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# Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement: Perceptions of Mexican Immigrant Mothers in Rural Wyoming

Sandra P. Sanderson

*Brigham Young University - Provo*

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Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement: Perceptions of  
Mexican Immigrant Mothers in Rural Wyoming

Sandra P. Sanderson

A thesis submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Educational Specialist

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## ABSTRACT

### Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement: Perceptions of Mexican Immigrant Mothers in Rural Wyoming

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The purpose of this study was to understand Mexican immigrant mother's perceptions concerning parental involvement with their children's schools. It provides a perspective on cultural considerations relevant to the implementation of Epstein's model of parental involvement. Eight mothers, two documented and six undocumented, who had emigrated from Mexico and were living in rural Wyoming, were interviewed. The information provided by the participants included descriptions of practices the mothers considered meaningful when involved with their children's education. They shared their own experiences of their school attendance in Mexico and their own parents' involvement with their education. They also shared their understanding concerning parental involvement after having lived in the U.S. and after witnessing their children attend schools in this country.

Although the participants in this study had their own understanding of *parental participation*, they are learning new practices in the U.S. Also, with culturally sensitive modifications, the types of parental involvement suggested by Epstein could also be implemented with the participants in this study. Additionally, in regard to participating in the schools, it was also found that not having documents to live in the U.S did not limit the participants from taking part in their children's schools.

Based on the results of this research, school personnel have the potential to play an important role in helping increase Mexican parents' involvement with their children's education. Small and inexpensive variations on what schools are already doing could create a more inviting environment for these mothers. Recommendations are made to assist schools in this effort.

Keywords: Hispanic parents, Hispanic education, Hispanic culture, parental involvement, immigrants, Mexican mothers, undocumented immigrants

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## DESCRIPTION OF THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis, *Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement: Perceptions of Mexican Immigrant Mothers in Rural Wyoming*, is written in a hybrid format. Although this thesis contains many of the traditional thesis requirements, the main body of this thesis is based on a journal publication format. The preliminary pages of the thesis reflect requirements for submission to the university.

The body of this thesis report is presented as a journal article. This portion conforms to length and style requirements for submitting research reports to education journals. A literature review is included in Appendix A.

This thesis contains two reference lists. The first reference list contains references included in the journal-ready article. The second list includes all citations used in Appendix A, entitled “Review of the Literature.”

## Introduction

Joyce L. Epstein, a sociologist specializing in community and family involvement in education, proposed the creation of a partnership between parents, schools, and community as a model method to provide support for children to succeed at school and in life (Epstein, 1995). Epstein explained that when this triad partnership is created, schools work in a family-like manner. She encourages schools to treat children as individuals and to create an environment of inclusion. Similarly, at home, parents participate by creating a school-like environment for their children. Parents become interested in the academic development of their children, thus helping them to succeed academically. As the third member of the partnership, the community is family-oriented and also school-oriented. The community provides services and programs for children before, during, and after school hours.

Epstein's (2002) model consists of six types of participation: (a) *Parenting* refers to the basic care parents deliver to their children by providing them with a certain level of wellbeing. Schools collaborate with the families by providing training and support for parents in topics related to education. It also serves to support schools in understanding family backgrounds and culture. (b) *Communication* requires schools to provide effective communication about school programs and student's progress. (c) *Volunteering* requires parents to participate and support by volunteering to help teachers and administrators. (d) *Learning at Home* recommends that parents take action at home. With the teacher's guidance, parents should create and implement learning activities to support what the student has learned at school. (e) *Decision Making* refers to the role of parents as leaders and decision maker at institutional and community level. (f) The final type of participation, *Collaborating with the Community* coordinates resources with the community to support learning, school programs, and family practices. These types of involvement serve as a

guide for developing an effective program for parent involvement. Epstein's oft-cited model is used as a framework for many studies and is extensively represented as a general model of parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

The Epstein (1995) model takes into consideration the cultural diversity of the students and charges the educators with the responsibility of comprehending the individual characteristics taken in the context of the students' lives. She encourages teachers to seek out and include the parents in programs and activities. However, teachers tend to assume that ethnic minorities are less likely to participate in the education of their own children. For example, it has been shown that school personnel hold beliefs that Hispanic families are less likely to be motivated and concerned about the education of their children (Hughes, 2006). This may occur because school personnel have limited access to information and training that may aid in the comprehension of Hispanic students' behavior, and they may not know how to reach out to Hispanic parents. The result is that educators fail to recognize the parents' strengths as partners in their children's education (Gandara, 2010; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

The model of parental participation of Hispanic immigrants focuses on parents teaching good manners and moral values to their children. Many Hispanic parents also have high academic expectations of their children. Research shows that Hispanic immigrant families import and maintain a desire to sustain their own cultural model of *educacion* (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore & Goldenberg, 1995). These practices are the basis for Hispanic children's emotional stability and the formation of their identity. The academic performance of Hispanic students is influenced by the traditional values of their families. The model of *educacion* should complement the academic education that Hispanic children receive in the U.S. (Reese et al., 1995).



## **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to learn about the perceptions of Mexican immigrant mothers surrounding the education of their children, and how these perceptions relate to Epstein's model of parental participation. The Mexican immigrant concept of getting involved with their children's school could provide an additional perspective on family and community collaboration with educational institutions. Recognizing general and specific Hispanic cultural strengths and also considering their needs could more effectively guide the development of educational goals and curricula that are more responsive to Hispanic cultural characteristics.

## **Research Questions**

Although the larger body of extant research focuses on Hispanic immigrant families, this study will focus more specifically on Mexican immigrant families. Mexican immigrant families may demonstrate their involvement in a manner different from or even contrary to what US educators expect. Educators need to understand how Mexican immigrant families involve themselves in their children's education. If US educators achieve this level of understanding, the result could be a change of perceptions about Mexican (and more broadly Hispanic) parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do these Mexican immigrant mothers in a rural Wyoming community perceive their involvement with their children's schools as culturally relevant?
2. How can prongs from the Epstein model be expanded to incorporate the perceptions of these mothers?

## Method

In qualitative research, the intention is to discover and describe a phenomenon through the experiences of the participants. The heuristic method of qualitative research will be used as a guiding theory for this research project. Moustakas (1990) recognized that heuristic research seeks for the essential meaning of the experiences. The primary researcher becomes a participant, focusing on personal experiences and the feelings behind them (Sela-Smith, 2002). When the researcher is able to reveal the essence of the experience, she may discover universal properties. Intuition will determine the steps in each stage of the process (Moustakas, 1990).

### Heuristic Method Design

According to Sela-Smith (2002), in order to successfully accomplish heuristic research, the researcher should complete six phases with openness, “surrendering to the feeling state of the subjective ‘I’” (p. 63). During the process, the researcher goes through self-discovery and personal growth while understanding human experiences. Moustakas (1990, p. 69) outlines each of the six phases as follows:

*Phase 1: Initial Engagement.* The researcher finds a topic of intense interest compelled by her relationships with the environment.

*Phase 2: Immersion.* Immersion is a natural process that happens when the researcher becomes involved with the research question. Sela-Smith (2002, p. 66) explains this phase by making a distinction between the researcher focusing on being “intimately and autobiographically connected to the question” rather than doing research merely to fulfill graduation requirements.

*Phase 3: Incubation.* This phase provides a time for reorganization; previous ideas confront the new acquired information, “creating new meaning, new behaviors, and new

feelings” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 67). There is no need to gather more information at this stage. It is a time to ponder, where the answer to the question unfolds naturally.

*Phase 4: Illumination.* The researcher becomes aware of her biases. All the new meanings and feelings from phase 3 come to consciousness, giving room for readjustments and deep transformation.

*Phase 5: Explication.* The researcher is still self-discovering, recognizing previous meanings and replacing them with the new understandings.

*Phase 6: Creative Synthesis.* The researcher will portray the substance of what has been investigated. “When others experience the story, whether is in the form of a dissertation, a painting, a book, a piece of music, a dance, a lecture or anything else creative, there will be something that resonates deep agreement within the observer” (Sela-Smith, 2002, p. 69).

### **Preparation for Heuristic Research**

For heuristic research, Moustakas (1990) suggests that the researcher inform participants or *co-researchers* of the purpose and expectations of the research design by creating a set of instructions. It is also recommended to select the participants under specific criteria and to develop a contract that outlines confidentiality, permission to record, time and place commitments, etc. It is also important to work on creating an environment of trust and openness. Heuristic research uses extended interviews as well, which resemble a dialogue with the participants. The conversation flows naturally, allowing the expression of ideas, thoughts, and feelings, with general questions created in advance that will encourage genuine dialogue.

## **Recruitment and Selection of Participants**

The group of participants consisted of eight Mexican immigrant mothers with children attending grades K–12 in the U.S. All participants live in a predominately Caucasian town in western U.S. where Hispanics comprises 4.5% of the population.

The families were purposely recruited to include undocumented parents. The method of self-nomination was used for the participants to voluntarily claim whether or not they have documents to work or reside in this country.

The Hispanic community has a diverse economic base. Most of the families participating in this study are between the low and middle class range of socio-economic status. Two-parent families and single-parent families were considered in the group. Relevant demographic characteristics of the participants are listed in Table 1. The participants were gathered independently using the snowball sampling technique. Following this technique, the first person interviewed recommended another interviewee, who then recommended another, and so on (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Due to her contacts in the local Hispanic community, the primary researcher served as a *locator*. The purpose of the locator is to make contacts for possible interviews. The locator in this research provided names of potential participants and then communicated with them in Spanish, as needed.

## **Data Collection**

**Procedures for interviewing.** One-hour interviews with each participant were conducted and recorded. Using open-ended questions based on a set of guiding questions helped focus the interviews on relevant topics and areas to explore, while still allowing a space for personal expression of perspectives and culture (Brenner, 1996).

Participants made an informed decision to participate (see Appendix B) and agreed to contribute voluntarily to ensure their interest, willingness to commit, and enthusiasm.

Participants were informed about the use and handling of the information they provided and the procedures used to verify the findings. Personal information and identity received from the participants was kept confidential throughout the study. Informed-consent documents defined the place and time for the interviews, as well as obtained permission to audio record the interviews.

Table 1

*Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N=8)*

Participant Code	Formal Schooling	Documented Status	Years in the U.S.
P1	10th Grade	No	25
P2	Some College	Yes	6
P3	None	Yes	26
P4	College	No	20
P5	Some HS	No	7
P6	6th grade	No	15
P7	6th grade	No	21
P8	6th grade	No	24

Initial contact was made by phone to ensure the willingness of the participant to participate and contribute to the study. The initial contact provided the opportunity to explain confidentiality, the limits of confidentiality, and the nature of the study. The researcher dedicated time to answer the participants' questions prior to obtaining signed consent. Then, the time and the location of the interview were determined.

**Interview meeting.** For their convenience, the interviews were conducted at the house of each one of the participants. This location was a safe place offering the necessary privacy for the interviews. The participants reported their experiences and perspectives on getting involved with their children's school. The participants and researcher had a dialogue in an environment created for them to feel free to express their thoughts relevant to the research questions. The intention was to let the participants tell their story and begin the inquiry after they had the opportunity to communicate their experience. Field notes and later reflections enhanced the data.

### **Data Management**

Confidentiality was kept by using code names to label data from the individual participants. Codes, voice recordings, transcripts, and analysis of data will be kept in a computer protected by a password. All the recorded information will be destroyed when this study is completed.

### **Data Analysis**

The recorded interviews were transcribed for in-depth analysis. Using the full transcription of each participant, every unit of data relevant to the experience was listed in preliminary groupings. If the units of data contained the necessary and sufficient information to understand the experience, and if it was possible to abstract and label them—they were grouped into thematic labels. The experiences that were grouped and labeled became the core themes of the experience. Subsequently, the units of data and core themes were synthesized, in verbatim, to provide examples that described the experiences. After reflecting over the information, a text was created that described the meaning and essence of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). This was done by searching through the data for patterns in behaviors, events, words, and ways of thinking that are outstanding or relevant to the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The

goal was to find salient themes that represent the group as a whole but also include their individual experiences (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). The analysis addresses within group variation as an exploration of findings by the participants demographic characteristics: schooling, documented status, and years in the U.S.

An auditor reviewed the data organization and provided feedback to help determine if the themes accurately represented the data, subthemes have been assigned to the correct theme, and all the important information has been included. After the researcher drew connections between the results and previous research the material is presented with stories, conversations, examples, and analogies (Moustakas, 1990). The participants' codes (see Table 1) will be used to help distinguish quotes from the various participants.

### **Validity**

To determine validity in heuristic inquiry, the final draft of the material provided by the participants should accurately express the meaning and essence of the experience. This meaning belongs to each person and their perceptions, the experiences in their life, and the connections to others and self. The researcher reflected on the material collected, and judged, analyzed, and explored it in order to find the pieces that represent the experiences precisely (Moustakas, 1990).

To increase verification, the researcher returned to some of the participants with the meanings obtained from the analysis and asked them to assess their precision and depth. The research participants evaluated if these were an accurate representation of their experience.

This method is created to guide the research and facilitate the analysis of data, but it is expected that the process will unfold in its own way. As a Hispanic immigrant with children attending school in the U.S., the researcher was able to communicate in Spanish with the participants in this study. The connection between native language speakers sharing similar

experiences about their process of acculturation and about common cultural practices enhanced the interviews and the interpretation of the responses of the participants.

### **Findings**

This study explored the experiences of eight Mexican mothers, examining their perspectives about culturally relevant parental involvement with their children's school: the ways Mexican mothers see themselves participating with the school and supporting the academic formation of their children; what they consider as their contribution to their children's education; the things they have learned from the education system in the U.S. as compared to their country of origin; and the limitations they have encountered during the learning process. All data presented in this section comes from participant interviews, and some verbatim quotes have been included to support relevant points of the research.

The interviews were conducted in Spanish and translated to English, attempting to preserve the meaning of the participants' perceptions. The experiences and ideas shared by the participants were organized in subthemes. Subthemes that shared similar descriptions were combined to create three broad themes: (a) what these group of Mexican mothers understand as their role when participating with their children's school; (b) experiences and new practices that these Mexican mothers are integrating; and (c) what they see as obstacles in their way to collaborate with their children's school. There is a within group variation analysis of the participants' demographic characteristics as they were considered relevant for inclusion.

The subthemes that correspond to each of the previously described themes are organized as follows:

**Theme A:** Culturally Relevant Participation: These Mexican mothers' understanding of their roles.



**Subtheme 1:** These Mexican mothers expected the school to initiate and conduct communication.

**Subtheme 2:** For these Mexican mothers it was significant to support parties and celebrations.

**Subtheme 3:** These Mexican mothers supported children at home by providing food and supervising homework.

**Theme B:** Assimilation: Experiences and new practices indicating that these Mexican mothers are integrating.

**Subtheme 4:** These Mexican mothers learned participation from their own parents.

**Subtheme 5:** These Mexican mothers have learned what parent participation means in the U.S.

**Subtheme 6:** For these Mexican mothers it is relevant to attend parent–teacher conferences and school events.

**Subtheme 7:** Immigration status does not affect these Mexican mothers participation.

**Theme C:** Parent Limitations: These Mexican mothers see obstacles in their way to collaborate with their children’s school.

**Subtheme 8:** These Mexican mothers would like to know how to participate better.

**Subtheme 9:** The ability to speak English would increase participation of these Mexican mothers.

## **Culturally Relevant Participation**

**Subtheme 1. These Mexican mothers expected the school to initiate and conduct communication.** During the interviews, the Mexican mothers narrated experiences that reflected their opinions about communication with schoolteachers. The mothers expected their child's teacher to communicate with them. If the teacher did not communicate, it meant that everything was fine with their child's behavior and academic progress. Some participants expressed a desire to be regularly informed about the academic performance of their children. They reflected discontent with not knowing how their child was doing in school. However, they did not consider themselves the ones in the position to initiate the communication.

*(P4) I would like them [teachers] to send me a note as a reminder or something to communicate with me but no... (What kind of reminder?) If there is a problem with him, what kind of things he is learning, they only let me know on PTC. I really liked when the teachers used to send me progress reports often telling me what goals he [child in Special Education] has reached.*

*(P4) They never called me to say my daughter was not doing well; she [the daughter] was the one who told me. (How old was she?) Six.*

*(P3) The teachers never sent me a bad report. The coaches were the ones telling me that he wasn't doing homework so they had to take him out of the team.*

*(P2) With [my daughter] the teacher used to communicate better with me. They told me how my child was doing and they had an interview with me. Now with my other two girls they changed the teachers, this new teachers don't tell you anything, there's no more meeting, nothing.*

For some of the participants, parent participation means being willing to participate when they are asked by a direct request. If the school asked for them to be present, Hispanic mothers indicated that they thought it was important to be there.

*(P8) (Do you know what are the school's expectations from you as a parent?) That we participate, if they call us for something we should be willing to go and see what is going on. (To participate for you means "go when they call you"?) Yes.*

*(P7) When they say they will have a meeting and they need me to attend, I like it. When they ask me to be there I am there. Even when I know I am not contributing with anything big but if they ask me to go, I go.*

*(P5) I go when there is an activity and parents are requested to participate. When is [your child's] birthday and you have to take a cake or cupcakes, I do it.*

The two participants with college education were proactive when looking for information about their children's performance at school. These two participants differed in their time living in the U.S., and in their immigration status. One participant was a US citizen and lived in the country for six years; the other participant reporting living as an undocumented alien in the U.S. for twenty years.

*(P2) The teacher does not ask me to go but I go, I talk to her and ask how [my daughter] is doing. (How often do you go?) I go every week, at least once a week; during recess or anytime during school when I have time. If there is something I don't understand I want her to tell me exactly what it is about.*

*(P4) I go and ask, and they have to figure it out and find somebody who speaks Spanish. When they see me there asking questions they find somebody. I have to force them a little and they call a teacher from the HS.*

**Subtheme 2. For these Mexican mothers it was significant to support parties and celebrations.** Some participants believed they should and would have significant participation in parties and celebrations. Some mothers hoped the schools in the U.S. would include celebrations related to the Hispanic culture. These Mexican mothers envisioned parties as a meaningful way to connect with other families and with the school personnel. They indicated that they would have appreciated the opportunity to celebrate and share their traditions. However, this was a common topic only among the undocumented mothers. Perhaps these participants did not have the opportunity to visit their country of origin. They appeared to yearn for these traditions. They also indicated that they would like their children to experience these traditions.

*(P5) There is a committee and during the school year those parents are in charge of organizing events ... and we like to party a lot! Therefore there are activities for everything; on teacher's day, parents help to plan something for the teachers. Mother's day is a celebration as well, and then we have a party. Children's day... we celebrate so many things! During those days in Mexico they have parades and they burn castles. The school does everything.*

*(P6) I would like to celebrate our traditions. Here they celebrate their festivities but they should celebrate some of ours. American children would learn [our] culture and maybe they would treat us better in the future. If they included activities related to our culture maybe moms would feel more comfortable to go. Get to know the teachers better.*

One participant explained that many schools in Mexico celebrate an annual Kermesse, or festival. During this celebration the families met at the school, played games, and ate traditional food. Mexican mothers helped organize these celebratory events and contributed by selling home-prepared food at the festival.

*(P5) They have a raffle, they give toys to the children, they bring a clown to the school, there is a Kermesse where you get tickets and you can buy things, games, and is all day and is really fun. They don't do that here. Just some games, those are kind of boring.*

*(P2) When there is a project in the school to collect money for something they ask parents to make tacos, others will sell Pozole, always something Mexican. In the school parents meet with students and they buy the food; that money is used to buy things the school needs.*

**Subtheme 3. These Mexican mothers support children at home by providing food and supervising homework.** During the interviews, several of the participants expressed the importance of making sure their children completed their homework. This was an important way the mothers envisioned their participation in their children's education. These mothers took great pride in encouraging their children to read and to finish their school assignments.

Another way the participants supported their children's education from home was to make sure they ate breakfast. Some of these mothers remembered their own struggles in school when they were hungry. They acknowledged that it was hard to work with an empty stomach.

*(P1) When you go to school with an empty stomach you can't think very well. I make sure they eat. I believe it is important that they have breakfast because that is one of the things that affect children very much.*

*(P7) I tell them: "before you go to school please have breakfast"... I remember when I went to school we had to walk a long way from the town to the ranch and we were hungry. We didn't learn because we were hungry and tired. How are we going to learn if we don't eat?*

*(P5) I think the way of [participating] is by helping with homework. Reminding them to do it because it is not common that children will remember to do it by themselves.*

*(P4) I also help them with homework; to read is important, school always asks us to read.*

## Acculturation

### Subtheme 4. These Mexican mothers learned participation from their own parents.

Most of the participants reported that their own parents, the grandparents, did not participate with their school to support academic progress. The grandparents' academic formation (academic achievement) was limited; in some cases, they did not know how to read. Their highest priority was to work and support the family.

*(P7) I didn't want to go [to school] anymore, so my mom said, "If you don't want to study then you will have to work" and I thought that was better. (During those 4 years when you were struggling because of the teacher, what did your mom do?) Nothing. (Did she go to the school and talk with the teacher?) No, my mom was never interested in if we went or not to school. (Your mom was never involved with your school) Focusing on it or going to meetings, no, never. (When your grades were bad, what did your mom do?) Nothing, she just said, "If you don't make an effort at school I will take you out and send you to work."*

*(P1) [The school] sent a letter, but [my mom] did not say a lot. Because she did not go to school herself then... (It wasn't her priority.) No.*

*(P3) I feel bad because I never participated in anything, I was embarrassed that they had dinner events for the players and I never went. I feel bad about that. But my parents didn't care about us going to school, they wanted us to work and help to support the house.*

*(P4) In my country moms said, "No, what I am going to do? Is just a waste of time." When there was a meeting they said "no, no, I won't go... and what? Is your teacher coming to wash the dishes?"*

*(P6) My dad is very "machista." He believes that women do not have to study. He did not help us with homework, did not notice if we were doing well or not. He did not help us with*

*homework or saw if we were doing well or not... my mom did, even when she didn't know how to read or write she always made sure we did our homework*

**Subtheme 5. These Mexican mothers have learned what parent participation means in the U.S.** The group of undocumented participants, who have lived in the U.S for more than fifteen years, mentioned having learned that they had the opportunity to be involved with their children's schooling. In spite of their legal status, these mothers received valuable information that motivated them to increase their involvement with their children's school. They acknowledged that their presence was important and that they have the potential to be a good influence.

*(P6) I started getting involved because my mother-in-law does speak English, she was a teacher, and she helped in the school. She told me that this country was not like ours, that here we should go to the school to know how our children were doing, we should talk with the teachers.*

*(P1) There is an advertisement on T.V. about how important it is to be present. It is important that your children know school is something they need. The advertisement says it has been proven that it does help; it makes a difference if you get involved or not in your children's school.*

*(P7) I think participation is to go to the school for forty minutes and help the children to read, no only to my son but also to other children. When they were in preschool the teachers told me that parents could come and read a book with the class.*

*(P6) I think [Hispanic parents] learn. I have friends and they go to the school because their child is not doing well or because is not doing homework. They ask what is happening. I*

*have noticed that here, Hispanic mothers are different, we get more focused in supporting our kids.*

**Subtheme 6. For these Mexican mothers it is relevant to attend parent–teacher conferences and school events.** When participants were asked how they participated with their children’s school, most of the mothers mentioned attending parent–teacher conferences and other scheduled events. Based on their upbringing, attending these meetings had not been a part of their cultural experience. However in their current situation, as parents participating in their children’s education, these mothers now acknowledged the importance of receiving formative information with respect to their children’s progress at school. Some of the participants also believed that meeting with the teacher at the teacher’s request was a basic parental responsibility.

*(P4) Most of the time I participate in parent–teacher conferences or any other activity they have.*

*(P5) I try to go to the activities at school. I go to all the conferences.*

*(P6) I attend parent–teacher conferences but I believe that one should also go before the conferences and after. Sometimes people just attend conferences and sometimes not even that. I think one should be more involved.*

*(P1) Conferences are something important that sometimes people do not contemplate. I know some people who think that the kids are fine and they don’t need to go. Even if the teacher sends the report home, it’s not the same as going and hearing the details. You receive more orientation than just a paper with the grades.*

**Subtheme 7. Undocumented status does not affect these Mexican mothers’ participation.** All of the participants who lived in the U.S. without documents agreed that being undocumented did not make any difference in the services they received from their children’s



schools. All of the participating Mexican mothers felt welcomed in the schools and did not feel limited in their participation due to their immigrant status.

*(P5) They do not discriminate. They still welcome my daughter in spite of the fact that she does not have a citizenship. Is a good thing because there are a lot of children who do not have [documents]. Even under those circumstances they receive education; it doesn't matter, they do not discriminate. I believe when people say, "Go to school because they will accept you whether you have a citizenship or not" so it really motivates you when [schools] do not discriminate.*

*(P4) That hasn't restrained me from going to a school meeting or to participate and have an opinion. There is equality, everybody has the same rights in those meetings: Americans or not.*

*(P6) I go to the school and all the teachers greet my children and me. I feel really good when I go, I don't feel I can't go because I don't have papers or because they will see me differently. They are very polite.*

### **Parent Limitations**

**Subtheme 8. These Mexican mothers would like to know how to participate.** As noted in Subtheme 1, for the participants in this study, parental involvement is typically initiated by the teacher's request for the parent's participation. Parents reported that they expected teachers to communicate with them (the parents) and that the teachers would provide the parents with the necessary information about the student. These Mexican mothers expressed appreciation for the schools' role in initiating communication. The parents reported an expectation regarding the need for specific and basic information about the school's expectations. In addition to receiving written information in Spanish about their children's progress, they would also

appreciate receiving information about other ways in which they might participate. The mothers expressed interest in participating and indicated the need for knowing exactly how and when they could do so. For instance, they would like to know more about the parent-teacher association, and that this was an organization they could join. Some parents did not know that they could volunteer to help the teachers in the classroom or that their opinion mattered and could be expressed in school district meetings.

*(P2) They haven't asked me to participate, but if they did I would do it. (About parents association) I would like [the school] to keep me informed. For instance, those things you were talking about, to help the teacher, or PA. They should tell me because there are many things I don't know. They should try to get you involved, to send notes explaining what activities they have, they should ask you for the things they need from you.*

*(P1) [I would like to] learn how to participate, learn what can I do to get involved.*

*(P5) (Is there a parents association in your school?) Yes, but is only for fundraising, not for cleaning or organizing parties.*

One of the participants shared a negative experience at her daughter's school because the mother did not know what was expected. More specifically, she did not know how to use the computer and she did not know the process of high school class registration. In Mexico, parents are not usually involved in the process of class registration. In this case, the participant's educational background, her culture, and her language limitations played an important role in her limited ability to participate.

*(P7) I had an experience when I really felt desperate for not knowing. When my daughter started high school as a freshman, they gave us a day and a time for registration. They took all the parents to a room and told them what to do. Then, they led us to the computers room. Here,*

*parents and children had to choose the classes... oh! No, that day I felt incapable because all the children were with their parents. The parents sat in front of the computer and started working ... and I couldn't do anything!*

*While my daughter was standing there I asked her, "What are you going to do?"*

*She said, "Just wait until these parents are finished and then you take the computer."*

*"What am I going to do sitting there?"*

*"Just sit down to save the place and I will do it myself."*

*I felt really bad. I started crying, "What am I doing here if I can't do anything, I am just an inconvenience." A lady came to me and offered to help my daughter. So when there was a computer available she helped my daughter. After that, every year my daughter had to register I begged her to go by herself, I felt really bad.*

**Subtheme 9. The ability to speak English would increase participation of these Mexican mothers.** With no variation by demographic characteristics all the participants agreed that the most significant impediment they experienced that impeded their ability to participate with their children's school was their limited ability to speak English. However, the younger mothers who reported being in the U.S. for less than 10 years, one undocumented and one US citizen, were more motivated to learn the language and did not see the language barrier as a significant impediment. Lack of English language skills interferes with participation of all these mothers in meetings, activities, and in helping children with homework. Not being able to communicate effectively causes them to step back from being proactive supporters of their child's education and being actively engaged with their child's school. Even when they understand some English, many feel self-conscious and incapable to talk. They know it is

important to learn the language in order to be the authority figure their children need. But they also recognize that learning a language is a difficult and time-consuming process.

*(P7) I feel embarrassed because I don't speak English well ... how am I going to help?*

*(P5) It was difficult for me because I had to learn to communicate, to ask questions. I had to know and study to be able to help my daughter. There are some kids who tell their parents "I am doing well, I got an F for 'fantastic'" and the parents believe that.*

*(P6) It is hard for me because I don't speak English. Sometimes there is a person who speaks Spanish and helps me understand, but sometimes there isn't.*

*(P3) When my children were young and my English was very limited, I don't know how they did it because they needed help. I told them: "Honey, I can't because I learned multiplication and division, but in English I can't..."*

*(P7) Let's suppose that my kid was in kindergarten and they told me to go and read. If he read to me, then I would go. But if I had to go read to him then I would not go because, what I am going to do? Honestly that was one of the things that made me think, "Why am I going?"*

### **Discussion**

Considering the perceptions of a group of Mexican mothers, this study attempted to understand culturally relevant parental involvement in children's education. In the following section the major findings of the study are connected with previous research and are considered within the context of Epstein's model. Additionally, limitations of this study are explained. Based on this study's findings, suggestions are offered to increase inclusion and strengthen parents' involvement in school environments.

Three main themes emerged from the interviews: culturally relevant participation, assimilation, and limitations. These themes are explained in context with the existing literature.

The themes' repeated relevance was based on having three or more participants contributing to the common theme. In addition to making a direct response to the research question, interviewees also provided insight regarding the acquired and relevant practices learned while living in the U.S. It was also considered important to include the difficulties the participants experienced when they attempted to get involved with their children's schooling and academic development.

### **Culturally Relevant Participation**

Strong cultural components were found in this Theme. These components included communication, celebrations, and food and homework.

**Communication.** In general, the Hispanic culture tends to view teachers as knowledgeable and professional. As such, Hispanic parents do not consider themselves to be in the position to interfere with the teacher's work (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). It is because of this respect that parents are willing to respond promptly to teacher's personal requests. When a teacher takes the time to send a personal invitation or to make a phone call to the parents, the participation of Hispanic parents seems to increase (Ramirez & Soto-Hinman, 2009).

Many of our participants expected the teacher to initiate communication. When these Mexican mothers see a problem with their children at school, they consider the teacher responsible for sending information and requesting their participation. This finding was particularly true of the Mexican mothers with less formal education. Supporting this finding, Peña (2000) found that the limited education of Mexican parents might affect their involvement with the school. It was concluded that Mexican parents did not feel comfortable expressing their needs. In contrast, the two Mexican mothers with a college education felt more comfortable

initiating communication with the teachers. The level of education was the only demographic characteristic shared by these two participants.

**Celebrations.** Peña (2000) also found that Mexican American parents showed interest in organizing parties in the school as a way of seeking involvement. Likewise, the Mexican mothers in this study expressed a desire to join the school for parties and celebrations. They showed excitement and interest in participating in celebrations related to their culture. This finding also resonates with previous research stating that in seeking to increase parent involvement, one of the approaches is to acknowledge parents' cultural values (Reyes et al., 1999) and to view them as strengths (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). One way to acknowledge parents' home culture is to incorporate it into the school curriculum and activities (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). This helps students develop pride in their identity and makes parents feel they can make valuable contributions to their child's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

**Food and homework.** In Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, & Ryals' (2010) study, it was determined that, for Hispanic families, a greater form of external participation was a very common form of parental participation. Participation from home was also one of the immediate responses offered by the Mexican mothers. Some of them made reference to their own experiences as students and how the lack of food affected their ability to listen and learn. One of their main concerns with respect of their children's ability to learn was related to making sure their children were not hungry because, as indicated by one of the participants, "people cannot think well when they are hungry." For the Mexican mothers in this study, making sure that their children had sufficient food was considered a cultural type of parental involvement.

All of the participants also mentioned the importance of reviewing or helping children with homework. Yet these parents also reported that some mothers do not help with homework

due to a lack of time or because they did not understand the tasks required. However, even under these challenging circumstances, parents reported making sure that their children completed homework. Parental involvement through providing homework supervision is considered a strength for the Hispanic culture (Lee & Bowen, 2006).

Some Hispanic parents perceive that their role in their children's education is to make sure their children are clean, fed, and are on time for school. Even though many Hispanic parents are not directly involved with the school personnel and school activities, they are concerned and support their children from home by eliminating distractions, providing a quiet place to study, talking about the future, praising their children's progress, and ensuring that their children completed homework and attended school (Diaz, 2008).

### **Acculturation**

Leaving behind the influence of their own parents, the participants in this study shared some of the ways they have learned to get involved with their children's school. This section includes how they learned, what they learned, and how their immigration status relates with their participation.

**Influence of grandparents.** Hispanic practices of education are influenced by previous generations. But Hispanic immigrant parents have modified these practices to accommodate the demands of their new setting. For instance, Hispanic immigrant parents have more years of education than their parents had. They also are determined to build a better life abroad. They are aware of the importance of supporting the formal education of their children (Ramirez, 2003).

The participants shared their own experiences when attending school back in Mexico. They explained that their parents were not active participants in their education. Common factors for the lack of parental involvement were the limited education of the grandparents and the need

for the whole family to work and support the household. Another factor that came out in the interviews was machismo, or the belief that girls do not need to study. These are some cultural differences that influence parental participation (Peña, 2000). However, some of the participants' parents did participate in their children's education by attending meetings when the teacher requested them and by helping children with homework.

**Learning to participate.** The term acculturation refers to the changes that happen inside the individual when one's culture makes contact with the host culture. These changes in attitudes, behaviors and values can be as diverse as the individuals, because while individuals are influenced by the culture at large, they embody cultural values found in their respective social groups (Johnson, 2011). With time, the participants in this study have acquired some of the US values regarding the education system. Their perception about parental involvement in schooling is changing as they observe and receive information from others. Family members with more experience, television campaigns, and previous experiences with teachers contribute to their process of acculturation.

Mexican mothers in this study have learned that significant parental involvement means that parents are expected to meet with the teacher during scheduled conferences across the year and to attend any other events where their presence is requested or expected. They know this is expected of them, and they recognize the importance of taking the time to attend and discuss their children's progress with the classroom teacher. Previous research found that approximately 23% of Latino parents are formally involved in attending parent-teacher conferences and other activities that require their physical presence at school (LaFevre & Shaw, 2011). LaFevre and Shaw (2011) also found that approximately 70% of Latino parents provide the cultural model of



education through discussions of values and respect at home. Both formal and informal support are positively related with academic achievement.

**Immigration status.** These Mexican mothers did not use the term “illegal” when referring to their immigration status. They said “no tengo papeles” (I don’t have documents) when asked if they were authorized by the U.S Government to work or reside in this country. They used the terms “citizen” or “American” when making reference to “tener papeles” or that one possessed legal documentation. But the general response when discussing immigration was that they feel comfortable and unthreatened when they come to their children’s school. They felt that there was no difference in the way the school personnel treat them in comparison to how other parents are treated. However, research related with Hispanic immigrants found that even when undocumented parents are confident that schools will not ask about their immigration status, they may still find limitations when attempting to become more involved. Underlying issues such as schools requiring parent volunteers to undergo background checks may cause undocumented Mexican parents, who were previously willing to get involved, to refuse to fill out the forms and to decline the invitation to participate (Mangual, 2013).

### **Parent Limitations**

Mexican parents may not be familiar with the daily practices to support their children in school. In the U.S., these parents may recognize their limitations and inability to actively participate with their child’s school (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). The participants of this study expressed their desire to know how to become involved with the school. They also identified their need to learn to speak English, since language barriers limit their ability to receive school information and to feel comfortable when attending school events.

**Knowing how to participate.** Delgado-Gaitan (1990) affirms that in order to participate, Hispanic parents need to have knowledge on how the school system works. They need access to information about their rights and responsibilities to empower them in their role as parents and advocates for their children.

The participants in this study agreed that they are not aware of the school's expectations. They think they have not received specific information about what parental involvement means in the U.S. These results are consistent with Ramirez's 2003 study that found that Hispanic parents felt they were unaware of the many traditions of school life.

**Language.** Previous research has found that the limited ability to speak English has played a large role in the lack of participation of Hispanic families. Schmidt, Stern, and Shatrova (2008), and Hughes, Schumm, and Vaughn (1999) found that Hispanic parents identified their inability to speak and understand the English language as the main barrier to their communication with school representatives. Schmidt et al. (2008) also found that parents who are struggling to adapt to a new culture and learn a new language have little time or impetus to learn about their children's educational system. All of the participants in this study concur that they need to learn to speak English in order to become more involved with their children's education.

### **Application of Results to Epstein's Model**

When following Epstein's model *Parenting* is the first type of parental involvement in which schools collaborate with the families by providing training and support for parents in topics related to education. Many of the mothers in this research did not receive academic support from their parents, and are not familiar with a model of interactions between parents and school. They explained that their academic formation was not a priority and that their parents did

not have much contact with their school. These mothers expressed interest in receiving information from the school on how to support their children's learning. As shown by one of the mother's negative experience when registering her daughter in high school, these mothers would like to understand school transitional points and their implications for parents and children.

In the same manner, Epstein suggests schools to practice effective ways to communicate about school programs and children's progress. This is the type two of parental involvement, *Communication*. Effective ways to communicate with the mothers in this research include making the communication personal through handwritten notes and phone calls. It would also be of great benefit to introduce them to the school system providing information about school policies, practices, and programs. A limitation for effective communication with these families in rural Wyoming is the lack of bilingual personnel to provide these mothers with regular and clear information about their children's academic progress.

Schools practices in Mexico differ from the ones in the U.S. Usually, and as stated by the mothers in this research, in Mexico parents do not volunteer to support the teacher in the classroom nor decide what kind of courses or activities their children will participate in at the school. In the third type of parental involvement, *Volunteering*, Epstein suggests collaboration between schools and home in curriculum related activities. Here, parents are invited to volunteer in the classroom to support the teacher. Information influences these mothers' ability and willingness to volunteer to help teachers and administrators. They showed interest in participating in spite of their limitations with English language but they were not familiar with this practice. Inviting these Mexican mothers to support Spanish classes or fieldtrips could be inclusive practices to recruit these mothers as volunteers.

Similarly, many of these Mexican mothers did not know about the existence of school parent organizations. And since school districts are not part of the organization of the school system in Mexico, these mothers are not aware of the role of leaders and representatives in educational decisions. When applying the fifth type of parental involvement, *Decision Making*, schools should be aware that if they would like to include these mothers in school decisions at the legislative level they should provide them with information about the structure of the district and their role in local elections for school representatives.

In the area where this research was developed there was a program many years ago that promoted Hispanic parental involvement and provided workshops with information about community services and resources to inform Hispanic families. However, this program was supported by a grant that lasted for one school year only. This was an important practice and it is encouraged in Epstein's model as the sixth type of involvement: *Collaborating with Community*. The participants in this research who participated in this program remembered how much they liked it and how much they learned from it. They enjoyed the sense of community that the program provided, it was an opportunity for the small group of Hispanic mothers in the area to learn and socialize with other mothers and with some of the school personnel.

With culturally sensitive modifications, the types of parental involvement suggested by Epstein could be implemented with the Mexican mothers in this research. They are in the process of understanding their role as participant parents in this country. They understand the importance of their involvement with their children's education and could acculturate to the educational system in the U.S. with the support of the schools.

## **Implications for Practice**

Parental involvement is higher in some families than in others; minority groups such as African-American and Hispanic are considered to be less involved with their children's school (Hughes & Wong, 2006). The Epstein (1995) model of parental involvement is based on traditional middle-class White culture characteristics. However, Epstein's model has not been applied to the cultural norms of Hispanic students and their families (Bower & Griffin, 2011). It seems that the participants in this study have some ideas about how to participate with their children's school, but they do not know how to introduce themselves into the system. School personnel could play an important role in helping Hispanic families to get involved with their children's education. Small and inexpensive variations on what schools are already doing could create a more inviting environment for Hispanic parents.

One way that schools can improve communication with these Mexican families is by sending out personal notes from the teacher to the parents. This form of direct communication indicates to the parents that the information they are receiving pertains specifically to their child. They would also feel obligated to respond to the teacher's direct request. Another strategy that could be successful in creating a welcoming environment and improving communication would be to designate a parent-coordinator. Some of the interviewed mothers in this study showed interest in creating a Hispanic Parents Association. Schools could ask a collaboration of bilingual mothers to play the role of parent liaison between the school and Hispanic mothers.

Hispanic parents are aware that there are some differences between the educational systems in their country of origin and in the U.S. To support the acculturation process of the Mexican families, schools could provide a short and specific list of the activities where the

parents are welcome to participate. Again, if this list is included as personal invitation from the teacher, these mothers are more likely to attend.

Mothers in this study consider celebrations a meaningful way to strengthen their relationship with school personnel. Having good personal relationships with these mothers would likely increase their involvement and positive response to the teacher's requests. Schools could include in their activities celebrations such as Independence Day, Mother's day, and Family Day; that are meaningful for these Mexican families. Inviting the parents to suggest activities and organize them could help create a sense of community in the school.

Many schools are already including information for parents in Spanish. However, daily communication is typically conveyed through the children. Children, especially young ones, may miss important parts of the information or simply forget. A suggestion to keep these Mexican mothers informed would be to have a notebook where the teacher and parent can communicate about daily or weekly occurrences. Even when this information is sent in English, the parents have the opportunity to review it and understand it better.

### **Researcher as Participant**

My previous employment as ESL paraprofessional in the school district where these mothers belong may have influenced the way they responded to the interview. The participants might have been hesitant to share information or they may have been eager to please me as the interviewer. At the same time, my relationship with the participants provided good rapport and allowed a good range of opinions and conversations. As research participant I had the opportunity to observe cultural terms and norms, for example: the indirect way participants referred to their immigrant status, rather than avoiding the topic. I also was able to capture thoughts that are sometimes missed or hard to uncover. Things that, if somebody from a different

culture had asked, participants may have considered inappropriate or taboo to mention. For example: disclosing educational level that appeared to be uncomfortable for most of the participants.

### **Limitations**

Because the interviews were made with mothers who live in the same school district, the opinion of the participants may only represent Mexican mothers in that specific area or Hispanic families who live in areas with similar rural characteristics. Also, the depth of the interviews and the lack of follow up to review the results with the participants could have limited relevant information. This research had a limited sample that consisted of female participants only. The contribution of fathers may provide valuable information about the role that Mexican couples play in the situation. Some participants may have provided information aimed at representing themselves as what they perceived as socially desirable. Their responses could have been biased by their attempt to be perceived as *good parents* by the interviewer.

### **Directions for Future Research**

The current structure of society in Latin America was established in the time of the Spanish conquerors. It could be important to review the relationships within the different social groups in this culture to better understand the interactions of Hispanic parents with big institutions such as the school system in the U.S. This examination could provide important information to generate ideas for the inclusion of Hispanic families in the system.

Due to the variety of subcultures comprising the Hispanic culture, it may be beneficial to research groups representing various countries in Latin America. Variables such as family SES, parents' education, family structure, academic performance, and cognitive ability should also be included in future research.

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## APPENDIX A: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Demography**

According to the US Census Bureau in 2011, the Hispanic population increased 48% during the 10 years prior to the census. Twenty-three percent of all births in the year 2010 were to Hispanic mothers, and 63 percent of the 9.3 million Hispanic families in the U.S. have children under age 18. Hispanic students' enrollment in public schools makes up 23.9% of enrollments nationwide from kindergarten to 12th grade. Around 12 million Hispanic students were enrolled in public schools in 2011, 52% of them in Texas and California. The U.S Census Bureau predicts a 166% increase of Hispanic students by 2050, going from 12 million to 26 million (Passel & Cohn, 2011).

States like Utah are considered “emerging” because foreign-born or first-generation Hispanic students are more likely to live here. Hispanics are the largest minority in Utah with a population of approximately 200,000. Two thirds of this group identified themselves as Mexican, and half of them live in Salt Lake City County. Utah County and Weber County are also among the counties with the largest Hispanic population (Perlich, 2002).

### **Diversity**

For the purposes of this study, the term *Hispanic* indicates the ethnic group of people who emigrated from any Latin American country to the United States. However, the Hispanic population is very diverse within itself. Diaz (2008) described it as follows: “We come from similar extended family traditions, and linguistic and cultural practices, yet vary by sociocultural and human complexities” (p. xviii).

It is possible to identify some cultural models within the Hispanic immigrant culture. They have related ideas that are expressed in similar words and contexts. For instance, Hispanic immigrant families express concerns regarding the lack of morality that prevails in the U.S., and

they believe that youth in this country have too much autonomy. They are also concerned with how to prepare their children to maintain their values in this country. Hispanic immigrant parents also have great aspirations for their children; they want them to finish their education but they express this idea as an expectation for them to become well mannered. Being a good person means that one can have a better future (Reese, 2002).

There is variation in the way that people embrace cultural models. Hispanics are not a socially homogenous culture; therefore it is not possible to make broad cultural generalizations and stereotypical labels. There is great diversity among these people in socioeconomic status, age, race, the nature and timing of their immigration, and their level of acculturation (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

### **Achievement Gap**

In the National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], (2011), the achievement gap is defined as “the difference between the average score for White students and the average score for Hispanic students in Mathematics and Reading on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, NAEP.” Using this assessment, U.S Department of Education reported a 20-point disparity in mathematics at the fourth-grade level and a 23-point deficit at the eighth-grade level between White and Hispanic students. In the area of reading, there was 24 points difference at fourth-grade level and 22 points difference at eighth grade Hispanic students’ academic skills upon completion of high school are at the same level as White students leaving middle school (The Education Trust, 2003).

The dropout rate of Hispanic students is four times as high as that of White students. Qualifications for enrollment in college are jeopardized because the high school completion rate of Hispanics is low (NCES, 2011). This could happen because school personnel have not had

access to information and training that make them able to understand the behavior of Hispanic students, or because they do not know how to reach Hispanic parents in order to recognize their strengths as partners in their children's education (Gandara, 2010; Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

System bias is another variable Rhodes, Ochoa, and Ortiz (2005) identified as a cause of underachievement of minority children. This variable covers different areas of concern for Hispanic students, including (a) *Instructional factors*, referring to teachers in low-income areas who are considered unqualified or ineffective to provide high-quality education; (b) *Referral procedures*, suggesting that school personnel misinterpret language limitations and cultural factors and attribute the lack of academic abilities to other causes; and (c) *Assessment practices*, involving the lack of training in assessment of culturally and linguistically diverse students, inappropriate assessment practices such as violating administration procedures, test misuse, and test inaccuracy.

There is no consensus as to a single factor, or group of factors, related to student educational achievement. A compendium of studies known as "Parsing the Achievement Gap" (Educational Testing Service, 2009) identifies sixteen indicators of achievement gaps among minority groups and low-income students. These indicators are grouped into clusters as follows: *School Factors*, such as curriculum rigor, teacher preparation, teacher experience, teacher attendance and turnover, class size, availability of instructional technology, and fear and safety at school; *The Home and School Connection*, describing parental participation; and *Before and Beyond School*, which includes birth weight, exposure to lead, hunger and nutrition, talking and reading to babies and young children, excessive television watching, parent-pupil ratio, frequent changing of schools, and summer achievement gain/loss. The report concluded that after six years from their first report in 2003, there had been little improvement to narrow the gap

between White students, minority, and low-income groups. A gap remains, which means many different life conditions still affect Hispanic students' achievement (Educational Testing Service, 2009).

### **Acculturation**

The term acculturation refers to the changes that happen inside the individual when his culture makes contact with the host culture. These changes in attitudes, behaviors, and values can be as diverse as the individuals because while individuals are influenced by the culture at large, they embody cultural values found in their respective social groups (Johnson, 2011).

The U.S. is considered a country of liberty, opportunities, and hope for many people who emigrate from countries in Hispanic America (Worthy, 2006). When immigrants establish their families in this country, they go through a process of acculturation. This is an interactive process where the dominant culture and the individual culture come into contact, resulting in changes in the patterns of the culture of either, or both: the main culture and the individual (Johnson, 2011).

Immigrants can also *assimilate* the new culture, leaving behind the values from their culture of origin in order to acquire the new beliefs, values, and perceptions. Or they can *alternate* between cultures simultaneously retaining their cultural distinctiveness while maintaining a positive association with the new culture (Bacallao & Smokowsky, 2011). Acculturation and assimilation are influential factors in the process of adaptation to a new cultural and linguistic environment (Bean & Stevens, 2003).

For Mexican immigrants, the process of acculturation sometimes implicates a resistance to leave their values and practices behind. They have a conflict to transfer them to the new environment. They seek to *alternate* and retain their identity. Their language and moral values,

in combination with religious practices, serve as a basis for the adaptation of their families in the new land (Reese, 2002).

### **Ethnic Identity and US Identity**

Identity is a dynamic process influenced by our experiences and our interactions with others. One's identity is formed by all the beliefs, ideas, and values that guide the behavior (Erickson, 1968).

Ethnic identity is the extent to which one identifies with a particular ethnic group and has a sense of belonging to that group (Smith & Sylva, 2011). Ethnic identity is relevant in a context where the main culture is different than the one of the minority group. Phinney and Baldelomar (2011) used the term *exploration* to define the essential process through which a person forms their ethnic identity by talking to others, reading, and attending events. Although exploration is common during adolescence, in some cases it can be a process that continues through life as it is in the case of Hispanic people immigrating to the United States.

Ethnic identity suffers changes over time and in new contexts. In the case of Hispanic immigrants, conditions in the new environment include not being White, not speaking English, belonging to the working class, and sometimes not having legal documents to live and work in the country. Hispanic immigrant families seek to strengthen their ethnic identity using different strategies such as acquiring the practices of the new land that are congruent with their values to accomplish their traditional goals, intensifying their practices, and rejecting the practices that do not support their beliefs (Reese, 2002). At the same time, they need to learn sociocultural aspects by constructing interpersonal relationships with the new culture in the United States, implicit behaviors, and the language of the new culture. Spanish-speaking parents have to go through a

cultural change to understand and assimilate the importance of their involvement in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990).

### **Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement with the school is influenced by many factors. Parents sometimes act in response to their child's achievement level. Depending on the age of the student, the need of participation from the parents could vary. In general, when parents participate with the school in the education of their children, these children tend to have higher grade point averages and to score better on standardized tests. Participation of parents is related with students enrolling in more challenging academic programs, having better attendance, passing more classes, earning more credits, and being better adapted in school (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

### **Hispanic Cultural Models of Parental Involvement**

*Educacion* is a Hispanic cultural model of parental involvement. Cultural models are "shared ways of organizing and understanding the social world and personal experiences" (Reese, 2002). They provide a common perspective for a group that otherwise may have many differences in their view of the world (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). *Educacion* conveys instruction in good manners, respect to others, making right choices, and other appropriate behaviors. There is not a marked difference between academic and behavior development in the Hispanic culture. Both terms blend together to define *educacion*. Hispanic parents feel the responsibility to teach their children how to make right choices. Being a good person will lead them to academic success (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1995).

In Reese's (2002) study, respect and obedience to parents and adults were ranked as the most important qualities for Hispanic parents to teach to their children. Teaching the difference between wrong and right and teaching good manners were ranked in second and third place



respectively. Parents providing academic support in reading and explicitly teaching letters or words were ranked in tenth and eleventh place out of twelve statements in the list. But, Hispanic immigrant parents have modified these practices to accommodate to the demands of the new setting. As Reese's (2002) study indicates, some Mexican parents have modified the practice of reading aloud to their children by taking the opportunity to reinforce their values of education during reading time.

When both father and mother participate in the education of the child, the probability that they would successfully implement family values was higher. With high-achieving Hispanic students, father and mother support each other to discipline children and to reinforce academic activities at home. All the families in Reese et al.'s study (1995) believed that the main responsibility of the parents is to teach respect, obedience, and good behavior to their children. These beliefs were the same in the families of both academically successful and unsuccessful students. However, student's academic success is positively influenced by a coherent set of beliefs within the family (Reese et al., 1995).

School personnel often misinterpret Hispanic parent participation. They evaluate the absence of communication from the parents as a sign of lack of interest and support (Lightfoot, 2004). Some studies suggest that the Hispanic cultural model of *educacion* may influence the low achievement in Hispanic students. The model of *educacion* is interpreted as if Hispanic parents have low aspirations for their children by emphasizing the family unit and obedience and apparently leaving academic development on the side (Reese et al., 1995).

Hispanic parents may not be familiar with the daily practices to support their children in school; however, they recognize their limitations and inability to actively participate with the school in the United States (Reese & Gallimore, 2000). They often have feelings of frustration

and insecurity because they see how their children are progressing in their English language development through school attendance and direct contact with the English-speaking community. They witness their children losing Spanish, which means that they, as Spanish-speaking parents, are fading out of their children's lives with less influence in their social and emotional development (Worthy, 2006).

In Reese & Gallimore's 2000 study, parents from Mexico and Central America shared and continued fomenting their cultural models of education even in their new setting in the U.S. Teaching traditional moral values to their children was an expression of their ethnic identity and it was attributed to their cultural roots.

### **Culturally Responsive Models**

Joyce Epstein (1995) developed the most cited model of parental involvement. Her model consists of six types of participation that splits educational responsibilities between schools, parents, and community. The model is based on traditional middle-class White culture. Cultural norms of Hispanic students and their families, and how the model could apply to them, have not been thoroughly investigated (Bower & Griffin, 2011).

The first type of parental involvement in the Epstein (2001) model is called *Basic Obligations of Families*. This type of involvement refers to the basic care parents deliver to their children by providing them with a certain level of wellbeing. In this type of involvement, schools collaborate with the families by providing training and support for parents in topics related to education.

Hispanic families may face limitations that could make it difficult for them to take advantage of the support and training offered by the schools, as suggested by Epstein's model. Hispanic parents appear to have a number of barriers imposed upon them vis-à-vis

socioeconomic barriers seemingly inflicted upon them by the burdens of everyday life. Hispanic parents often have difficulties providing transportation, encountering translation services at schools, and having access to childcare. (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Reyes, Scribner, & Paredes, 1999). These parents identified their inability to speak and understand the English language as the main barrier to their communication with school representatives (Hughes, Schumm, & Vaughn, 1999; Schmidt, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008).

Some Hispanic parents believe that their basic obligations to their children's education is to make sure they are clean, fed, and on time for school (Diaz, 2008). Even though many Hispanic parents are not directly involved with the school personnel and school activities, they are concerned and support their children from home by eliminating distractions, providing a quiet place to study, talking about the future, praising their progress, and supervising attendance.

The second type of parental involvement requires schools to provide effective communication about school programs and student's progress (Epstein, 2001). In some cases, limited English proficient (LEP) parents do not receive information in Spanish concerning the activities that could benefit their children. Trips to museums, libraries, and parks are all examples of activities that support the knowledge base children acquire through class attendance (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990). Even seemingly mundane information, such as the school calendar, newsletters, or menus written in English, create confusion for these families. For example, a child could go to school wearing the school uniform on "free clothes day" or be left waiting for the bus on in-service days. Parents who are struggling to adapt to a new culture and learn a new language have little time or impetus to learn about their children's educational system. It would be uncomfortable to communicate a problem to the school when their child will be the interpreter (Schmidt et al., 2008). However, these parents need a point source of information to become

participants and supporters of the education of their children (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003).

Epstein's (2001) third type of parental involvement requires parents to participate and support by volunteering to help teachers and administrators. A common type of participation in Latin America promotes volunteer participation as well. Mothers in particular help by taking care of the children in the community, providing them with education, food, and affection. These mothers can also be in charge of the kitchen, preparing food, cleaning, and assisting other volunteers. In Nicaragua, for instance, the participation of the parents includes manufacturing school materials or community substance farming. They also teach children how to make art, weave, or develop other skills (Oficina Regional de Educacion para America Latina y el Caribe UNESCO, 2004).

Expectations in the United States for a volunteer parent are different. Epstein's (2001) model suggests that parents volunteer in assisting teachers and administrators. In this context, we need to consider that many Hispanic parents come from a culture where teachers are considered the experts in education. Questioning or suggesting improvements may be interpreted as disrespecting the authority of a teacher (Diaz, 2008).

The fourth type of parental involvement recommends that parents take action at home. With the guidance of the teacher, parents should create and implement learning activities to support what the student has learned at school.

There are some limitations that may interfere with Hispanic families and this type of involvement. In communities where parents do not have higher education, the achievement of their children will be lower than those with parents who are more educated. Garcia and Garcia (2012) reported that in 2000 there were about 3 million Hispanic children (46%) whose mothers

had not graduated from high school. According to Mong, Kang, and An (2009), in a comparative study of Mexican and Korean immigrants, parents' education influenced school achievement. Because Mexican parents tend to have lower education they face limited resources, limited time and ability to help with homework. In a group of one hundred Mexican participants, 88.5% of the parents did not have college education and a great percentage did not have a high school diploma. The Pew Hispanic Center estimates that 47% of undocumented immigrants do not have a school diploma, and that 6.8% of students from kindergarten to grade twelve have at least one parent who is undocumented (Passel & Cohn, 2009).

Under these circumstances, consideration should be given to Hispanic parents with regards to supporting instruction at home. Should the model be revised to take into consideration the nature of support that can be provided by parents who have not finished high school themselves? Epstein (2001) found that the level of education of the parents did not factor into or influence their participation. Parents will become involved if teachers use strategies to promote involvement. Socio-economic status and levels of education do not make the difference.

Under the Epstein model of participation, the fifth type of parental involvement refers to parents' role as leaders and decision makers at institutional and community levels. The model portrays active parents who advocate and form part of committees and councils to suggest reforms and improvements in schools.

Delgado-Gaitan (1990) affirms that Hispanic parents' role is to intervene and find explanations as to why their child is not achieving at the expected level, prevent misconceptions about the child's motivations, and help find the means for improvement. In order to participate, Hispanic parents need to have knowledge on how the school system works. They need to have

access to information about their rights and responsibilities to empower them in their role as parents and advocates for their children.

In some areas of Latin America, the family or the community does provide resources to support educational programs. This help can come as money, maintenance, school supplies, land, or buildings. In summary, families' participation will depend on their economic possibilities. In this context, familial participation is a key factor in supporting their children's education, but the parents' opinions are not considered when making educational decisions for the programs (Oficina Regional de Educacion para America Latina y el Caribe UNESCO, 2004).

Type six of involvement indicates that the community should provide information to support learning, school programs, and family practices (Epstein, 2001). In places where Hispanic communities are extensive, this type of involvement should not be a challenge. In communities where the Hispanic population is less extensive, as it is typical in the Mountain West, the community would need to provide information sensitive to culture and language.

Rojas-LeBouef and Slate (2012) concluded that students from minority groups have the abilities to succeed in school, but they need to be encouraged with the right environment provided by their families, community, and school. Nevertheless, if the school environment generates a perception of social and psychological division between groups, or a community is seen as prejudiced and discriminatory, or mere social neglect attributes second-class status to minority groups, then this atmosphere has been shown to have a negative influence on students' achievement (Trueba, 1988).

In sum, the Hispanic traditional model of parental participation and Hispanic families' values may contribute in supporting and improving school achievement in students from this minority group. Educators should approach Hispanic families to investigate their interests and

strengths. They need to consider the cultural diversity within this group and recognize and support the ways in which Hispanic parents are involved (Reese, 2002).

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## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

### Consent to be a Research Subject.

#### Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Aaron Jackson, Associate Professor and Sandra Sanderson, Graduate School Psychology student at Brigham Young University to learn about the contributions of Hispanic immigrant parents to the education of their children. You were invited to participate because you are a first generation Hispanic immigrant, and you have children attending grades K-12 in this country, which meets the criteria required by this research study.

#### Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will fill a short background information survey including your immigration status. A pseudonym will be used to identify this information but you are welcome to skip any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.
- You will be interviewed for approximately sixty (60) minutes about what you consider relevant parental involvement with the schools.
- The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements.
- The interview will take place at a time and location convenient for you.
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers for approximately thirty (30) minutes.
- Total time commitment will be 90 minutes

#### Risks/Discomforts

You may feel uncomfortable if your answers reflect your cultural values in a negative way or if your answers bring memories about negative experiences. The interview questions do not ask for specific details about your experiences and you are able to skip or discontinue answering any question you desire.

Another discomfort may come from the interview being audio-recorded. You may feel uncomfortable discussing certain situations or cases while being recorded. In those cases the recording device will be turned off. You may feel uncomfortable discussing certain cases due to legal problems. Once again, you will not be asked for specific details and you may skip or discontinue questions.

#### Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you. It is hoped, however, that through your participation researchers may learn about Hispanic cultural strengths and needs. This could guide the development of educational goals and curriculum that respond to your cultural characteristics.

#### Confidentiality

The summarized results of this study will be included in the researcher's thesis, which will be available to the general public, and it will also be submitted to an academic journal for publication. Your specific information, such as name, school, and city will not be used for either the thesis or the publication. In order to maintain your confidentiality you and your school will

be given pseudonyms. All the data collected will be kept in a locked safe and only the primary investigator and supervising faculty member (Aaron Jackson, PhD) who are directly involved will have access to the data. Once the research and associated thesis are completed—after the information from the audiotapes has been transcribed (with personally identifying information changed)—the audiotapes will be destroyed.

#### Compensation

No compensation will be given for your participation.

#### Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without consequences.

#### Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Sandra Sanderson at 307-413-4276, or Aaron Jackson PhD at 801-422-8031 or email: [aaron\\_jackson@byu.edu](mailto:aaron_jackson@byu.edu) for further information.

#### Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; [irb@byu.edu](mailto:irb@byu.edu).

#### Statement of Consent

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed):

Signature:

Date:

## Permiso para ser Sujeto en un Estudio

### INTODUCCION:

Este estudio es conducido por Aaron Jackson, Profesor Asociado; y Sandra Sanderson, estudiante de postgrado en Psicología Escolar en la Universidad de Brigham Young. El proposito de este estudio es conocer las contribuciones de los padres Hispanos inmigrantes a los Estados Unidos, en la educacion de sus hijos. Usted ha sido invitado a participar porque usted es primera generacion de Hispanos inmigrantes y cumple con los requisition de este estudio al tener hijos que van a la escuela en los grados K-12 en este pais.

### Procedimientos:

En caso que usted acepte participar en este estudio:

- Usted respondera por escrito informacion general incluyendo su estado migratorio. Esta informacion sera identificada con pseudonimos pero usted tambien puede dejar en blanco cualquier pregunta con la cual no se sienta comodo (a).
- Usted sera entrevistado por 60 minutos aproximadamente acerca lo que usted considera importante para que un padre participe en la education de sus hijos.
- La entrevista sera grabada en audio para asegurar un correcto reporte de sus opinions.
- La entrevista se llevara a cabo en un lugar y al momento que sea conveniente para usted.
- La investigadora podria contactarle despues para clarificar sus respuestas en la entrevista.
- Esto seria por aproximadamente 30 minutos mas.
- El tiempo total que se requerira de usted son 90 minutos.

### Riesgos – Incomodidades

Usted podria sentirse incomodo si sus respuestas reflejan ideas negativas acerca de sus valores culturales, o podrian traer recuerdos de experiencias negativas. Las preguntas de la entrevista no piden detalles especificos acerca de sus experiencias y usted podra decidir si quiere evadir alguna pregunta o parar la entrevista en cualquier momento. Usted tambien podria sentirse incomodo hablando de ciertas situaciones o experiencias mientras esta siendo grabado. En esos casos, la grabacion podra ser parada. Usted se podra sentir incomodo hablando de algunos temas que puedan causarle problemas legales. Le aseguramos que no se le preguntaran detalles especificos y que usted podra evadir o dejar de contestar cuando lo desee.

### Beneficios

No habra beneficios directos para usted. Sin embargo, se espera que con su participacion los investigadores puedan aprender mas sobre las fortalezas y las necesidades de la cultura Hispana en este pais. Esta informacion podra servir para desarrollar sistemas educativos y curriculums que se adapten a las caracteristicas de su cultura.

### Confidencialidad

Un resumen de los resultados de este estudio se incluiran en la tesis de la investigadora. Estos resultados estaran disponibles al publico en general y tambien seran sometidos para publicarse en un periodico academico. Informacion especifica como su nombre, su escuela, y su ciudad de origen no seran usados en la tesis ni en la publicacion. Para mantener confidencialidad usted y su

escuela reciban nombres falsos. Toda la información que se obtenga se guardará en un lugar cerrado con seguridad y solamente la principal investigadora tendrá acceso a los documentos. Cuando este estudio y la tesis se completen – después de que la información se haya transcrito (con su información personal cambiada) – las grabaciones serán destruidas.

Compensación

No se dará ninguna compensación por su participación.

Participación

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Usted tiene el derecho de retirarse en cualquier momento o de rehusarse a participar, esto, sin tener ninguna consecuencia.

Preguntas sobre este Estudio

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre este estudio usted puede contactar a Sandra Sanderson llamando al 307-413-4276 o Aaron Jackson al teléfono: 801-422-8031 email: aaron\_jackson@byu.edu.

Preguntas acerca de sus derechos como Sujeto Participante

Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre sus derechos como participante de este estudio, contacte al Administrador de IRB al 801-422-1461; A285 ASB, Universidad Brigham Young, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

Nombre : Firma: Fecha:

## APPENDIX C: GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is your experience getting involved with your child's school here in the U.S.?
- Tell me about your understanding of parental involvement in your culture.
- Tell me about differences, challenges, and similarities in parental involvement with the schools in the U.S. when compared to your culture.
- How is culturally relevant involvement taking place now? What do you like about it?
- Tell me how schools in your country involve parents.
- What could schools in the U.S. do to take better advantage of your cultural values to make the experience more comfortable?

## APPENDIX D: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

## Participant 1

Age: 40	Education: 10th
County/Region: Mexico, Zacatecas	Years in the US: 25
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: in progress	Children attending school: 3rd, 7th, and 8th grade

*What are your memories from the time when you went to school in Mexico, how do parents do in Mexico to get involved with their children's school?* You know what, my mom did not get involved very much. My mom used to work all the time so she couldn't go to the school. She just sent us.

*How many siblings you have?* 10

*Where you a good student?* Not very good, because we were hungry, and when people goes to school to an empty stomach they can't think very well. That is one of the things that happen over there.

*In what part of Mexico did you live?* Zacatecas

*And other parents in your community, your friends' in general, what did the parents do?* The majority went to school to feed their kids because the school does not give food to students over there. If your parents don't bring you food or you don't take it, you don't eat. And then parents also went to the school events.

*What kind of school events?* Different dances, playing movies, things like that.

*If you were failing your classes, did somebody from the school communicated with your parents?* They sent a letter, but she did not say a lot. Because she did not go to school herself then... (*it wasn't her priority*) No.

*When you move to this country and you had to send your kids to school, what differences you saw, what was hard, what did you like/dislike?* A liked everything because it is completely different. Education is better; especially here in WY they give a lot of help even compared with other states.

*What kind of things do you do now, similar to your parents or different to them, when participating with your children's school?* I attend the events they have; I believe is important that I am there. I make sure they do homework, I make sure they eat, I believe it is important that they have breakfast because that is one of the things that affects children very much.

*What are the things you maybe don't like that much? If you could ask the schools to help you participate, what would you ask for?* There are some things I don't like, especially at this school where my son is, sometimes there is a little racism. Short time ago a teacher questioned him about some things he did not want to participate, he told them he did not wanted to the point he came home and told me about it. My husband went and talked with the principal. It was about religion. They questioned him; I told him that he did not have to answer those questions. They wanted him to salute the flag, and he didn't want to. That was one of the things. (*Your religion*



*does not allow you to salute the flag.)* No, we do not have a religion but we don't do that either so the teacher told him that she did not believe that, that he had to be catholic because Mexicans are catholic or Mormons. That is one of the things that I don't believe is okay for a teacher to question them.

Also, I think that teachers should get involved more because sometimes there is bullying that is racist as well (*to your little boy as well?*) to the older ones. I told them not to listen to what other kids tell them. (*Do they say things to them?*) Yes, they tell them things because they are Mexicans. I told them that they should not worry about those comments... or they say things because of their skin color. And teachers don't do anything.

*When this kind of things happen, do you call the school? Or what do you do?* When my girl was in elementary there was a kid who told her that her skin was brown, I told her not to listen to him and that was it, it wasn't necessary to do anything. Here in the other school (MS) kids have told them things but I tell them the same, they should not listen. I haven't done a lot but I've told my girls to tell the teachers what is happening.

*If you had some ways in which you could get closer to the school and involve more, what would you need?* Learn how to participate, learn what can I do to get involved. (*That they told you what they need?*) Yes, (*would you do it? If they told you to go help the teacher on Tuesdays, and you had the time?*) Yes

*Is there anything that you remember from Mexico that you can say "that was a good thing for the school to do" and that you could bring to this country so it was culturally relevant for you?* For instance, for us when is Independence Day, I liked to celebrate it. But here what I've seen is that Americans think that Cinco de Mayo is very important for us, and they confuse it with our independence so they even confuse our children. Our independence is not on 5/5 but in 9/16. For us is important, it was something good for the country but is not independence. (*You would like to have celebrations that teach your children their culture*) Yes, and then on those days in Mexico they have parades, they burn castles, everything is done by the school and here nothing happens.

*If you could do something to help all the Latino moms to participate with the school, to get involved more, what would be your suggestion?* Maybe we should get together as Latinos to make it happen. (*Do the school can do something to get us together?*) I think they can, get us together and talk about it, about the celebrations that are different.

*Do you know about Parents Associations? Have you ever been in one of those meetings?* No, (*Did you know about them?*) no

*How much important it is for a mom to be involved with the school?* I believe being involved enough so your kids get good grades and think about graduating and have a career. (*You said you go to PTC, homework, food, and it would be more interesting to you to go if there was more celebrations from your culture where you could participate in the parties*) Maybe, the truth is that you start losing it after being here for so long and more in this state because in other states there is more Latinos.

*If you could give and advice to moms on how to participate more what would you tell them?* That the conferences are something important that sometimes one does not consider. And I know some people who think that the kids are fine and they don't need to go but sometimes even when the teacher sends the report home, is not the same as going and talk to them and they tell you details, things they may not like that they can't write in the report they send at home. You receive more orientation than just a paper with the grades.

*If you had something to tell the schools so they can help Latino moms to get involved more?*  
Create awareness that schools need to invite them more to participate in everything.

*Do you mind when they send notes asking for you to do something?* No, even when I am tired sometimes I think is important that I am present because that is how I show them that I really care about what is happening or what they are thinking or what events they have. I have my two daughters in orchestra and I always go to their plays. I think is very important, there is an advertisement on TV giving advice about it, telling you how important it is to be present so your children know that school is something they need to do, to think about their future. They say it has been proved that it does help; it makes a difference if you get involved or not in your children's school.

There was a time when the school was having activities just for Latino moms, and it was great, I was there. I remember how my mom was and I know that doesn't work so one has to try. I would like my daughters to go to college and this is one of the hardest times when they are teenagers is hard.

#### Participant #2

Age: 34	Education: Some College
County/Region: Mexico, Tampico Vera Cruz	Years in the US: 6
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: yes	Children attending school: Kindergarten, 1st grade, 7th grade

*How is the culture of the schools in your country, parents helping their children, getting involved with the school in Mexico?* I remember that when I went to school even in elementary is very different. Starting with transportation, here they drive the bus, over there I remember my mom taking me to, and picking me up from school. And she went all the way to my classroom to talk with the teacher, and that happened every day. In high school I had more freedom to go by myself and come back. But I believe that parents participate a lot, helping with homework, my dad sometimes helped me with algebra and he gave me a headache because every night he had me sitting there when I wanted to watch TV. He helped me a lot. Always trying to teach me because he's always been good at math, and was always trying to help me succeed.

*What kind of activities do the schools do to keep parents involved?* They have meetings to let parents know how their child is doing, and there is a lot of parties over there. Kermeses, and for instance, when there is a project in the school maybe to collect money for something they ask parents to make tacos; others will sell Pozole, always something Mexican. In the school parents meet with students and they buy the food and that money is used for things the school need.

*When you moved to the US what was the difference you noticed?* Starting with pre-k is different because in Mexico children go to school every day. From 8 to 12. Here pre-school is only for two hours, two days a week. With –older daughter- I understood them better because the teacher they had before used to communicate better with me. They told me how my child was doing and they had an interview with me. Now with my other two girls –tweens- in the same school they changed the teachers this new teachers don't tell you anything, there's no more meetings, nothing. I like it because they have helped them a lot to learn English because they are young children but in reality for me is not enough time for them to learn everything. My older daughter now has a great teacher that communicates frequently with notes, she does not ask me to go but I do go, I talk to her and ask how XX is doing. (how often do you go?) every week, at least once a week. During recess o anytime during school when I have time. I go and talk with the teacher and ask her to let me know how XX is doing. If there is something I don't understand I want her to tell me exactly what it is about.

*What is difficult for you?* The only thing that was difficult but I am already overcoming it is the language. Because I believe everything else is the same. I am trying to avoid having somebody to translate for me because that way I will never learn.

*Would you participate in the parents association?* Yes I would because is like helping and trying to get involved with your kids. They haven't asked me to participate here but if they did I would do it.

*Do you know how to be in the parents association?* No,  
*Do you know that you can go and help the teacher in the classroom?* No I didn't know.

*What do the school could do to help you, is there something else you would need to feel comfortable and to support your children?* What I would like is that they kept me informed. For instance, those things you were talking about to be able to go and help the teacher. They should tell me because there is many things I don't know. They should try to get you involved, to send notes explaining what activities they have, they should ask you for things so you can participate more.

I understand that mom's have to work, but someone like me, that my only job is to take care of my children I believe that is the right thing to do. For me when my girls come from school I try to finish her homework as soon as possible, if she brings a book she has to finish it in three days, everything, to have her work even if her hand is tired but I believe we should do everything for them.

### Participant #3

Age: 40	Education: none
County/Region: Mexico	Years in the US: 26
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: yes	Children attending school: 1 Senior, 2 in College

*What is your perception about the way the Hispanic culture participates in the school?*  
I think that here Mexican moms are too busy; they don't participate with the school. They are always working. I never participated, not even in my children's sport events because I was

always working. And I see moms that are very busy and they dragged their feet to go to parent-teacher conferences.

*Do you go to PTC?* Yes, because I work for the school I was there. But almost never went to the games of my kids that were always in some kind of sport. Now I am going to –youngest children – activities but before never.

*Where they good students?* Always, and you know thanks to whom? The teachers that always taught them, we as mothers think that we nurture and raise our children but no, the school does it because the kids start to go really young. Starting in pre-school I feel that my children were raised in the school; because they feed them, and they don't do that in Mexico. I am grateful for the schools in this country, all the way to high school. They have unbelievable teachers, unbelievable counselors, unbelievable principals, from elementary to HS. I feel so blessed.

*What you are saying is that you didn't feel a cultural difference after your experience with schools in Mexico and these schools? Something that made you feel comfortable or uncomfortable?* My children left this house speaking Spanish and came back speaking English. I tried to never speak English here so they wouldn't lose the language. Teachers never complained about me not speaking English, with homework I never helped my kids. (*Did you have problems with their behavior at school*) Never, just one time, one and only time I felt really upset with a teacher that made my son to clean up poop after other kid. But that was the only time, and I didn't complain because I thought... because my son promised me that he hadn't made the mess. And I felt so bad because I thought she was discriminating him, but at the same time I didn't say anything. It was the only time I felt that way; my son was about 8y/o. (*and you never received any complain about their behavior*) the only time I did was when the principal called me because my son was involved in that problem I told you about.

I have been so lucky with my children and with the people around here, because they have always supported me, and they say I was a good mother but basically my kids did it by themselves because I was always working.

*Your trust in the school, you trusted that your children were learning, they were safe, and they were fine while you were working.* I never received a note saying that I needed to help my children with homework because they were not doing it by themselves. I don't know how they did it, the kids, because they needed help. But I told them "honey, I can't because multiplication and division, I learned it but in English I can't..." "back then when my children were young my English was very limited.

*Did you tell them to do homework or when you came back from work it was time for bed?* I told them to do it because I was at home in the afternoons and they worked on it because they grew up together and they were almost in the same grade. So they worked together, as I told you they were very polite all the time, they were the best. They didn't get A's but B's and C's. They read and I never received a complaint.

*What advice would you give to Latino moms to get involved with their children's school?* I would tell them to take away TV and video games. I never let my kids play those games. Cellphones, my

kids never had... they called me to let me know when they came back from school but never texting. Now they can't leave without them the Internet and Facebook. But when they were little my kids never watched TV. (What did they do? Go outside?) Yes, always with their father, and the cows and horses. They rode bikes.

*What advice would you give to the school to help the Latino families to get more involved? What can they do so the Hispanic culture feels comfortable to...*

Well, I always felt comfortable. I never felt there was racism. I've heard that other kids that were older than mine suffered from bullying but my kids never complained about something like that. Maybe they didn't tell me but what can I tell teachers if they were my babysitters?

And teachers always told me that I had such good kids that they never had to send them to the office. The only one was that coach YY, he would yell at me "your kid is too lazy!" and I felt so embarrassed. I told XX "my son please, look your coach yelled at me in front of everybody" but he was lazy to do homework. And that teacher was his coach and teacher, and he is very strong that guy. But that is what I like, I like them to push my kids, not to let them quit. I have been a very strict mom. Even today, you will never see my children's beds undone, their clothes disorganized, never... but I have been very strict.

I was lucky.

I feel bad because I never participated in anything, I was embarrassed that they had dinner events for the players and I never went. I feel bad about that. But my parents didn't care about us going to school, they wanted us to work and help to support the house. Before I got divorced I already worked all day, imagine how it was after... I didn't know what to do with three teenagers.

#### Participant #4

Age: 47	Education: CRN in Mexico
County/Region: Mexico, Mazatlan	Years in the US: 20
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: No	Children attending school: 4th, 8th, and graduated HS

*What do you understand as parent participating with their children's school?* Under my perspective it is important that parents participate because that way you know what education are they receiving in school and if it is convenient for them or not.

*How do Hispanic parents participate?* Going to the meetings, if you know how to help with homework. I like to go when they call me, sometimes I don't have the time to go because of my work schedule but must of the time I go and participate in parent-teacher conferences or any other activity they have. I also help them with homework, to read that is important, school always ask us to read.

*How do parents participate in your country?* In my country moms said, "no, what I am going to do? Is just a waste of time." When there is a meeting they say "no, no, I don't go... and what? Is

your teacher coming to wash the dishes?” I used to get upset when my mom said that. (Your mom didn’t go to your school) No, never. That is why you become conscientious; you learn from your experiences, you remember how it was when you were a little girl, I remember, so I try to go to my children’s meetings. I remember when I was a little girl and my mom said “no, I can’t... who is going to feed you?” and I felt frustrated, I felt bad.

*Then when you move to the U.S., with your daughter... did you take the initiative to go or the teachers called you?* At the beginning I started asking because I was living in California and my daughter came without knowing the language. She came home saying that she didn’t understand, so I went to the school and told them that she had problems to learn because she needed a bilingual class. There was not a bilingual class at her grade level. They never called me to say that my daughter was not doing well; she was the one who told me (*how old was she?*) six. I went and asked, so when she was going to third grade then they called me to say that they had a bilingual class for her but she said that she didn’t need it anymore. I did not make her to go to a bilingual class because she had learned the language already.

*What about your second child?* With him it was even more, because you know about the problem he has (cognitive disability) when he went to Head Start I register him and told the teachers that I saw something different in my child. I have noticed that he wasn’t like my older daughter who seemed to me more awake. They started to assess him and a person came home... even before he went to HS somebody came to ask about the children –because of that program WIC – it was a psychologist and I asked her why there were some things he wasn’t able to do like asking for a drink. So I started asking questions. Before he started in Head Start the psychologist tested him and when he was around 3y/o they told me he had ... not mental retardation but he was not developing at the expected rate. So from that time on I have always been involved with him.

*The teachers communicate with you then?* Well right now, sometimes I want to fight because I get mad even to myself and I told my husband that in the school he is attending right now they almost never communicate with me. I would like them to send me a note as a reminder or something to communicate with me but no... (what kind of reminder?) well, if there is a problem with him, what kind of things he is learning, only for PTC they let me know. When he was in elementary they communicated with me with frequency. And the other thing is that in the MS nobody speaks Spanish. (what do you do when you go talk to them then?) Linda goes (the district interpreter) but only for IEPs. (if you just want to ask how he is doing?) I can’t. I have gone, when they call me saying he is sick I use that as an excuse and I go and ask and they have to figure it out and find somebody who speaks Spanish. When they see me there asking questions they find somebody. I have to force them a little and they call a teacher from the HS

*When you see the differences on how things worked in your country when you were a little girl and still today, and the way things work here, what do you think? What do you like? What you don’t like?* This country definitely changes you, if I was in my country in my son would have been born in Mexico I think he would’ve never develop the same way he has. Because he has learned how to read, how to add numbers, subtract even short subtraction but he can do it. (*What made the difference?*) The country made the difference, the teachers, all the help, everything. When I was in Mexico and saw children in those ranches, they look just like “indigents” they had parents but

the kids were like “indigents” with a disability, all dirty. And the main city is close so their mothers could take them to receive therapy or something.

*If there was something you could change in the schools here? How schools can help Hispanic families to get involved with the education of their children?* They need more teachers who speak Spanish to communicate better.

*Is there something similar between this country and your country?* NO, nothing. *(What is the main difference?)* The interest teachers have towards the students. In my country if you want to learn you learn but if you don't, don't do it. My younger girl struggles with math and she stays after school for her to practice math.

*Have you felt that your immigration status has put limits on your communication with the school?* No, depends on the state, in WY I have never felt racism. That hasn't restrained me from going to a school meeting or to participate and have an opinion. There is equality, everybody has the same rights in those meetings: Americans or not. I am very comfortable in this country, they have always provided me with services.

*What would you suggest to other Hispanic parents to participate more?* We think we don't have the time, I try to do what I can but what I think would be good is for all the Hispanic mothers to get together because sometimes I go to the meetings and I am the only Latina. There are other kids in my daughter's class and their parents are not there. Maybe have a Latino parents association. When I ask my daughter about where are the parents of her friends she says they are working or sick.

I really liked when the teachers used to send me progress reports often telling me what goals he has reached. Right now his teacher has tried to communicate, he has come to our house a couple of times with a paper to let me know of the upcoming activities. I like that. Even with my bad English and his bad Spanish we try to communicate.

#### Participant #5

Age: 28	Education: Some HS
County/Region: Mexico, Tlaxcala	Years in the US: 7
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: No	Children attending school: 2nd and 5th

*What does it means for you to get involved with your children's school. Based on the times when you were a student? What do parents do in your country?* Doing homework with them. I think the way of doing it is helping with homework. Reminding them to do it because is not common that children will remember to do it by themselves. That's one thing, and the other is to check if they finished it. When they have activities in the school you go and that motivates them to ...

*What do you do to participate in your children's education?* I go to the conferences, I review homework every day, I make sure they ready every day. I try to go to the activities at school. I go to all the conferences.

*What is the main difference you see between the schools in Mexico and here?* The main difference is the buildings, because here kids are being taught in tablets and computers. Children in Mexico don't have those things. I think in Junior High they start to learn how to use that.

*Would you volunteer to help the teacher?* I could try, it would be nice but I feel embarrassed because I don't speak English well ... how am I going to help? But I have gone when there are activities, when parents have to participate. When is their birthday and you have to take a cake or cupcakes I do it.

*Do they have parent associations in Mexico?* Yes, there is a committee and during the school year those parents are in charge of organizing events ... and we like to party a lot so there are activities for everything like teacher's day so parents help to plan something for the teachers. Mother's day is a celebration as well, they have a party, children day, and we celebrate so many things; all the events are organized by the parent's associations. If there is a fund raising for something or parents go and help cleaning, see in Mexico one has to do it. There is one person in charge but is not enough. *(What about here, is there a parents association?)* Yes, but is only for fund raising but not to clean or organizing parties.

*What would you like them to do to make participation more comfortable for us?* Have a party for all the children. There is never a party just for the kids, something that is for kids. There are activities but they are more like PE. At end of the school year they have a contest but is not fun. I think they could celebrate something like Children's Day for instance.

*What do they do for those celebrations in Mexico?* They have a raffle, they give toys to the children, they bring a clown to the school, there is a Kermesse where you get tickets and you can buy things, games, and is all day and is really fun. They don't do that here. Just some games, those are kind of boring.

*Would you participate in the parents association here?* I don't think I have the time and I would know if they like my ideas. *(What ideas would you share?)* I would like to have more celebrations to get families together. And here when kids finish a chapter in math they receive chocolate. Instead of chocolate they could give them a little car; they give candy all the time, I don't like that. I'd change things like that but I don't think they would like it because that is their tradition. *(If you were the Latina leader in the PA what would you do to help other Latino mothers to participate?)* I would have groups to help kids that are struggling, help each other, everyone providing their expertise to help the kids to improve their classes if they are not doing well.

*How are the schools helping Latinos to approach?* I've seen they do not discriminate. For instance if my daughter has or not a citizenship they still welcome her in school. Is a good thing because there is a lot of children that do not have that. Even under those circumstances they receive education. It doesn't matter they do not discriminate. Or when they see that a kid is being bullied they try to avoid that to happen. That is a main thing I believe when they say, "go to school because they will accept you whether you have a citizenship or not" so it really motivates you when they do not discriminate.

*Do you remember what your first impression was when your daughter started attending school? What was hard? Easy? Different?* Something that I really like is that when there is parent-teacher



conferences they tell you individually about your child. They don't let everyone else to know if your child is doing good or bad. In Mexico all the parents and students are present so if somebody did something wrong they will tell you in front of everybody. They expose you. That is something I would change over there.

En YY town the majority of moms are comfortable because the teachers speak English and Spanish. For them is very important to stay in YY town because they translate for them. It was difficult for me because I had to learn to communicate, to ask questions. I had to know and study to be able to help my daughter. There are some kids who tell their parents "I am doing well, I got an F for "fantastic" and the parents believe that.

In this town the majority of moms work less and they participate more, in YY town they have to work more because living there is more expensive. For me, dedicating time is the most important thing. Even when you don't speak English just being there and tell them they have to do homework. The other thing I care about is to make sure they have breakfast. Children can't do well at school if they are thinking "I am hungry."

#### Participant #6

Age: 37	Education: 6th
County/Region: Mexico, Guadalajara	Years in the US: 15
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: No	Children attending school: 2nd, 5th, and 7th grade

*How do you think parents participate with in their children's school?* Talking with teachers, asking how their children are doing, going to school if you call and they cannot tell you through the phone, go to school and getting to know how your children are doing. (*How often?*) I attend parent-teacher conferences but I believe that one should go before the conferences and after because sometimes the only time one goes is for conferences and sometimes not even then. I thing one should be more involved.

*How does it work for you?* It is hard for me because I don't speak English and sometimes there is a person who speaks Spanish for one to understand but sometimes is not there. Sometimes my husband goes by himself, must of the time I go with him and he translates for me.

*When you were young and went to school? How were things in your country?* It is very different over there. Teachers don't give attention to the children, if a child is not learning and is not performing at the same level than his peer, teacher will not pay attention they don't teach him more. I like it here because if a child is not learning they focus on that child and provide more attention to him, is not like that in Mexico.

*How did your parents participate with your school?* Very little because my mom doesn't know how to read, she didn't go to school, doesn't know how to write and my dad is very machista and he believes that women doesn't have to study. He did not help us with homework, didn't see if we were doing well or not, my dad... my mom did, she went to the conferences and talked with teachers, even when she didn't know how to read or write she always made sure we did our

homework. She went to school and asked if we were doing homework. Because she didn't know, she told us that we would not make fool of her so she went and asked.

*When you moved to the US and your children attended school, what did you notice?* I started getting involved because my mother in law does speak English and she was a teacher and she helped in the school. She told me that this country was not like ours, that here we should go to the school to know how our children were doing, we should talk with the teachers. At the beginning she helped me because I didn't drive either, she took me to the school and translated for me.

*When she said that here wasn't like in your country, what did she mean? How are things there?* Well in my country we just leave the kids there, we don't talk to teachers. My mom went because she didn't know how to read but I have a sister that her daughter is not going to middle school because she needs to wear glasses but she doesn't want to and my sister doesn't tell her to go. Parents over there are too careless about their children; they don't inculcate that (education). Maybe some parents do but not all of them.

*What is your opinion then, from the people you know here in the area, they move here and what? Do they learn different?* I think they learn, because I have friends and they go to the school because their child is not doing well or because is not doing homework. They go ask what is happening. Maybe they have a problem with other kids and get discouraged. But yes, I have seen that here, Hispanic mothers are different, is like we get more focused in supporting our kids.

*What are the challenges you found other than not speaking the language? What could make easier for you to get involved with your children's school? What could the schools do so you feel more comfortable?* They need to have more people who speak Spanish. That we could communicate better, because even when my husband translates for me, he doesn't do it thoroughly because he is listening as well and I get out there understanding only half of what was said. (the main problem for you then is the language) yes.

*What is good about schools in your country? When I was there wasn't anything good. (Nothing that you could bring from there and put it in schools here?)* No, I don't think so. Because here they pay more attention to the kids, there, what kids do is get out for recess and play, school time is very short. There are two shifts: from 8 to 12 and from 2 to 5. And there is more time here, over there you just want to go and see your friends, play, you don't go learn. Right now I've heard that schools are getting better, they are paying more attention to the kids and improving. My mom told me.

I have lived in Colorado. Schools here in WY are better than in Co. they did not pay attention to my daughter over there. They send her to an area were they had very sick children, because she does not understand well when you talk to her and she has to write. So they sent her to other place with really sick kids. They t told me that she needed glasses. The teacher ignore her and I didn't like that, she kept saying that my daughter shouldn't be there, that I need to take her somewhere else where she could get help. When we moved here to WY they immediately pay attention to her, and she didn't know the colors, the numbers... she just came here and she knew everything within a week. (*How old was she?*) She was around 7y/o. In Colorado the teacher said she couldn't learn letters and colors that she would never learn.

*Have you had problems because of your ethnicity or legal status? Have you felt uncomfortable because of that?* No, it's been the opposite. I go to the school and all the teachers greet my children and me. I feel really good when I go, I don't feel I can't go because I don't have papers or because they will see me different. They are very polite and I like it.

*If you could give an advice to mothers that just move to this country, what would you say to them?* They shouldn't feel like they shouldn't approach to the school because they don't have documents because they have to involve and participate in their children's education and talk with the teachers and if there is nobody who speaks Spanish, ask them to find somebody because schools can do that. I think we all have the right to be in any place.

*What advice would you do to the schools to help Hispanic parents feel comfortable?* I would like to celebrate our traditions. They celebrate here their festivities but they should celebrate some of ours so the American children learn the culture and maybe that way they would be treated better in the future. Lately, I have seen a lot of Hispanic people in town that I haven't seen before. There is more Hispanic children in the school as well but I never see their parents. It would be nice that the schools included activities related to our culture. In the HS the Spanish teacher brings food to the students on May 5th or Sept 16th.

If they included activities related to our culture maybe moms would feel more comfortable to go. Get to know the teachers better.

#### Participant #7

Age: 38	Education: 6th
County/Region: Mexico, Tlaxcala	Years in the US: 21
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: No	Children attending school: 2 in 10th grade, 2 in 12th grade

*Tell me about your experiences in school when you were a child?* It wasn't good at all because, they say that there is no racism but I feel there was. I was one of the poorest in my class. I had a hard time learning, not only in school but all my life I've never learned to do things fast, thinking by myself. I didn't learn fast and because of that, when children didn't learn they were put in the back of the class. The smartest kids were sat in the front and the teacher said that "the ones in the back row would not have recess, they will stay with me and I will teach them during that time, and after school all of you in that row will stay for 30 min." I started school in first grade; I didn't go to pre-school or kinder. Starting in first grade through fourth grade I had a teacher who loved to knit, she would grand us without recess, and then she would write down a long lesson on the board while she was knitting and knitting, and that's how we spent the 30 min. then she would have us to do additions and some other things that she would just write down on the board without explaining how to do it. So I had this same teacher from 1st to 4th grade. Well not only I was already bad for school but ... I didn't learn anything. To be honest, I still read badly when compared to my children. They read really fast, I have to wait and take a time to understand. In 5th grade I had a different teacher, and that teacher was most interested in teaching us, she told to the other teacher "well, you sent me this kids but they don't know anything and they only have

one year left to finish elementary school.” She taught us better. That year in 5th grade, I don’t have a father so I just lived with my mom and my grandmother. My mom had to go to work and because I was the oldest they took me out of school so I stayed at home helping my grandmother to take care of my little sisters. I lost that year. Then my mom decided to send me back so I could finish my sixth grade. “that way at least you finish elementary” I went back to 5th grade but I didn’t like school anymore, I felt too old to be with the children. My mom said that no matter what I had to go. But I didn’t want to go anymore, so my mom said, “If you don’t want to study then you will have to work” and I thought that was better.

*During those 4 years when you were struggling because of the teacher, what did your mom do?* Nothing (*Did she go to the school and talk with the teacher?*) No, my mom was never interested in if we went or not to school. (*When your grades were bad what did your mom do?*) Nothing, she just said “if you don’t make an effort at school I will take you out and send you to work.” (*But then you didn’t finish 5th grade, you went to work*) yes, and then I help to clean the house of a lady that was friends with the teacher, so that lady I was helping was very nice because I helped her to clean and in the afternoon she used to say: “hurry and go to Hilda’s she is going to be waiting for you” (*The teacher?*) yes. That teacher was teaching me and my mom didn’t know that I was receiving classes with this teacher. And the lady I helped told the teacher “hey Hilda, now that your 6th grade class is graduating, I am asking you to help XX, please take care of her” and that is how I graduated from 6th grade. I graduated with the 6th grade class but I didn’t attend school. And because I was learning by myself I started to understand better. (and your mom didn’t know about all this) in our town they opened a small store and they needed employees who know how to read, but they reviewed what schooling they had and because I was supposedly finished 6th grade I told my grandmother, because my grandmother did know that I was going to Hilda and she encouraged me to go. It was later when I started working at that store that my mom knew that I had finished 6th grade.

*Now that you are a mother, how was that change? How did you learn what is different here?* I like that the school here sees a child who is staying behind and they don’t ignore them. They support them and help them to move on. But here everything has to be legal so they ask for parents to be present, if one agree or disagree with what they are planning on doing, and that is something I really like. Two of my kids had had help at school. My kids are slow to learn because of me, I gave that to them. I told them “before you go to school please have breakfast” I leave everything ready for them just to sit and eat but still they don’t do it. I get mad because I remember when I went to school we finished at 1pm and then getting home took a long time because we had to walk for 30-45 min far away from the town to the ranch and we were hungry. We didn’t learn because we were hungry and tired. How are we going to learn if we don’t eat and that’s what I had to live? I didn’t like my experience in school, I like what my children are living in these schools, because they had had a good education.

*What does it mean for you to participate with your children’s school?* For me is something I like because they tell me the areas where my son is behind and that they will give him 15 min of extra help and this teacher will help him with this. Those are the things I like. When they say they will have a meeting and they need me to attend, I like it. When they ask me to be there I am there even when I know I am not contributing with anything big but if they ask me to go I go.

*How is your schools' culture different from the culture of the schools here? I don't understand the question. When your children started school here, what you understand is your role as a parent to participate in your children's school?*

I think is a lot of responsibility. We should be there. (*How do parents participate?*) If I knew how to read and write, I think participation is to go to the school for 40 minutes and help the children to read, focus not only in my son but also in other children and help them to read. If I could, but because I know I can't then I don't. (*Schools let you do things like that?*) Yes, when my kids were young they told us that it was reading day and that moms could go help and I thought "I am sorry for my children, the other moms can help but I can't." (*That was probably hard for you*) yes it was because I couldn't understand them. When they were in preschool the teachers told me that parents could come and read a book with the class and I just thought, "is good that other parents can help because I can't." (*There are things you know you could do if you were not limited by the language*) yes.

*Do they have parents' associations in Mexico?* No, sometimes is sad to say bad things about your country but the way I see it, in Mexico the purpose is not to help the children to learn but ... to celebrate..

*What would be your way of participating? If you could ask for something to the schools so you feel more comfortable, what would you change?* I wouldn't change anything, I like the plan they have and everything. To get more involve and go read to the kids and help them, if I didn't have to work I would like to be there and understand and be able to really help the children. I would do it. The same way they helped my kids, I would also like to help.

*(If we could summarize it: if it weren't for the language and your education impeding you from helping the school, would you participate?)* Let's supposed that my kid was in kinder and they told me to go and read. If my son was to read to me, then I would go but if I had to go read to him then I wouldn't go because what I am going to do? Honestly that was one of the things that made me think, "why am I going?"

I had an experience when I really felt desperate for not knowing. When my daughter started HS as a freshman, they gave us a day and a time for registration. They took all the parents to a room and told them what to do. Then, they lead us to the computers room. Here, parents and children had to choose the classes... oh! No, that day I felt incapable because all the children were with their parents. The parents sat in front of the computer and started working ... and I couldn't do anything!

While my daughter was standing there I asked her, - "What are you going to do?"

She said, "Just wait until these parents are finished and then you take the computer."

"What I am going to do sitting there" - "Just sit down to save the place and I will do it myself"

I felt really bad. I started crying, "what am I doing here if I can't do anything, I am just an inconvenient." A lady came to me and offered to help my daughter. So when there was a computer available and she helped my daughter. After that, every year my daughter had to register I begged her to go by herself, I felt really bad.

*What advice would you give to other Hispanic moms for them to get involved? What would be a good idea for the schools to make it more comfortable for them?* I think that the majority of moms I know have the same problem I have. If all of us knew a little more English we could be motivated to get involved and help.

*What about your documents? Does that factor have caused you problems?* No, the school has never questioned me. They don't care if I have documents or not. The contrary, there was this secretary who asked us if we had Medicaid and she offered to get the papers to apply and the insurance papers. They do ask if the kids have insurance and why my children didn't have it and we didn't even understand why. Because when I was pregnant the public health did all the paperwork for me. Later, a lady who speaks Spanish came to my house and said that my children had insurance for a year, so I left it like that. Then when they started school they helped us to get the insurance. And honestly, I thought that the birth certificates of my children where the footprints they gave me in the hospital, and I didn't have the official ones.

#### Participant #8

Age: 47	Education: 6th
County/Region: Mexico, Chiguagua	Years in the US: 24
Permission to work/reside in the U.S: No	Children attending school: 11th grade, 2 graduated

*Tell me about your experiences with the school in your country? What did your parents do to participate?* When I went to school I had two brothers and a sister, everything was fine. My parents participated in the activities they did at school. The school called my parents to show them the reports and then at the end of the year the final report.

*What was your thought when you move to this country?* What I like in my country is that the school provides a uniform. I like that because people do not compare on how you are dressed or if it is one kind of clothes or the other.

I liked everything. I just had to learn the language. (Besides the language, what about the system, how the schools work here and how they do in Mexico, did you find any differences?)

*What do you do to participate with your children's school? I have tried to go to see what they need. (Do you know what are the school's expectations from you as a parent?)* That we participate if they call us for something that we are willing to go and see what is going on. (*To participate for you then means "go when they call you"*) yes. Well also if they need... -asked to stop the recording

Participant #8 explained that years ago she had to go back to Mexico. While in Mexico she enrolled her daughter in school for a few months. During this time she was an active participant with the school, she said that the school required parents to take turns helping in different activities such as directing the traffic before and after school and cleaning the building once a month. Parents were invited to take turns helping in the kitchen and supporting the teacher in the class.

*Did you know that there are similar activities in the schools here in the US where you could participate and help in the same way?* No, I didn't know.

*Based on your experience helping the schools in Mexico, where you felt comfortable, what would you recommend to the schools here? What can they do? If there is a way for Mexican moms to get together, make our own PA.*

*How about the other Latino moms, have you noticed how they get involved?* No, I know them but I don't know.