’s activities related to parent involvement for four years. Delgado-Gaitan, (2004) explored the benefits of involving a group of Latino parents in their children’s education. Programs were instituted specifically involving low-income, minority parents. When the parents were invited to discuss the outcomes of their involvement they spoke of their own increased confidence and the improvements in their children’s academic abilities and self-esteem (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). In this study, teachers also felt that they had benefited from the assistance provided by the parents in the classroom. An additional model, the School Development Program, was also developed specifically for low-income, minority students and their parents.

The School Development Program. James Comer is the founder and chairman of the School Development Program (SDP). He grew up during a time when Blacks were denied equal education, but his mother instilled in all her children a desire for academic success (Comer, 1984; Comer et al., 1999). Comer brings a commitment to his educational research and practice which advocates for children to have educational and personal opportunities to develop in six areas of growth. Comer’s aim is to help create a just and fair society in which all children can succeed. At this point, numerous schools and districts in 14 states have adopted the School Development Program.

According to Comer et al. (1999) the program was built on a healthy developmental process as foundational to academic achievement and life success. The

program emphasizes six developmental pathways: physical, cognitive, psychological, language, social, and ethical. Three teams make important decisions for a school and its students: The School Planning and Management Team, the Parent Team, and the Student and Staff Support Team. The Comer process describes the critical role of parents and, in particular, the members of the Parent Team. A principal of an elementary school describes the level of involvement of parents at her school after implementing the School Development Program (SDP). “Now parents are in the school every day. They work in the classrooms, help in the cafeteria, assist arrival and dismissal, and copy papers for classroom teachers” (Comer et al., 1999, p. 83). According to Comer (1984), rates for parental involvement rise substantially in schools that have adopted the SDP.

Benefits of Parent Involvement

Generally, parent involvement in school is related to greater academic achievement in terms of both grades and standardized test performance. Benefits of parent involvement are especially salient for low achieving children, who show the greatest achievement gains when families focus their involvement on student achievement of clearly designated goals (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Students and parents also perceive the school climate more positively when parents are more involved. Schools are positively impacted when parents partner with educators. For example, parents involved in the classroom may make it possible to expand curriculum and increase its relevance to students. Moreover, parents may broaden the contact base for the school in the community. This may result in curriculum connections and sometimes in

donations of resources and time.

Mexican Immigrant concept of Parent Involvement

Shannon's (1996) study explored how Mexican parents were involved in their children's education and noted that it surfaces in non-traditional ways that differ from practices accepted by the schools. Latino parents come to the U.S. with a mental model of parental involvement that is from their countries of origin. Their different view of parental involvement conforms to their cultural backgrounds and experiences (Trumbull et al., 2001). Instead of perceiving parental involvement as participation in organized activities sanctioned by the school, they view it in terms of nurturance, transmission of cultural values (Lopez, 2001), monitoring their children's homework, and providing for their material and emotional needs (Valdes, 1996). As the research shows, some Mexican parents' cultural models of parental involvement look differently than mainstream models. De La Vega (2007) study of Mexicana/Latina mothers' involvement in one bilingual school in California showed that language and culture were very connected and should not be separated. She notes that "schools should explore their assumptions and scrutinize the climate in their schools' community, in particular, how a parent's native language is treated and accepted" (p. 178). However, it is important to note that not all Mexican Immigrant parents have the same cultural models of Mexican parental involvement though they might share similar cultural values such as *respeto* (respect), *ser buen educado* (to be well educated/good behavior), *confianza* (trust), and the power of *consejos y dichos* (counsel and proverbs).

The predominant implication in the mainstream parent involvement literature is that if one were to apply the mainstream principles to different populations, then maybe there would be changes in that other population. For example, Valdes (1996) found that Mexican Immigrant parents were instructed to “read to their children” when the school did not recognize some parents were not literate or did not read in English. This misinformed strategy for parent involvement is sadly seen in many schools today. Parent involvement in schools is bigger than the relationship that a parent has with their child’s school. When looking at the big systemic picture, we can see that the system of schools, or the institutions of schools, have long discriminated against and oppressed parents who are racially and linguistically diverse, as well as those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. For example, according to Fine (1993), parents have been invited by the school districts to sit at the table in order to “fix the damage” (p. 682) that was created by unequal educational and economic systems. This seems unfair and once again, blames the parent for a systematic problem of society and schools. While some researchers have sought to provide a voice for different minority groups in the parent involvement discourse, notions that parents need to be involved or need to increase their levels or types of involvement are based on the activities implied by the mainstream literature.

Minority parents seem to be less visible participants in their children's education since they are less likely to participate in traditional parent-school activities (Comer, 1984). The reason for the infrequency of minority parent involvement is not clear and may result in a stereotypical view of minority parents and the erroneous assumption that they do not care about their children's education (Chavkin and Gonzales, 1995; Valdes,

1996). Further, what constitutes involvement is often based on assumptions of what policy and school personnel consider to be acceptable demonstrations of involvement, which is a mismatch to what Mexican Immigrant parents understand as parental involvement.

Summary of Literature Review

Parents and family's involvement in their children's education has been positively related to academic benefits such as improved motivation and attendance, and higher grades and test scores. The positive results have been accepted, and supported by educators and researchers. The current definitions of parent involvement and related policies are traditional activities performed in U.S. schools. However, these same activities or expected behaviors present challenges to involvement for Mexican immigrant parents (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991).

A small number of researchers have explored efforts aimed at enhancing parent involvement among Mexican Immigrant parents (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Trumbull et al, 2001; Lopez, 2001), Each of these investigators called for further research in this important area. Delgado-Gaitan's (2004) research highlighted the process of engaging with the educational system as bound by rules, language, and values that privilege others; namely mainstream, English-speaking, traditional families. Trumbull et al. (2001) study of the role of culture in learning and education, concluded that families' differing views of parent involvement conforms to their cultural backgrounds. Lopez's (2001) research identified that instead of perceiving parental involvement as participation in organized activities sanctioned by the school, Mexican Immigrant parents view being "involved" in

terms of nurturance and transmission of cultural values.

Chapter 3 - Methods

This research study will be a phenomenological case study that uses a qualitative approach to identify Mexican immigrant parent involvement in their children's education during their elementary schooling (Creswell, 2007; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2014). The choice of qualitative methods will allow me to understand the experiences of the Mexican Immigrant parents/family, and what it means - from their perspective- to be involved in their child's education. This phenomenological case study will allow me to explore the phenomena which shows up as a misunderstanding between school personnel and Mexican Immigrants related to parent involvement. The cases are bounded by particular characteristics (Merriam, 1988) and in this study, those are related to the participants having children in Pacific Northwest County elementary schools and having immigrated from Mexico.

The purpose of this study was to understand the intersection of Mexican Immigrant parent involvement in elementary schools in the Pacific Northwest. The study also identified the ways that Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to support their children's education at home. And finally, the study aimed to bring forth Mexican immigrant parents/families' experiences interacting with school personnel. Thus, in order to achieve the purpose above, I pursued the following two research questions:

1. What do Mexican immigrant parents understand as parental involvement/participation in U.S. schools?
2. How do Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to

support their children's education at home?

I used a qualitative design for this study in an attempt to understand Mexican-born parents' experiences in their children's elementary education and their perspectives on parental involvement in school. Specifically, I interviewed Mexican-born parents of elementary school students to explore their involvement in their children's education, barriers to family involvement, and how families support their children's education. The results of this study provided a better understanding of parental involvement in their children's education from the perspective of Mexican immigrant parents and, in turn, can contribute to the improvement of family-school communication in Pacific Northwest schools in the United States.

Research Methods

This research study used a qualitative study design to identify Mexican immigrant parent involvement in their children's education during their years in elementary schools (Creswell, 2007; Plano-Clark & Creswell, 2014). While there were many ways to approach a qualitative research study, however, this study drew on the traditions of phenomenology and case studies. According to Padilla-Diaz (2015),

All qualitative research has a phenomenological aspect to it, but the phenomenological approach cannot be applied to all qualitative researchers. ... one of its main characteristics lies on the study of qualities and the interpretation addressed by the object of the study (p. 103).

In this dissertation the object qualities being studied are the perceptions and feelings about the interactive space between Mexican Immigrant parents and in public elementary schools residing in the Pacific Northwest County area. The interpretation will be the focus of the Mexican Immigrant parents' perceptions. When describing what makes up a phenomenological study, Creswell, (1998) states:

[T]he best criteria to determine the use of phenomenology is when the research problem requires a profound understanding of *human experiences* common to a group of people. The members of the group should be able to articulate their lived experiences . . . and the role of the researcher is to construct the studied object (p. 104).

While this study refers to phenomenology, it also integrated with a case study approach. Yin, (2014) recognizes that a case study approach focuses on a phenomenon. He states “Most simply, case study is defined as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the ‘case’) in depth and within its real-world context” (p. 16). For this dissertation study, the real-world context is the reality of the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions about being involved in their child’s educational schooling.

Recruitment Procedures

The participants in this qualitative study were recruited from the members of *Adelante Mujeres* organization. *Adelante Mujeres* is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2002 by Bridget Cooke, Sister Barbara Raymond and 15 Latina mothers. The

organization was created “to do something no other nonprofit was doing in the state of Oregon: focusing on the needs of marginalized immigrant Latina women” (Adelante Mujeres n.d.) Based in an Oregon county in the Pacific Northwest, the organization offers Latina women and their family holistic programs and the tools to achieve self-determination in the areas of education, leadership training, and enterprise. As a community member, I obtained permission from the organization to attend an event where people gathered for a Youth Development Conference. I was granted 10-15 minutes to speak to the people, explain my dissertation topic, as well as to distribute and collect survey instruments. It was an anonymous bilingual parent/family paper survey that included a stapled half-sheet invitation to participate in a follow-up interview. These half-sheets were removed and collected to identify potential interview participants; thus, the surveys remained anonymous. The two criteria I was seeking for interviewing participants were that they have immigrated from Mexico, and have a child(ren) in a public elementary school residing in an Oregon Pacific Northwest county area. The purpose of the research was to obtain their views about being an immigrant parent engaged in their child’s educational process. The instrument did not have any place for identifying information, except at the bottom, there was a half sheet of paper where survey takers could provide contact information should they wish to volunteer to

participate in the next steps of the research.

The rationale for selecting this particular group of parents/family members to recruit, was because they all resided in the county from Oregon's Pacific Northwest area. This targeted county represented schools with 40% or more Latino/Spanish speaking student population. It reinforced the recruitment process for this study, which was focused intently on the relationship and intersection of Mexican Immigrant parents in the area schools. The research study participants were recruited from *Adelante Mujeres* event, with an eye toward seeking Mexican Immigrant Parents/Family members with children in schools in the target county. I collected forty-five surveys from Spanish-speaking parents/family members. The next step was to sort the surveys in two ways. First, I set aside the surveys where participants identified themselves as immigrants from Mexico. Afterwards I separated those who volunteered to participate in the study (half-sheet paper). This process yielded eleven families, which I contacted. In the end, only five families were available to be interviewed.

This group of participants lived in the targeted County in Oregon. In particular, this parent population shared the characteristic of having immigrated to the United States from Mexico and have or have had children in public elementary schools.

Participants. Table 1 lists the participants demographic information. Note all

names are pseudonyms.

TABLE 1 - Participant's Demographic Backgrounds

| Participant Pseudonym | Grade finished in Mexico | # of Children | # of Children in school | Mexican Birthplace | Years in the USA |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Linda | 6th | 4 | 1 | Guerrero | 40 |
| Pati | Studied to be Seamstress | 4 | 2 | Michoacan | 20 |
| Jaquelin | 8th | 2 | 1 | Estado de Mexico | 23 |
| Griselda & Jose | 6th & 7th | 3 | 3 | Michoacan & Hidalgo | 20 & 28 |
| Maria | GED | 5 | 3 | Estado de Mexico | 11 |

All participants reported coming from small towns. Their time here in the United States ranges from eleven to thirty years. None of the participants therefore, would be described as recent immigrants. All of the participants reported that their parents were not involved in their education and now they see the engagement here in the United States is totally different than in Mexico.

None of the participants has ever attended college. Only one parent reported completing classes to be seamstress. One parent reported completing her GED, two

reported finishing 6th grade, one reported finishing 7th grade and the remaining parents reported finishing 8th grade. In Mexico, Elementary schools end in the 6th grade and in many small rural towns there are no middle schools to continue education. After sixth grade, students in Mexico have the option to continue with education, at the level called *secundaria*, which is the equivalent to a middle school. *Secundaria* comprises seventh grade through ninth grade. Unfortunately, in Mexico, it is not a requirement to be educated past sixth grade.

If a family wishes for their child to continue to *secundaria*, it would require them to travel back and forth in public transportation and they would be paying for meals every day. The tenth through twelfth grades are called *preparatoria* or *bachillerato*. This level of education is meant for college preparation or for a specific trade and it is not a requirement in the Mexican education system. Like *secundaria*, a *preparatoria* or *bachillerato* it can be a heavy financial burden on families.

Data Collection

The data collection process was grounded in qualitative research methodology. The most appropriate data collection strategy for this research study was using a phenomenological approach of a semi-structured interview, which should be open and profound. According to Creswell (1998) the “purpose of the interview is to obtain

descriptive information and meaning about the phenomena and as close to their experienced reality as possible” (p 104). The primary data collection instruments were surveys and interviews. In this section, I describe the instruments as well as the timeline for the study and the confidentiality procedures used to collect the data.

Survey. A preliminary survey was collected for this qualitative study. The instrument was a voluntary bilingual parent/family paper survey that was distributed with the support of a non-profit organization *Adelante Mujeres* during a Spring Youth Development Conference. The survey instrument was used to collect demographic information and included Likert-scale statements that highlighted parent/family members' perspectives on a variety of issues related to “involvement” in their children’s educational process. In addition, there was a half-sheet attached to the survey that invited parents/family members to participate in follow-up interviews. From the original forty-five surveys collected, five families agreed to be interviewed.

The survey instrument was adapted from a school district school climate survey for parents. The instrument was translated into Spanish and had 18 items that were phrased in the style of statements. Participants could choose from the Likert 7-point scale answers of

1. Strongly Disagree

2. Disagree
3. Somewhat Disagree
4. Somewhat Agree
5. Agree
6. Strongly Agree
7. Don't know

The open-ended questions on the survey included:

#19. In what ways does the school support you as a Spanish-speaking and/or Latino parent/ family member?

#20. In what ways does my child's school demonstrate an appreciation and respect for students' language and culture?

The survey instrument provided a big picture of the population in the specific county in the Pacific Northwest. While the survey gave a glimpse to patterns, I focused on the participants who were willing to be interviewed. In some ways, the survey was simply a way to find / recruit my participants for this study.

Interviews. Through interviews, I had direct communication and gathered information from the participants in an authentic way. Detailed interviews were the primary data collection for a qualitative study (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2014). Typically,

qualitative interviews included general, broad questions that the researcher asked the participants. It was important in this research design, however, that the questions were sufficiently flexible to allow for changes in individual styles of telling stories (Castro-Salazar & Bagley, 2010). Therefore, this study employed the use of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews include open-ended questions that have the flexibility of diverging from the structure of the interview. Semi-structured interviews allow for interaction that can become unexpected, yet insightful.

In-depth semi structured interviews was a tool that allowed me, as the researcher, to explore the topic of parent involvement in detail and with an openness to the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and experiences. Irving Seidman's *Interviewing as Qualitative Research* (2006) is grounded in the phenomenological tradition of three distinct, thematic interviews designed to question meanings of experience. I found his work was a good starting point for this data collection because his structure or protocol provides an in-depth interview process. He writes:

Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behavior and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behavior. A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience.

Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their actions. (p. 7)

For this reason, I used a three-interview, semi-structured protocol (Seidman, 2006). This method was selected because of my interest to capture the lived experiences of the Mexican immigrant parents' engagement in their students' education at elementary level. Following Seidman's interview protocol, the first interview was focused on their life history, including their immigration journey to the United States. The second interview was focused on concrete experiences they have had with school personnel or at their children's school. Finally, the third interview guided participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences with being "involved" in their children's education.

I invited any family member who is a part of a child's life (parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, etc.) to participate in this study and engaged in a series of interviews with the researcher. I asked Mexican-immigrant parents/family members of elementary school students about their school involvement experiences, their expectations of what family involvement encompasses, and the barriers to and/or the influences to become involved. The interviews with each parent/family member allowed the participants to express their ideas about family involvement in their own words.

I conducted interviews with 5 participants (parents/family members) who

volunteered and signed a consent form. I scheduled mutually agreeable times when all parents/family members could be present.

According to Creswell (2007) a semi-structured interview is set up at the convenience of the participant and will follow a structured protocol, with some room to diverge and explore other topics related to what is being discussed. I chose a place off school premises to conduct the interviews so that the participants felt comfortable discussing issues related to their children's schools. I felt if conducting the interviews in a school building, the participants would see me more as a district employee rather than a doctoral student-researcher. I made arrangements with the public library to reserve the public meeting room for the interviews or found another mutually agreed-upon location.

I identified myself as a teacher in the district at one of the elementary schools; however, I emphasized that I am a doctoral student at Portland State University as well and that the purpose of the interview was to gather information for my case dissertation study. Prior to beginning each interview, I explained to the participants that I would speak in Spanish and that I was able to conduct the interview in Spanish. I demonstrated my bilingual and bicultural proficiency to them by proceeding to speak to them in Spanish. I provided a copy of the interview questions in Spanish as well as read to the participants my questions and referred them to a particular written question. This allowed

any non-reading family member to participate without disclosing their literacy status.

Timeline of Procedures. The timeline of activities for this research is described as follows. Once my dissertation research proposal was defended and approved, I applied for and gained IRB approval. This process allowed me to begin collecting data in the Spring of 2017 through Winter of 2018. The survey at the *Adelante Mujeres* event was the first data to be collected. The analysis of the surveys was completed during the Summer of 2017. The interviews were conducted during the 2017-2018 academic year. The transcription process of the audio recordings was completed to allow for the interview data to be analyzed. As the researcher I transcribed the audio recordings in Spanish. Life circumstances prevented me from moving quickly through the analysis process. However, in spring of 2020, the process of working on my dissertation analysis was halted. Covid-19 pandemic turned everyone's lives upside down and as an educator, all my focus was on my second graders and my own family. Once I picked up my dissertation work and reacquainted myself with my data in 2022, I remember feeling deep appreciation and gratitude for the participants who shared their stories and perspectives with me. The analysis process was conducted in Spanish and allowed me to identify the codes which were common among the participants. The coding process eventually led to the creation of themes and choosing quotes that exemplified that theme. Once the quotes

were chosen, I translated them into English. I was able to have a certified translator look over the final transcriptions in both languages. As a researcher, I was unable to check in with the participants to verify the transcription due to the gap in timing from the interview to the analysis. However, I followed the IRB protocol and accurately transcribed the audio recordings.

Confidentiality. Because the researcher was working with persons who have immigrated to the US. Some of the participants might be undocumented and so care was taken to ensure that they were reassured that ALL information was confidential. This was done in their native Spanish language and with cultural sensitivity. Throughout the data collection phase, I reminded the participants that all interview responses were kept confidential, and that the nature of the interviews were voluntary. I followed all safety measures in accordance with IRB protocols that kept recordings, transcriptions, and notes stored in a locked cabinet at my residence. Participant names were assigned pseudonyms recorded in a confidential codebook that was also locked up in the file cabinet. Participants were reminded throughout the recruitment and interview process that they could stop at any part and that they could step out of the research project anytime without consequence or repercussions.

Both during the recruitment at the conference AND prior to interviewing, the

researcher spoke in Spanish to the potential subjects and explained about the research study. Participants were reassured verbally and in written form that their participation is completely voluntary and will not impact their status or standing with *Adelante Mujeres* organization or the broader community. The researcher stressed the nature of anonymity of the survey and the confidential nature of the interview and took time to answer questions posed by the potential subjects. Participants' privacy will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and all material or data collected will NOT have any names associated that could be linked back to participants' identity.

Coding & Data Analysis

In the beginning of my analysis, I started with the survey data collected during the *Adelante Mujeres* meeting. I reviewed the bilingual survey and conducted a descriptive analysis of the quantitative data provided. I reviewed the open-ended comments section to determine if there were topics or information vital to the perspectives of my participants and respectfully included them in my semi-structured interviews. The findings from the survey instrument were described earlier and did not weigh heavily in my analysis of the interview data. I used the survey to provide a broader background of my interview participants' contextual lives with other targeted county survey participants.

The phenomenology approach to this study and interview data collected through Seidman's protocol (2006) naturally led to analyzing the data through the lens of phenomenology. According to Creswell (2007), the process "aims to identify common meanings and essences through textual and structural analysis." He goes on to explain:

Textual analysis – is simply looking at the text – in other words, WHAT was said by the participants. This would be explicit information. Structural analysis is the interpretation of HOW the words were expressed by the participant. Another way to see this process is to examine the implicit information of how it was told; to hear the narration, look for the meaning of what was said and what was NOT said. (p 105).

All data retrieval, review, and analysis were conducted with an open mind to ensure trustworthiness in reporting the findings of this study. Sensitivity, confidentiality, and ethical values were applied during the interviewing process. I employed Seidman's (2006) in depth-phenomenological interview process to collect data that explores how the parents perceive their involvement and identify the ways that Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to support their children's education at home.

The analysis started with reading the interview transcripts more than once to get an overview of the findings (Patton, 2002). I read and reread the transcripts for a holistic view prior to initial coding (Merriam, 1988). During the

second phase of analysis, axial coding used to “compare, reorganize, of ‘focus” codes into categories or themes (Saldaña, 2013, p. 51). In order to develop a “code book” I used the literature for some “start codes” such as access, language, perceptions, knowledge, understanding, and involvement. Within each theme, the codes were clustered into categories - which showed up in all the participants’ stories. The following code book was the outcome of the analysis stage of this dissertation (see Table 2).

Table 2: Code Book

| | |
|--|--|
| Perceptions About the home-school relationship How the participants feel and see themselves (drawing on their own experiences) and how they perceive others in the home-school relationship. | |
| codes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Intimidada</i> (Intimidated) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Navigate the physical space ○ <i>Sin confianza</i> (without trust) ● <i>Interactuar</i> (Interaction) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Relacionarse</i> (to relate) ○ <i>Con confianza</i> (with trust) ● <i>Involucrarse</i> (to involve oneself) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of understanding the educational system |
| Culture These are cultural traits or behaviors that are represented by the Mexican parents in this study. | |
| codes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● <i>Respeto / Respeto al Maestro</i> (Respect/toward teacher) ● <i>La Familia</i> (The Family) ● Gender Roles /Responsibility ● <i>Buen Educado</i> (Well Mannered) |
| Communication The bridge between the school system and the parents that flows both ways - and in two languages in order to have communication. | |
| codes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Language ● Barrier |

The theoretical framework also assisted in the analysis of the interview data. The social-cultural view of learning (which includes funds of knowledge theory) says we “socially” construct knowledge and this happens naturally in family structures, in communities we live in. This foundational way of seeing the world is predominantly set in a person by the time they enter school at 5 years old. Therefore, parent engagement with schools when their children enter the school system is already set up for mainstream, English speaking, families. This is where the problem occurs and the misunderstanding between Mexican Immigrants and school personnel emerges.

Role of the Researcher

I have served my community as a second grade Spanish-teacher in the Dual Language Program, at an elementary school in the targeted Oregon county for twenty-two years. I conducted this study with community members from *Adelante Mujeres organization* who live in the targeted county area. Over the 20 years as a teacher, I have been burdened with comments from well-meaning colleagues about Spanish-speaking, Mexican immigrant parents. As an educational professional and new researcher, my desire to understand this phenomenon of misunderstanding has pushed me to pursue this investigation. As a Mexican immigrant parent and a professional woman who has experienced obstacles in how to navigate the school system, my cultural lens and funds of

knowledge about this phenomenon adds a complex and nuanced understanding that I bring to this research. However, I aimed to acknowledge biases, if any and put aside any and all biases to conduct the study. I drew on my coursework in qualitative research at PSU to remember that all researchers have bias and need to work on identifying and decreasing its impact. In order to recognize my bias, I reflected consistently on the process and any data collected and checked with my advisor and/or checked with my doctoral peers for feedback on bias I may not be aware of.

I came to this point in my academic and professional life as an educator to embark on this research with deep honor and humility. My goal in this endeavor is to amplify the voices of Mexican Immigrant parents/families, because oftentimes, they don't have the words to express their thoughts, or they may feel that their voices will not be heard or maybe that they don't believe their voices will be valued. Part of the reason that I chose to walk down this researcher's journey is because I believe it is important for someone to read, to hear, and to understand that sometimes we hold beliefs and assumptions that are not correct. My hope is that they will be able to hear the voices of Mexican Immigrant parents and find that the parents only want what is best for their children. This is a commonality for us all. I hope that the stories of their lives and perspectives will fall upon the ears of the many people who may never have

imagined how immigrant parents live day-to-day. I believe that this work will help the educational community to change the system – and that teachers and parents and educational leaders will come together to make a change for a more just and equitable education for immigrant students and families.

This chapter provided a broad understanding of the contextual factors that created the stage or platform in which this study was possible to take place. The next chapter introduces six participants of this case study, to hear their stories and to understand the lens through which they viewed their broader world, and more specifically, the context of parent involvement at school. In this narrative I tell stories of Linda, Pati, Jacqueline, Griselda and Jose, and Maria. These six participants represent five families that I interviewed for this study. I believe that they give a voice to the range of experiences of all participants.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter focuses on the voices and stories of the six participants in this research study. The three themes that emerged from the data include: Perceptions about the home-school relationship, Culture, and finally Communication in the United States. Based on the traditions of case studies, this chapter will begin with an in-depth look at the *human experiences* of the participants' encounters and interactions with their child(ren)'s school, which contributed to their perceptions about the home-school relationship. Thus, the first section of this chapter will be about what the participants think and will point to why the participants think or believe the way they do. In other words, what experiences contributed to their perceptions. This will bring us to the second theme of Culture and the immense impact and influence it holds in people's lives. Finally, the third section brings together perception and culture to examine the way communication occurs with participants and the school personnel. The theme of Communication is interconnected to the human experience of navigating a new culture, new language, and a new school system as an immigrant parent.

First Theme: Perceptions about the home-school relationship

While perceptions are an internal psychological/physical process in human beings, in qualitative research interviews, participants' perceptions or recounting events emerge from their life experiences. For example, Maria's experiences as a young child were impacted by her parents decision that she needed to quit school at 9-years-old in order to learn how to cook and take care of a home, as this would be her future life.

Internally, she held onto the belief that education was important as she states the following: *“Pues es, para mi es algo muy importante porque de los padres depende que un hijo salga adelante. Por eso para mi la participación a los padres para mi es muy importante.”* (Well, for me it is something very important because it depends on the parents that a child succeeds. That is why parental involvement is very important to me.)

As a mother of five children, she became familiar with the school and whom to talk to whenever she encountered a situation. She became involved with a group of Migrant families and was soon connected with the main Migrant Education office in the State of Oregon. She received information about her rights as a parent and the responsibilities of the district. So, when she went to a Migrant Family meeting in her district, she was surprised that the director did not attend. Instead, he sent his secretary to take notes. The group wrote a letter, signed their names, and sent this report to the Migrant Education office in Salem. At the next meeting, the director showed up and the following describes the encounter she and others had with the director.

Y entonces él llegó muy prepotente hablándonos en inglés. Diciéndonos “okay, okay estoy aquí, se que tuvieron problemas con mi personal, quiero saberlo.” Pero con una voz así fuerte, y yo le dije en ingles también le digo “okay yo se que tu hablas español y nosotros sentiríamos mas cómodos que nos hablara nos en español.” Y nos contesto “oh es que mi español es académico, pienso que ustedes no me van a entender.” (And then he arrived very arrogant speaking to us in English. Telling us "okay, ok I'm here, I know you had problems with my staff, I

want to know." But with such a strong voice, and I told him in English, I also told him "Okay I know you speak Spanish and we would feel more comfortable if you spoke to us in Spanish." And he answered us "oh my Spanish is academic".)

His actions, tone of voice, and words conveyed a racist, dismissive, and disrespectful attitude toward Maria and the other Migrant families present at the meeting. His actions discriminatory barrier that separates the educated from the uneducated, which is prevalent in Mexico and other societies. In response, Maria reacted to counter his racist comment by requesting an interpreter. "Pero necesito un intérprete. Pero este intérprete no quiero que sea el personal de aquí mismo, quiero que venga de afuera..." (But I need an interpreter. But I don't want this interpreter to be the staff from right here, I want it to come from outside...)

This encounter highlights Marias access to knowledge and information, which in turn allowed her to be confident in speaking out and pushing back in the interaction with the director. She went on to explain in her interview that this incident created a barrier for her because she would have to pay for an outside interpreter if she did not want to use the district's personnel. Sadly, she later shared that many of the parents felt discouraged by the encounter with the director and stopped attending the District Migrant meetings.

During the era of President Trump from 2016-2020, participants spoke about the impact of his rhetoric of negative words against immigrants and especially those from Mexico. Linda explained that she became aware of her grandchildren's concerns in the following:

...me he enterado a través de mis nietos. Amm, que lo que se está viviendo hoy en día, está afectando uno a los niños de siete años. Siete años como mi nieta de 7 o 8 años. Esto empezó del año pasado, yo nunca había escuchado una niña de 6 o 7 años conociendo perfectamente al nuevo presidente. Y sintiendo que este presidente está haciendo cosas en contra de los hispanos. (... I have found out through my grandchildren. Amm, that what is being lived today is affecting seven-year-old children. Seven years as my 7 or 8 year old granddaughter. This started last year, I had never heard a 6 or 7 year old girl knowing the new president perfectly. And feeling that this president is doing things against Hispanics.)

The influence of the former president contributed to a society's negative reactions toward Hispanics, which was felt by children as well as adults. Society has always been a mirror of what people think and believe. This filters down into institutions of schools that can show up in controversial ways. For example, High School students in this county "walked out" because there was an incident where a person rolled out a banner in the cafeteria "Build The Wall". Latino students and those from Mexican heritage were insulted and angry over the perception that they did not belong because of their skin color or ethnic identity.

Of the three themes in the findings, Culture was a strong thread that was prevalent throughout the transcripts. Culture is now thought to be a more fluid construct than previously defined. The field of Anthropology has contributed much to our original understanding of culture. Through an anthropological lens, culture was viewed as having

neat boundaries inside of which all sorts of traditions and structures exist, such as marriage practices, gender roles, religion, death rituals, childrearing practices, language, power and authority structures, food and so forth. Culture was believed to exist outside the person and to exert a strongly deterministic role in people's lives; that is, culture provided rules for living, and there was not much one could do about it. Individuals were seen as passive recipients of culture (Henze & Halister, 1999).

Sonia Nieto, a multicultural education scholar, posits that culture is a dynamic, multifaceted construct that should take into consideration the context and influence of social, economic, and political factors. Ultimately, understanding culture is an organic process that is created and socially constructed; that is learned and dialectical (Nieto & Bode, 2000). The Mexican-immigrant parents in this study provide an understanding of how culture is manifested in their day-to-day lives and decisions. It emerges in concepts such as *Respeto*, *La Familia*, *Ser bien educado*, Gender Roles and Responsibility toward family. These areas of culture became codes in the analysis of the data, which led to the following findings.

Second Theme: Mexican Immigrant Parents' Solid foundation of Culture

Respeto is one the first aspects of culture that emerged during my interviews. The value of *respeto* is based on the importance of respect and obedience of authority in Mexican culture. It means of maintaining harmony within the extended family and is related to knowing the level of courtesy and decorum required in a given situation in relation to other people of a particular age and social status parents, *respeto* emphasizes

that children should be highly considerate of adults and should not interrupt or argue. At least in the context of parenting young children, *respeto* appears to delineate the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate child behavior at school. Valdes (1996) found that *respeto* “was the central value in the Mexican families and one that demanded that children *honor* their parents in a very old-fashioned sense of that word ” (p. 180).

The importance of raising obedient children who accept authority without question, defer to elders, follow specific rules of decorum and exhibit high degrees of control over their behavior, particularly in public is often referred to as a child being “*bien educado*”.

“Respeto” (respect) as a part of Mexican culture, shows up in multiple ways in the daily lives of the participants in this study. For example, as a Mexican immigrant “el saludo” (ones’ greeting) is very important. How you greet a person is part of how you were raised. According to Linda: “En México, una persona no tiene que saludar de tú, no de tú, tiene que saludar de usted. (In Mexico, a person does not greet you to everybody, needs to greet “*usted*”.)

The word “usted” has a much more comprehensive definition that is not directly translated from English to Spanish. Many Mexican parents teach their children to greet elders by shaking hands and using the honorific of “*usted*”. A child’s behavior and the respect that a child demonstrates toward his or her teachers is very important in Mexican culture. These findings are supported by other qualitative researchers (Lopez 2001; Valdez, 1996). The importance of respect is represented on multiple occasions in

the transcripts by all the participants. Maria, for example told me during an interview “Pero si, yo cuando era pequeña mis papás dijeron respeten a sus maestros.” (But yeah, when I was little my parents said respect your teachers.)

She was encouraged to display appropriate behavior such as showing respect to teachers. This directive has been heard by many children of Mexican heritage.

Griselda and Jose, agreed with Maria on the importance of “*respeto*” (Respect) and how this cultural value is passed on from generation to generation. Griselda describes how she teaches her son “Siempre le he enseñado el respeto, así como mi mamá nos enseñó a nosotros.” (I have always taught him respect just like my mom taught us.)

Respeto is more than the English word translated into “respect”; there is an echo of a long tradition in the Mexican cultural ways that are passed on from generation to generation within the word. The cultural construct of *respeto* is worth exploring because of how it influences the ways in which Mexican Immigrant parents interact with society and live in their daily lives.

La familia. Another cultural value that is related to *respeto* is how tightly held the family (*la familia*) is an all-encompassing, important priority for those who hold onto their cultural values in their day-to-day decisiones and lives. Typically, in the United States, family consists of two parents rearing their children as Merriam Webster

Dictionary describes “the basic unit in society traditionally consisting of two parents rearing their children *also*: any of various social units differing from but regarded as equivalent to the traditional family (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) Children are born into families that provide the primary means of socializing them into society. Interestingly, the definition of *la familia* differs from the traditional Merriam Webster dictionary as noted in: *The concept of family in Mexico: A review from the anthropological and demographic perspective* by researchers Gutiérrez Capulín, Díaz Otero, & Román Reyes 2016)

La familia es el ámbito primordial de desarrollo de cualquier ser humano pues constituye la base en la construcción de la identidad, autoestima y esquemas de convivencia social elementales. Como núcleo de la sociedad, la familia es una institución fundamental para la educación y el fomento de los valores humanos esenciales que se transmiten de generación en generación. (The family is the primary area of development of any human being as it is the basis for the construction of identity, self-esteem and elementary social coexistence schemes. As the nucleus of society, the family is a fundamental institution for the education and promotion of essential human values that are transmitted from generation to generation.)

The nuclear family is understood as part of a network of extended kin as well. Adult siblings are understood to have mutual obligations for one another and their immediate

family members, and mutual obligations are understood for extended kin as well (Parke & Buriel, 2006). The term *familismo* encompasses collectivistic, positive interpersonal familial relationships, high family commitment and loyalty (Romero, Robinson, Haydel, Mendoza, & Killen, 2004). The term *familismo* is used within the Hispanic culture and is interconnected with the values of *respeto* and *confianza* (trust).

The way that people care for their family members is an important cultural tradition. For Linda and Griselda, the tradition of caring for family members is a strong theme in their interview data. For example, Linda spoke about taking care of her niece (Stephanie) because her sister went back to Mexico to take care of their father. She explained:

Después del fallecimiento de mi mama mi papa se puso muy triste y se empezó a enfermar bastante, así que la mama de mi sobrina que se llama Maria, ella se tuvo que ir para el pueblo o al rancho como la quiera entender. Se tuvo que ir con mi papá para estar con él. (After the death of my mother, my dad became very sad and started to get very sick, so the mother of my niece, Maria, had to go to the town or to the ranch, however you want to interpret it. She had to go, be there with my dad.)

It is the children's responsibility to take care of their parents in their elderly age in the Mexican culture. This idea of taking care of ones' family also applies to our children and youth, as in Linda's situation, she is taking care of her niece because there wasn't a High School in the town where her father lives in Mexico.

Griselda talked about taking care of her mother and knew from an early age that this was her goal. She described her home life as harsh and traumatic. “Yo decía ‘quiero aprender porque quiero salir adelante, sacar a mamá, porque no quería ver esa situación en mi familia.’” (I said ‘I want to learn, I want to get ahead, get my mom out, because I did not want to see that situation in my family.)

Griselda knew at a young age that she wanted a life without domestic violence and her cultural roots of taking care of her mother emerged from her experiences. She explained: “Estábamos pequeños fue ahí cuando yo dije no. Si un día Dios me hace ser grande, voy a dejar que mi mama tenga todo que mi mama tenga todo.” (we were small That was when I said no. If one day God makes me great, I will let my mom have everything.)

One of the most important relationships and dynamics in the family occurs between the mother and her children. The “role” of the mother is to raise her children as *bien educado* and to pass on her wisdom/*consejos* to guide them in the future for the world they will encounter. Through their words and actions, they acculturate their children into the traditions and values of their culture. As the children grow older and become adults, there is often a discussion about the shared responsibility of caring for their elders. This cultural tradition of taking care of the elder members is more than an obligation. It is a complex system of cultural beliefs and values that are based on Mexican tradition. For Linda and Griselda there is nothing more honorable than taking care of their parents. It is a way of showing respect and gratitude for life.

After hearing these interviews grounded in Mexican culture, *La familia* is more

than “a group of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit” as the Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines it (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) For the Mexican Immigrant parents, it is an all-encompassing, important priority for those who enact their cultural values in their day-to-day decisions and lives and includes extended family. This process ensures that the cultural values and traditions get passed on from generation to generation.

Gender Roles/Responsibility Toward Family. Within the overarching theme of culture, how participants view identity were influenced by their experiences growing up in Mexico. Identity of gender and the roles associated with that gender have been changing and evolving over time, which has created new ways for individuals to view their role and self-identify. In this study, all the participants immigrated from Mexico and brought a traditional view of gender roles. There is a strong connection between culture and gender roles. For many years, women have lived in a submissive role in Mexican culture. For generations they did not have access to education because of the simple fact of being a woman. Culturally, it is men who have had preference for education, if there were economic resources. Instead, the woman has to dedicate herself to household chores, because education was not seen as important for her.

Maria spoke how she was told that girls were going to get married and school was useful for domestic life. It was the reason why she studied until third grade.

A pues no estudie mucho. Solo estudié hasta el tercer grado. Y este por ah, pienso que porque me decían que, pues la mujer no le servía de mucho estudiar eso fue lo que a mi me mencionaron, que, porque me iba casar, me iba ir con mi esposo y

que pue no me iba servir mucho estudiar.(ja) Entonces por eso fue por lo que, que llegue a tercer grado. (Well, I did not study much. I only studied until the third grade. And this one over there, I think that because they told me that, well, the woman wasn't much use studying that was what they mentioned to me, that, because I was going to get married, I was going to go with my husband and that it wasn't going to help me a lot of studying. (ja) So that's why I got to third grade.)

She further elaborated on the different roles between male and females as well as the responsibilities that were expected of them in the Mexican cultural tradition.

Mi mamá, pues ella se enfocó más en darle la educación a mis hermanos hombres, a los varones, que a las mujeres. Entonces mi hermana, mi hermana mayor y yo somos las que no estudiamos. Por lo mismo que lo que decía que para ese entonces ella pensaba que la educación de las mujeres no era importante. (My mom, well, she focused more on educating my male brothers, the men, than the women. So, my sister, my older sister and I are the ones who don't study. For the same reason as what she said, at that time she thought that the education of women was not important.)

In this excerpt, we see the inter-relatedness between culture and gender roles. Griselda also experienced the imposed expectation that women did not need education. For example, she described her father's question. "Mi papa decía ¿Para que tenia una mujer que ir a estudiar?" (My father used to say, why did a woman have to go to school?)

Griselda shared her experience when she was living in Mexico and describes the impact of how imposed gender roles did not allow her to access an education. She

believed that expectations of the different gender roles for males and females was part of the thinking of the Hispanic community. In her opinion, young men had the option to finish school or not and would encounter the family obligation to help out. She explains: “Y mi mamá decía, oh ya terminaste la high school, ya eres hombre, ve a ayudarle a tu papá.” (And my mom was saying, you already finished high school, you are already a man, then go help your dad.)

Adult siblings are understood to have mutual obligations for one another and their immediate family members, and mutual obligations are understood for extended kin as well (Parke & Buriel, 2006). By listening to the interviews and to the participants, we see that the cultural expectation and beliefs about gender roles impacted both men and women.

Linda experienced a different responsibility as one of the oldest in her family. She was tasked to be “responsible” for her siblings. With the approval of her parents, she left her hometown with her brothers and sisters to live in a place where there was more access to educational opportunities. Her siblings attended school, and she managed the household.

Y este salimos del pueblo a la ciudad de México, estuve con mis hermanos que estaban estudiando los mayores y menores. Entonces yo me dedicaba más a ayudarlos a hacer la comida, a prepararlos y a trabajar en la casa. (And we left our town for Mexico City. In Mexico City I was with my brothers and sisters who were studying the older and younger. So, I was more dedicated to helping them making food, preparing them and doing housework.)

We see different cultural values central to Mexican Immigrant family life are important as a background for understanding the sense of responsibility toward family. This is not to suggest that these values are shared by all Mexican Immigrants. Rather they should be viewed as broad cultural frameworks that shape family relationships and are relevant for understanding Mexican family culture.

Griselda told me that she left home at age 17 to look for a job and was going to take responsibility for her mother. In her interview, she cried when she spoke about her mother because they had suffered under the abuse of her father for many years. She loved her mother and wanted only to take care of her. She described the following:

Yo me voy a hacer responsable de mamá y salí de la casa a la edad de 17 años a buscar trabajo. Y ahí fue donde yo entendí que, que tenía que salir adelante y lo poquito inglés que aprendí, ahí fue donde me ayudó mucho. (I'm going to take responsibility for mom. And I left home at the age of 17 to look for work. And that was where I understood that, that I had to get ahead and the little English that I learned, that was where it helped me a lot.)

In this excerpt, we see the inter-relatedness between *gender role* and *responsibility toward family* through Griselda's interview. The cultural aspect of taking care of siblings and extended family and working at a young age emerged as a strong commonality, a part of a solid foundation of culture. The cultural aspect of responsibility toward family was exemplified by Griselda who spoke about taking care of her mother and knew from an early age that this was her goal. She described her home life as harsh and today, we would describe it as trauma.

Jaquelin also spoke about her responsibility toward her family. At a young age she wanted to become a doctor, but her mom was a single mother and needed help. She was able to finish a technical career, and became a secretary instead of her goal of becoming a doctor.

Mi mamá como le digo ella fue madre soltera, ella necesitaba ayuda. Por ejemplo, yo siempre tuve el deseo de ser doctora pero vi el esfuerzo de mi mamá y solamente me pudo ayudar para la carrera de secretaria. Después de eso, yo creo que fue más la necesidad de ayudar a mis hermanos a que tuvieran un mejor estilo de vida. (My mother, as I say, was a single mother, she needed help. For example, I always had the desire to become a doctor but I saw my mother's effort and she could only help me for my secretary career. After that, I think it was more the need to help my brothers to have a better lifestyle.

In this example, we see that Jaquelin's experience of taking on the role and responsibility to help her siblings obtain a better life, was life changing. Helping her single mother and family became the priority in her life instead of pursuing her own dreams. She didn't hold any regret or resentment because it was simply seen as her role to help.

We must not lose sight of a role in the family, that of the women's role which sets the course of the family's trajectory. Because her husband does not speak English, Jaquelin takes on the role to connect with the school related to the education of their children. She attends parent conferences, communicates with teachers, and in addition she works outside the home and takes care of the housework. This is a common role in

Hispanic homes where the work of educating the children is also part of the woman's responsibility.

Mi esposo no habla inglés, entonces como mamá, yo he tenido la carga de ir a juntas y reuniones con los padres o la que recibe mensajes de la escuela. No solamente he trabajado o ayudado en la casa, si no que soy la que se comunica con los maestros. (My husband does not speak English, so as a mother, I have had the burden of going to meetings with parents or the one who receives messages from the school. Not only have I worked or helped out at home, but I am the one who communicates with the teachers.)

In summary, the aspects of culture that appeared in the participants' lives were Respeto, La Familia, Gender Roles and notions of Responsibility toward one's family guided the participant's interpersonal relationships at home and in the community. These aspects of culture appeared in different events and incidents shared in this study. This finding highlighted the aspects of shared culture as a foundational part of the perceptions of the participants in this study. In addition, we see that cultural values also were revealed in how participants communicated. The next section explores further how Mexican Immigrant parents speak about communication and how this is translated into their day-to-day lives.

Third Theme: Mexican Immigrant Parents' Speak out about Communication

Communication is a big part of navigating a new language, new culture, and new school system for immigrant families. As an educational community we understand second language acquisition and know that there is a socio-cultural aspect to learning and

using a new language. The participants in this study primarily spoke Spanish and reflected the continuum of not speaking English to using some or more English words in their conversations. It is important to recognize that *respeto* as noted earlier is a critical part of the cultural values for the participants, and this influences how one communicates with others. The theme of Communication in the findings revealed a complicated connection between how the participants felt (emerging from lived experiences), their perceptions (what they believed), and their cultural background (which includes *respeto*).

Jaquelin desired to be a part of their child's education, but language was the first barrier she encountered. In addition, she did not have knowledge of how to navigate the educational system which became her second barrier. Immigrant families are at a disadvantage and often must rely on the goodness of the educational system, including personnel, to come to their support. She explained in the following: "El idioma y otras muchas barreras que a veces el propio sistema de aquí de Estados Unidos nos ponen. Pero principalmente al principio para mi fue el idioma y no conocer el sistema educativo que es muy diferente a donde yo estudié en México." (The language and many other barriers that sometimes the very system here in the United States puts on us. But mainly at the beginning for me it was the language and not knowing the educational system that is very different from where I studied in Mexico.)

Linda shared similar feelings to Jaquelin in regards to her hesitation in speaking with the school personnel. Her feelings are central to why she does not feel confident in communicating with school personnel. "Sabes que, yo me siento cohibida al relacionarme y hablar con personas que están preparadas, como los maestros y

consejeros.” (You know what, I feel self-conscious about connecting and talking to people who are prepared, like teachers and counselors.)

There’s a tangle between respect, communication, and interacting with others. Respecting someone who is older, with education, a professional and someone in a type of authority position creates *deference* when it comes to communication. Linda describes this hesitation as “fear” and this raises the question “fear of what”? From the CRT literature, we understand there is an underlying socialization process that minoritized people have gone through where they are dismissed, ignored, belittled, or even made to feel inferior. Society's oppression and individual’s require courage to speak out. With Linda we note from her interviews that she was already socialized as a child not to question, not to bring attention to herself for fear of how that adult would react to her. She describes her experiences as a young child in school. “Y pues yo no hacía la tarea y tampoco les preguntaba a los maestros de como hacerla, no me daba confianza porque tenía miedo.” (And well, I didn't do my homework and I didn't ask the teachers how to do it, I didn't feel confident because I was afraid.)

Jaquelin describes mixed emotions about communicating with school personnel. On one hand, she appreciates that she can find someone who speaks her language and can help her. But on the other hand, she still has hesitation to speak with the teacher.

Verdaderamente cuando voy a la escuela de mi hija si me siento intimidada, es grandísima, me siento con apoyo porque ya hablan mi idioma. Entonces ya son personas que me pueden ayudar con preguntas, lo puedo sentir. Pero yo creo que

hablar con un maestro ya no puedo. Por ejemplo, ¿cómo le pregunto a un maestro de un tema que no entiendo? (Truly when I go to my daughter's school if I feel intimidated, it's great, I feel supported because they already speak my language. So there are already people who can help me with questions, I can feel it. But I think I can't talk to a teacher anymore. For example, how do I ask a teacher about a topic I don't understand?)

Jaquelin is describing the feeling of being intimidated because she lacks understanding. It appears that she does not want to reveal her uneducated position.

The demonstration of respect can show up in many ways. Oftentimes when an individual defers to an authority it can be interpreted this person feels inferior or may be afraid to say an opinion. However, in Mexican culture there is a tremendous recognition and respect for someone with education. We saw this in the interviews with Linda and Jaquelin. Their respect and deference toward the teachers emerge in their feelings and hesitation in communicating.

Communication with a cultural lens and hearing the participants' voices - I found that Immigrant families would approach the communication process with a deep respect and an inability to "counter" or negate what the teacher says. There are several issues that appear to present themselves in the process of communication between the participants and the school. First, the inability to speak the English language confidently was perceived as a barrier. The other issue that created a barrier was the participants' *confianza* / confidence or self-esteem to speak to the teacher. This feeling

came about because the “teacher” was viewed with great respect and the immigrant participants who did not feel they were educated in the same way, did not see the teachers as equal in the communication process.

Bringing the three themes together

Respeto is one of the first aspects of culture that emerged during my first interviews. In the Mexican cultural value of “*respeto*” (respect) is an important aspect of the culture. It shows up in multiple ways in the daily lives of the participants in this study. The value of *respeto* is based on the importance of respect and obedience of authority. Delgado-Gaitan (1994), illustrates that for Mexican American parents, *respeto* emphasizes that children should be highly considerate of adults and should not interrupt or argue. At least in the context of parenting young children, *respeto* appears to delineate the boundaries of appropriate and inappropriate child behavior. Children should show respect above all others; by explicitly using the honorific of “*usted*” with: parents, grandparents, teachers, doctors, extended family members, and strangers.

Jaquelin shared that she was not sure if she was doing good or bad as a parent in her communication or lack of asking for help from the teacher or school personnel.

Mire yo no sé si estoy haciendo bien o estoy haciendo mal, pero a mis hijos sinceramente no quiero avergonzarlos, si me entiende? Yo creo que ya pasan situaciones difíciles como jóvenes, como para que yo vaya a la escuela a pedir

ayuda. O que vaya a decirle a la maestra que no está haciendo bien su trabajo, o que no está explicando bien su clase. (Look, I do not know if I am doing good or I'm doing bad, but honestly do not want to embarrass my children, you understand me? I think that difficult situations are happening as young people, so I go to school to ask for help. Or that he is going to tell the teacher that he is not doing his work well, or that he is not explaining his class well.)

In this excerpt, we see the perception of Jaquelin and how communication with *respeto* to the profession of teaching can become complicated. The cultural aspect of showing respect toward the teachers showed up as a strong commonality amidst participants. Linda spoke earlier in her interview, she felt self-conscious when speaking with educated individuals. These data pointed to the cultural value of *respeto* toward the teaching profession is a link that kept them tethered to their cultural roots.

In summary the findings show the perceptions of the five participants were deeply influenced by their experiences. These experiences were drawn from their early years growing up in Mexico, all the way to recent experiences interacting with school district personnel and teachers. The strongest finding in this study was about the critical influence of cultural values and traditions the participants held closely and which influences their day to day lives. And finally, the theme of communication emerges as the moments when perceptions, experiences and cultural values combine to create misunderstandings of traditional norms of parent engagement and the Mexican Immigrant parent's actions in navigating relationships with schools and teachers.

In the next chapter will step outward to provide alignment between the findings of

this study and the literature. Recommendations will also be offered to improve Home-school relationships with Mexican immigrant parents of elementary age-children.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological case study is to explore the misconception that is occurring in schools today about Mexican Immigrant parents' involvement. In particular, the views and perceptions of Mexican immigrant parents' involvement with their children's education will be explored. Five families volunteered to participate in this case study to explore these two research questions:

1. What do Mexican immigrant parents understand as parental involvement/participation in U.S. schools?
2. How do Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to support their children's education at home?

From the participants' responses during the in-depth multiple interviews (Seidman, 2006), I found the participants had similarities through specific aspects of culture. The results of this study indicate that Mexican immigrant parents provide a strong foundation of support for their children's education. I found that participants, in fact, support their children's education in several ways that may not be recognized by educators and are not generally recognized by school personnel, including teachers. In chapter four, I discussed the findings as clustered around three themes: 1) the notion of participants' perceptions emerging from experiences, 2) the impact and influence of culture in the participants' lives, and 3) the communication process between schools and the immigrant parents' interactions.

This study provided me an opportunity to hear the voices of immigrant families

and to help reveal the misunderstanding that often blames Mexican Immigrant parents/families for the gap in their children's educational achievement. This phenomenological case study lies in understanding the phenomena of the cultural mismatch between Mexican Immigrant parents/families' view about what it means to be “involved” in their children’s education. They discussed these two questions in three, in-depth interviews and allowed time to spend time with them.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was grounded in the sociocultural theory that framed the human experience as socially constructed through community and life experiences. Because my participants were immigrant families from Mexico, the theory of Funds of Knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti, 2005) was important to integrate and provide nuance to the cultural aspects of this study. Funds of knowledge theory has its origin in Vygotsky’s (1978) Social Development Theory, which is built on three concepts: social interaction, the more knowledgeable other, and the Zone of Proximal Development. Together, these principles argue for a social approach to learning, where there exists a kind of apprenticeship, enabling children to bring their own experiences into the classroom and to explore and build on them in a way that acknowledges them as individuals that bring their funds of knowledge. Both the sociocultural and funds of knowledge theory are very connected to parents and family members who participate in the socialization of their children, preparing them for the world and passing on their cultural knowledge, beliefs and traditions from generation to generation. The theoretical frameworks used in this study allowed me to consider what the participants shared during interviews, leading me

to the three themes in the findings.

Synthesis of Findings

The literature on parental involvement has identified barriers to effective involvement specifically related to immigrant parents in mainstream school settings. Some of these barriers were the lack of English proficiency, lack of academic skills, work related issues, lack of time, restricted opportunities for interaction, limited skills and knowledge among parents and educators on which to build collaboration, and psychological and cultural barriers between families and schools are some of the main factors that may account for a lack of parental involvement (Lareau, 1989; Lopez, 2001; Moles, 1993; Perez-Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Valdez, 1996). The findings from chapter four point to some of these barriers in the lives of the participants, but what emerged from the interviews were findings presented in three themes listed below.

First theme: Perceptions about the home-school relationship. The first theme in this dissertation study is the participants' perceptions about the home-school relationship. Pontus, Persson, Hillmeister, and Persson, (2022) explore the idea of “perceptions” from a physical and psychological approach. They noted that

[T]here is still a surprising amount of verbal ambiguity about the concepts of (unconscious) sensory input and (conscious) perception. It probably does not help that the term “perception” has several dictionary-defined meanings, all used regularly when composing a paper: (i) An awareness of things through the

physical senses, (ii) a belief or opinion based on how things seem, and (iii) the ability to notice and understand things that are not obvious to other people (p. 1).

While this dissertation study does not delve into the scientific knowledge and theories (Psychophysics) about perceptions, I understand that fundamentally, perceptions are an internal human process, unseen to the eye. Our bodies take in information through the senses and then our brain translates this into something meaningful. In other words, perception is an internal process that organizes information we see, hear, taste, feel, and smell in our brain and then translate information into experiences. De Lange, Heilbron, and Kok (2018) studied how expectations shape perceptions. They propose that prior knowledge strongly influences perceptions and decision making. All of this is based on the “probabilistic structure of the world”. They go on to explain that “Humans, like many other species, are ‘anticipatory systems.’ They construct predictive models of themselves and their environment, allowing them to quickly and robustly make sense of incoming data” (p. 764). In this dissertation, the anticipatory systems for the participants were established through their past experiences and cultural and linguistic upbringing.

While perceptions are an internal psychological/physical process in human beings, in qualitative research interviews, participants’ perceptions or recounting events emerge from their life experiences. For example, Maria’s experiences as a young child were impacted by her parents' decision that she needed to quit school at 9-years-old in order to learn how to cook and take care of a home, as this would be her future life. Internally, she held onto the belief that education was important and she brought this into her life as an adult. She reflected on her parents’ decision as she states the following:

“Pues, para mi es algo muy importante porque de los padres depende que un hijo salga adelante. Por eso para mi la participación de los padres es muy importante.” (Well, for me it is something very important because it depends on the parents that a child succeeds. That is why for me the participation of parents is very important.) During the interview process, Maria reflected on her experience and recognized that she made a decision that she wanted her children’s education to be a priority.

A mí me ha impactado la forma en que fui criada en mi país. Ahora veo la diferencia en que yo estoy criando a mis hijos. Porque para mi la importancia es de que mis hijos sean unas personas de provecho en este país, donde estamos ahorita. (I have been impacted by the way my parents raised me in my country. Now I see the difference in who I am raising my children. Because for me the importance is that my children are useful people in this country, where we are right now.)

Maria’s parents made decisions based on their own experiences and within the context of their culture and community. As a child, Maria accepted this decision because of the cultural norms in her life. This was a demonstration of *respeto* toward her parents and family. Today, as an adult woman living in the United States, she is proud and values the opportunities for her children to grow up and become successful and productive citizens.

Maria’s *cuento* points to how her culture influenced her. This brings us to the second theme in this study, which is Culture. By exploring culture, we see how it is embedded within the day-to-day lives of families and how it is part of traditions that get

passed from generation to generation. It includes topics such as *respeto* (respect) and *comportamiento o ser educado* (behavior or to be well-mannered).

Second Theme: Culture. From the findings, the second theme of culture quickly became a large and critical theme of this dissertation. The participants described a clear understanding of what it meant to support their children's education that was specific to their culture. Mexican immigrant parents generally saw preparation at home as an important instrument in providing support for their children's education, such as food, a safe place to stay and taking them to school every day. They provide support to their children through discussions about school and the relationship of education to their children's future in the United States. These discussions with the participants include topics such as *respeto* (respect) and *comportamiento o ser educado* (behavior or to be well-mannered) as they relate to raising their children. In addition, the participants also saw the monitoring of homework as part of their way to support their children's education. These aspects of culture were revealed in subtle and often casual ways and it was only when the same aspects of culture appeared in the data from parent to parent that I understood the patterns were pointing to the important role of culture in these parents' daily lives.

In her ethnographic study of ten Mexican Immigrant families, Valdes (1996) presents a portrait of Mexican parents as having strong family values. She primarily focused on mothers because they were the primary caregivers. She notes the following:

The relationship between the mothers and their children cannot be understood

without an examination of one of the most important notions guiding interaction between individuals in these families. This notion is *respeto*, a concept that goes much beyond the meaning of the English term *respect*. The English notion of *respect* suggests some of the elements of the concept of *respeto*, but excludes many others (p. 130).

“Respeto” (respect) as a part of Mexican culture, shows up in multiple ways in the daily lives of the participants in this study. For example, as a Mexican immigrant “*el saludo*” (ones’ greeting) is very important. How you greet a person is part of how you were raised. According to Linda: “En México, una persona no tiene que saludar de tú, no de tú, tiene que saludar de usted.” (In Mexico, a person does not greet you to everybody, needs to greet “*usted*”.)

Respeto. was a code that showed up in the transcripts time and time again. It was worth exploring because of how it influenced the ways in which Mexican Immigrant parents interact and live in their daily lives and how they passed on this cultural value to their children. Based on the anticipatory systems that parents were socialized as children, the participants passed on the cultural value of *respeto* to their children. In her ethnographic study of ten Mexican Immigrant families, Valdes (1996) presents a portrait of Mexican parents as having strong family values. She observed mostly mothers in her research interacting and providing care for their children. She points to the value of *respeto* in the children based on their behavior. She noted that they did not interrupt, they complied with directions, they did not fight with their siblings, and they contributed to the household chores. For children to argue with their

mother was considered “*falta de respeto*” disrespectful behavior (p. 121). In conclusion, Valdes found that *respeto* is about the “presentation of self before others as well as the recognition and acceptance of the needs of those persons with whom interaction took place” (p. 132).

A child’s behavior and the respect that a child demonstrates toward his or her teachers is very important in Mexican culture. Maria, for example told me during an interview: “Pero si, yo cuando era pequeña mis papás dijeron respeten a sus maestros.” (Pero si, yo cuando era pequeña mis papás dijeron respeten a sus maestros.)

Comportamiento (behavior) and ser educado (to be well mannered). These behavioral expectations were some of the first aspects of culture to be shared by the parents who participated in this study and are closely related to the value of *respeto*. *Comportamiento* is an essential element of social behavior, reflecting good manners or being polite in social settings (Valdez, 1996). *Comportment* refers to children being socially agreeable and behaving with dignity in their bearing. This is displayed by greeting guests appropriately and making polite conversation. A child’s behavior and the respect that a child demonstrates toward adults (especially his or her teachers) is very important in Mexican culture. During my first interview all the participants agreed that the way you greet a person is part of how you were raised, or your upbringing (manners) or in Spanish, *ser educado*. These cultural behaviors are very interconnected to each other with the central theme that binds them together being *respeto*.

Maria was encouraged to display appropriate behavior such as showing respect

to teachers. Griselda and Jose, agreed with Maria on the importance of “*respeto*” (Respect) and how this cultural value is passed on from generation to generation. Griselda describes how she teaches her son: “Siempre le he enseñado el respeto, así como mi mamá nos enseñó a nosotros.” (I have always taught him respect just like my mom taught us.)

In the next theme, the data revealed that communication is a big part of navigating a new language, new culture, and new school system for immigrant families. The third and final theme of this dissertation study is Communication. When communication is successful between the home and school, there is more support and agreement for what’s best for the child.

Third Theme: Communication. Because all of the participants immigrated from Mexico, they all went through the process of acquiring English. The literature on second language acquisition according to Spada & Lightbown (2013), tells us that second language acquisition research focuses on the developing knowledge and use of a language by children and adults who already know at least one other language. It has a theoretical and practical importance. The theoretical importance is related to our understanding of how language is represented in the mind and whether there is a difference between the way language is acquired and processed and the way other kinds of information are acquired and processed. The practical importance arises from the assumption that an understanding of how languages are learned will lead to more effective teaching practices. Spada & Lightbown (2013) note that understanding language acquisition through a sociocultural theory aligns with “Vygotsky's theory

[which] assumes that cognitive development, including language development, arises as a result of social interactions. Unlike the psychological theories that view thinking and speaking as related but independent processes, sociocultural theory views speaking and thinking as tightly interwoven” (p. 118). Communication is a social interactive process that overlays a lens of second language acquisition theory into the lives of the participants.

Communication with a cultural lens and hearing the participants’ voices - I found that Immigrant families would approach the communication process with a deep respect and an inability to “counter” or negate what the teacher says. The inability to speak confidently English was an issue that participants shared in the interviews about their process of communication with the school.

As described earlier, the theoretical framework used in this study was primarily a sociocultural perspective. This allowed me to analyze the interview data with this lens. The social-cultural view of learning (which includes funds of knowledge theory) says we “socially” construct knowledge and this happens naturally in family structures, in communities we live in. This foundational way of seeing the world is predominantly set in a person by the time they enter school at 5 years old. Therefore, parent engagement with schools when their children enter the school system is already set up for mainstream, English speaking, families. This is where the problem occurs and the misunderstanding between Mexican Immigrants and school personnel emerges.

By using a sociocultural perspective of a second language learning, the words of the participants used to communicate emerged from encounters with learning English. We know that in the sociocultural theory, there is a close relationship between culture and mind, and that all learning is first social then individual. As a result of the interviews, it appears that immigrant families are at a disadvantage when trying to communicate with their child's school. They must often rely on the goodness of the educational system, including personnel, to come to their aid and need for help – this is the social aspect of learning a second language and building knowledge on how to communicate with school personnel. Jaquelin desired to be a part of their child's education, but language was the first barrier she encountered. She explained in the following:

El idioma y otras muchas barreras que a veces el propio sistema de aquí de Estados Unidos nos ponen. Pero principalmente al principio para mi fue el idioma y no conocer el sistema educativo que es muy diferente a donde yo estudié en México. (The language and many other barriers that sometimes the very system here in the United States puts on us. But mainly at the beginning for me it was the language and not knowing the educational system that is very different from where I studied in Mexico.)

Jaquelin, also shared that she was not sure if she was doing good or bad as a parent in her communication or lack of asking for help from the teacher or school personnel.

Mire yo no sé si estoy haciendo bien o estoy haciendo mal, pero a mis hijos sinceramente no quiero avergonzarlos, ¿me entiende? Yo creo que ya pasan situaciones difíciles como jóvenes, como para que yo vaya a la escuela a pedir

ayuda. O que vaya a decirle a la maestra que no está haciendo bien su trabajo, o que no está explicando bien su clase. (Look, I do not know if I am doing good or I'm doing bad, but honestly do not want to embarrass my children, you understand me? I think that difficult situations are happening as young people, so I go to school to ask for help. Or that he is going to tell the teacher that he is not doing his work well, or that he is not explaining his class well.

Jaquelin talked about her hesitation in speaking with the school personnel. She describes a critical time in a young person's life when good communication needs to happen between the school and home. In this comment, she is referring to her own children and the need to go to the school to ask for assistance. However, her feelings and perceptions are central to why she does not feel confident in communicating with school personnel.

In the synthesis of the three themes, we see that the perceptions of the six participants were deeply influenced by their experiences and that those experiences influenced how they interacted at mainstream schools in the USA. The main finding in this study was about how the participants' cultural values and traditions showed up in their day to day lives. And finally, the theme of communication emerges as the moments when perceptions, experiences and cultural values combine to create misunderstandings of traditional norms of parent engagement and the Mexican Immigrant parent's actions in navigating relationships with schools and teachers.

Recommendations

In a school that serves multicultural and multilingual students and families, the most critical part of providing an educational experience that is positive is based on how the school values and accommodates their cultural and linguistic assets. This brings us to the first recommendation.

- 1. Perspective:** Schools need to adopt and constantly monitor their way of interacting with Immigrant families to ensure that it is a funds of knowledge / asset perspective and not a deficit perspective.
- 2. Professional Development:** teachers ought to have professional development (PD) to understand the unique experiences of their Mexican Immigrant families.
- 3. School Activities:** The majority of Immigrant Mexican families work long hours that often end in the evening. Therefore, activities at school should take this into consideration and offer a variety of times for parents to participate or engage in school activities.
- 4. Mode of Communication:** In today's world, schools often rely on technology such as text messages or emails or school newsletters on the website to communicate with the families. Some families who do not have access or familiarity with the technology, will not be able to respond. This contributes to the misunderstanding that the family does not care. To remedy this, schools will need to invest in building relationships and personal one-to-one communication by person or phone. As the findings

from the communication theme highlighted, parents are often feeling insecure about speaking to the educators at school. Taking this into consideration is of vital importance if the school truly wants to be inclusive and increase the involvement of parents from diverse backgrounds.

5. **Future Research:** It is interesting to note that the recruitment of participants yielded a unique group of Mexican Immigrant Parents. As a group, they did not have formal education such as a college degree. In addition, they also had experiences living in the USA for more than 11 years. In the future, it would be beneficial to recruit a larger sample of participants in the hopes of including college educated, recent immigrants, and younger Mexican Immigrant parents.

Conclusion

In conclusion, when I set out to explore Mexican Immigrant parents' perceptions, I had two research questions. The first asked: "What do Mexican immigrant parents understand as parent involvement/participation in U.S. schools?" To answer this question, I used in-depth phenomenological interview protocol (Seidman, 2006) and I found out that the six participants were deeply influenced by their experiences. These experiences were drawn from their early years growing up in Mexico, all the way to recent experiences interacting with school district personnel and teachers. The participants in the sample of the study have lived in the US for at least 11 years and it was evident that they are able to voice their opinions/ideas about being involved. They know their children well including the parenting style that is right for their child. Because of the way the participants were enculturated to respect elders, those in authority, and especially teachers, they had a strong trust that the school would treat their children well and that the school personnel were educated and knowledgeable. The participants understood that communication was a critical part of parent involvement. However, from the interview data, it appeared that Communication was the most challenging aspect of being involved.

The second question I asked was: "How do Mexican immigrant parents' use their cultural funds of knowledge to support their children's education at home?" The answer to this question rose up to be the main theme in this dissertation study. The theme of Culture encompassed the cultural and linguistic traditions, values, beliefs that are passed down from generation to generation. This showed up as demonstrating *respeto* (respect)

to adults and those individuals who are educated. In addition, how you greet someone is also related to *respeto*, but it is a demonstration of being *buen educado* (well mannered). And finally, the *cuentos* that the participants shared about their lives and perceptions pointed toward the responsibility they felt toward their family. This was evident in the gender roles that were part of the socialization process in Mexico prior to immigrating to the US.

This dissertation journey was close to my heart as a beginning researcher that shared the same cultural and linguistic background as my participants. I learned so much about myself through the participants' stories and experiences they shared with me. I'm grateful. Today, as a second-grade teacher with over 20 years of experience, I feel affirmed that the importance of culturally responsive teaching isn't just an educational fad or the newest strategy to try in the classroom. I believe that at its' core - understanding and valuing the cultural funds of knowledge that students and families bring to the classroom and school setting are essential and foundational for all educators to implement.

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