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Barriers to and Facilitators of Latino Parent Involvement: One Georgia District's Perspective

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BARRIERS TO AND FACILITATORS OF LATINO PARENT INVOLVEMENT: ONE
GEORGIA DISTRICT'S PERSPECTIVE

by

LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAM

(Under the Direction of Teri Denlea Melton)

ABSTRACT

The face of America's school is changing bringing in students from all over the world,
predominantly Spanish speaking students from Mexico and Central and South America.
Parents of these students are trying to balance the various challenges that moving to a
new country can bring, including fostering success in school for their children.
Oftentimes, their jobs, their immigration status, or their lack of education prevent them
from speaking out and sharing their experiences. Many of these families are in areas of
the country where immigration issues are relatively new. Unfortunately, statistics on
academic achievement and drop-out rates for these Latino students are alarming. The
educational community must create opportunities for these parents and students to
experience academic success. Critical race theory encourages storytelling from the
perspective of the less heard. Furthermore critical pedagogy encourages dialogue and an
understanding of context and life experiences as educators prepare the young men and
women for their future.

        This qualitative case study using an ethnographic design, set in a large, urban
school district in Georgia provided Latino parents of elementary school children, a
platform to share their perspectives on parental involvement in school and at home, its

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impact, and its barriers and facilitators. Using participants from the schools, the

researcher conducted interviews and focus group meetings. The researcher found that

parents, in spite of barriers that may exist, want their children to experience the American

dream. They were prepared to do whatever it takes to help their children and remained

hopeful for their future. The researcher provided insight for the educational community

in the selected Georgia district as well as those that are similar on how to collaborate with

Latino families to foster success for all students.

INDEX WORDS: Parent involvement, Immigrant Latino families, Social capital, Critical
race theory, Critical pedagogy

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DEDICATION

For their continued and unconditional support, I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my family, without whom, none of this could have happened. Together, we stand strong.

For his guiding hand and confidence in me, I would specially like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Narayan K. Murthy. I wish you were here.

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to my translator for being my soul sister and my guide on the side

and finally, to my husband, who stood by me against all odds and supported my oftentimes frustrating endeavor to become a Doctor.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in

order to transform it" – Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Parent involvement has remained a topic of discussion and debate for decades

both in the research and in the educational communities. Studies have shown that

parental involvement helps increase academic achievement and promotes a positive

attitude toward school (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Ferrara, 2009;

Orozco, 2008; Turney & Kao, 2005). Furthermore, research has indicated that the more

the involvement, the greater the positive effects (Chrispeels & Gonzalez, 2004).

Interestingly, research also indicates that it does not matter what age the child is; if the

parents are involved, the child is more likely to succeed in school and remain motivated

(Gonzalez-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). While assessing

school climate, educators often place lack of parental involvement as a major concern

(Conteh & Kawashima, 2008; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). However, too few proactive

steps are taken by the educational community to address the situation (Brown & Souto-

Manning, 2008; Ferrara).

Definitions for parental involvement differ depending on who is asked. "Parental

involvement in education refers to the ways that parents attempt to support and manage

their children's educational experiences" (Crosnoe, 2010, p. 2). These experiences occur

in school and outside of school. Many educators believe that parental involvement

includes everything from membership in parent teacher organizations, to homework

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assistance, and attendance to social and academic events (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Tinkler, 2002; Turney & Kao, 2005; Zarate, 2007). On the other hand, some parents believe their involvement includes their role at home as well (Anderson & Minke; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2004; Wang, 2008; Zarate). Involvement is a dynamic concept that changes with situations and needs (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005). For some, parent involvement is an all-encompassing concept from being an active participant in the schooling of children to holding high expectations for their future and everything in between (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Jeynes, 2003; Turney & Kao).

Parental involvement has been linked to academic success for students and is an important goal of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) and the recently reauthorized blueprint of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, U.S. Department of Education, 2010). These federally mandated laws (NCLB, ESEA) strongly support the need for school districts to involve parents in multiple ways in order to create student success by providing them with the information needed to support learning at home. A Harvard Family Research Project (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2007) report further emphasized that the No Child Left Behind law requires the school to communicate regularly with the families, provide workshops for parents, and give parents the opportunity to be involved in leadership both at the school and the district level.

Vision and mission statements of schools districts around the country state the need to include parents and families in creating success for all students. However, this ideal does not include all. "Family involvement is linked broadly with school achievement across different socioeconomic and ethnic groups; however, the results of the home-school relationship in particular vary by class and culture" (Caspe, Lopez, &

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Wolos, 2007, p. 3). In the same study it is revealed that families with social and cultural capital that is in keeping with the mainstream culture are able to provide better opportunities for their children when compared with minority and immigrant families. In order that all families are included in creating success for students, school districts should make every attempt to reach out to the parents who may seem further removed from the process of school involvement.

In the United States, people from different nations, with different cultures and different religious beliefs come to make a life for themselves. As a matter of fact, in a report for the Center for Immigration Studies, Camarota (2007) stated that between the years 2000 and 2007 the immigrant population in the United States accounted for a 34% growth in population, and added that 20.2% of America's school children are immigrants.

More specifically, according to immigration trends, 54.6% of foreign-born residents in the United States are from Latin American countries (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Camarota, 2007). Hispanic growth rate accounts for 43% of the growth rate in the United States compared to a 4.9% growth rate for non-Hispanic populations (Census, 2010). Even though they bring with them hope and prayer for a good life (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), these Latino immigrants live at or below the poverty level all their lives (Arias & Morillo-Campbell). They come to the U.S. hoping to create a better standard of living for themselves and their children, and many do earn more than they could in their country of origin, however it comes with a price (Gibson, 2002). They anticipate that their children will be provided with opportunities for success they may have struggled to have in their native lands. Regardless of socioeconomic status or nationality, many Latino parents believe that education lays the foundation of success for

their children (Arias & Morillo-Campbell; Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Mohl, 2003; Zarate, 2007) and is the only way to break the cycle of poverty (Nieto, 2005).

Recent numbers reveal that 21% of all school-aged children in the United States speak a language other than English at home (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to a report by the Center on Education Policy, over 20% of America's public school children are Latino (Kober, Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Dietz, 2010). Alarmingly, national figures on drop-out rates and academic achievement among Latino students are staggering (Wainer, 2004). According to Fry (2003), about 15% of Hispanic youth who attended schools in the United States between the ages of 16-19 were high school drop-outs. Additionally there are another 175,000 Hispanic youth who never did attend American schools but are still considered drop-outs because of their age (Fry). In many instances, intelligent and academically capable Latino students dropped out of school because they felt disconnected with the system and felt as if they did not belong (Nieto, 2005). These young men and women are less likely to find employment that would support them and their families (US. Department of Labor, 2010), and are more likely to participate in activities that are socially detrimental (Levin & Belfield, 2007). The long-term effects to society of high school dropouts are serious and affect all Americans. "The costs of closing the education gap for Latino students will be high, but the costs of not doing so will be far higher" (Gibson, 2002, p. 248). Educators should take a look at the barriers that exist which prevent immigrant Latino students from staying in school and experiencing academic success.

In order for barriers to be removed and for Latino families to experience successful involvement practices in schools and in the community, an honest discussion about race and racism needs to be held. Traditionally, discussions about race and racism in the United States bring to light the injustices against African Americans. Although the Latino label is technically an ethnic designation, as mentioned by Smith (2008) and Yosso (2005), the Latino experience in the U.S. is a racialized one, sharing some significant elements with the African-American experience. In spite of the landmark Lau v. Nichols case in 1974, where the Supreme Court ruled that "Any ability grouping or tracking system employed by the school system to deal with the special language skill needs of national origin-minority group children must be designed to meet such language skill needs as soon as possible and must not operate as an educational deadend or permanent track," many of the Spanish speaking Latino students are not afforded the instruction or resources that they need in order to experience success in America's schools.

Critical race theory explains how race and racism play an integral role in the creation of social structures, in its practices, and in ensuing discussions (Yosso, 2005). This theory forms a framework for understanding how groups of people were subordinated and marginalized, their cultures dismissed, and their experiences nullified (Solorzano, 1997). Furthermore, Paulo Freire, through his theory of critical pedagogy, explained the need to fully understand the students, know about their experiences, and have critical dialogue about it (Lyons, 2001). Through an understanding of critical race theory and critical pedagogy, researchers and educators can commit to social justice, celebrate the lived experiences of Latino families, and, by hearing their stories,

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understand and try to remove the barriers that exist in the way of their experiencing

success as they navigate the American school system.

Several barriers exist for immigrant families and their children as they make

adjustments to their new life. The most often cited barriers are language and culture.

Communication has been identified as the preeminent barrier facing immigrant families

with children in schools (Catalano, 2008; Golan & Peterson, 2001; Peterson & Ladky,

2007; Ramirez, 2003; Wang, 2008). Immigrant students speak English as a second

language, and many of their parents have little communicative competency in English

(Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Language has remained the "…instrument of identity

and power" (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005, p. 470). The language barrier puts great

strain both on the school and the parents (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). Granted the

medium of instruction in schools is English and some accommodations are made for non-

English speaking students; however, very few are made for parents (Peterson & Ladky).

Traditionally, most of the written communication that is sent home or transmitted via the

Internet is in English (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Arias & Morillo-Campbell). Also,

parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings or socials are held in English. Some

schools communicate to their parents in their home language and others don't.

Therefore, many immigrant parents choose not to come to these events because they do

not understand the proceedings and feel left out (De Gaetano, 2007). Their absence at

these events translates to a lack of involvement in the eyes of the school (Wang, 2008).

In fact, some teachers and staff at schools have very low expectations of Latino parents

(Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). This lack of expectation and of communication places

immigrant parents at a disadvantage. It is not only important that the parents understand

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and support the school's culture and expectations, it is equally important that the schools understand and support that of the parents' (Arias & Morillo-Campbell; Dennesen, Bakker, & Gierveld, 2007; Reyes-Blanes, 2002).

Parents and teachers often cite cultural differences as another serious barrier. Most teachers and administrators do not intentionally set out to undermine the cultures of their students and their families. However, a majority of teachers represent the mainstream culture of the U.S. and teach from within their limited experiences (Reyes-Blanes, 2002). Therefore, an increased understanding by teachers and administrators is needed in order to create a successful partnership between schools and families (Peterson & Ladky, 2007). Teachers and principals have to examine closely their own perceptions and misconceptions of immigrant families (Auerbach, 2009; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Reyes-Blanes). A seminal study in New Haven by Comer in 1986 revealed that educators perceived immigrant parents as being uninvolved in their children's schooling because of their absence in school. On the other hand, Latino families value education, but remain unsure as to the expectations of the school, and feel left out (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Because of this lack of connection, many low-income Hispanic families sense a feeling of disrespect and insensitivity in their interactions with school personnel (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005; Golan & Peterson). In Latino culture as in some other cultures, families consider *Educacíon* holistically as an academic, social, and behavioral concept (Farver, Xu, Eppe & Lonigan, 2006). Moreover, Latino parents defer control over their children's schooling to the teachers as they generally consider teachers to be the experts (Catalano, 2008; Golan & Peterson, 2001). In preparing teachers and

administrators, colleges all over the country need to include cross-cultural

communication and cultural sensitivity in their curriculum (Ferrara, 2009).

Anti-immigration sentiment has been around for a long time but, more recently

the debate has intensified all over the country and on both sides of the political aisle. As

a response to the anti-immigration rhetoric, in 1998, Proposition 227 was passed in

California ending bilingual education for a state where a large majority of Spanish

speaking students live and go to school (Salinas, 2006). Later, with the passing of the

NCLB mandate and its tough accountability standards, students who speak a language

other than English were expected to become fluent in English as quickly as possible.

Added to this, by law all students were expected to attend school and be provided the

needed educational opportunities regardless of their immigration status (Plyer v. Doe,

1982). However, recently dwindling resources exacerbated by a sluggish economy has

prompted new and more severe anti-immigration debate as seen in the laws passed in

Arizona and more recently in Georgia targeting illegal immigrants. This has caused fear

and trepidation among immigrants regardless of their immigrant status (Boone, 2011) and

has become a barrier in regard to school involvement. With an understanding of the

barriers that exist for Latino immigrant parents, schools have to make the necessary

accommodations to increase opportunities for academic success for the students.

Historically, California, Texas, and New York have been destination states for a

large number of immigrants from all over the world and especially from Mexico, Central

and South America, but they are not the only states that need to rethink strategies to

involve immigrant parents in schools. During the past few decades, Latino families have

arrived in various destinations in the United States seeking employment and

opportunities. In recent years, southern states including Georgia have experienced tremendous growth in immigrant population (Kochhar, Suro & Tafoya, 2005; Wainer, 2004). According to the latest census report (2010), between the years 2000 and 2010, Georgia experienced a 96.1% growth rate in Latino population compared to a 14% growth in non-Latino population. For example, Gwinnett County, Georgia, has seen a dramatic increase in Latino population in the last decade and has grown from 10.9% in the year 2000 to 17.9% in the most recent census (Census, 2010). With such great increases in several counties, Georgia schools have not been fully prepared to handle the challenges that such large increases bring (Kochhar, Suro & Tafoya; Wainer). Interestingly, from the time of the Trail of Tears when Native Americans were removed from the South in the 1830s until fairly recently, there was almost no other group defining race in the South except for English speaking blacks and whites (Beck & Allexsaht-Snider, 2002). "Thus, Georgia had minimal prior experience with immigrants and immigrant education to help prepare for the sudden increase in immigrant population that has occurred since the 1970s" (Beck & Allexsant-Snider, p. 41). Adhering to the guidelines set forth by ESEA and NCLB, and in the interest of providing the best educational opportunities for all Georgia students, an urgent need has been created to understand the new faces in Georgia schools and the call to educate them.

Keeping in mind that partnership between schools and families creates student success, this study, set in a large urban school district in Georgia sought to gain an understanding of the barriers to and facilitators of parental involvement faced by immigrant Latino parents of elementary school students as they assimilated into their adopted country. The researcher, as encouraged by critical race theorists, provided a

stage in interviews, observations, and focus group meetings for the parents to tell their

story, and thereby gained an understanding of Latino parents' perspectives on

involvement in schools and elements that serve as barriers and facilitators to that

involvement. This information will help empower schools and policy-makers in making

decisions that promote parental involvement and contribute to the success of all students.

"Our schools cannot fulfill the ambitious and noble purpose they were purported to meet

unless all of us parents, policymakers, and the general public commit ourselves to

sustaining education as a public trust for future generations" (Nieto, 2005, p. 61).

Valuing the opinions and experiences of immigrant parents and providing a supportive

climate for their voices to be heard are major steps in creating a partnership between

immigrant families and schools.

<center>**Problem Statement**</center>

The debate about parental involvement has been a long and continuous one.

Recently, the debate has included the need to find ways to include parents whose first

language is not English. However, the 2010 reauthorization of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act of 1965 has created urgency to the states by committing the

states to adopt and set high standards of achievement for all students. This includes

students with disabilities, students of poverty, those from minority families, and

immigrant students. Immigration trends reveal that more and more schools are being

populated by students whose first language is not English. Many of these families are

from Latin America, and the standards apply to their children, just as they do to any other

student. However, educators and researchers are still attempting to figure out ways in

which immigrant students can succeed by involving their families in the process of

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education. Seeking input from the parents themselves about their perspective on barriers and facilitators to school involvement, although an obvious step forward, has not been consistently implemented. The power of language, familial patterns and culture, and educational beliefs and expectations, as they pertain to academic success all remain to be explored more fully by social scientists and educational researchers. Parental involvement among Latinos, especially in areas of recent influx, is an all-important frontier for educational research.

This qualitative case study using ethnographic design was set in a large urban school district in Georgia. The researcher, through interviews, observations, and focus group meetings sought to gather the perspectives of Latino parents of elementary school children who attend a school in the district with English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, or schools with a large number of Latino students. The following overarching question served to guide this study:

What are Latino parents' perceptions of their role in the education of their elementary school children?

In addition, the following sub questions further clarified this study:

1. What is the impact of school involvement on immigrant Latino parents and their children?

2. What do Latino parents identify as barriers to their involvement in their children's education?

3. What do Latino parents identify as facilitators of their involvement in their children's education?

4. What do Latino parents think their role is at home?

The researcher believes that she provided an outlet for the marginalized voices of Latino families to be heard and thereby equipped educators with some information on how to better pursue the need to provide academic and life opportunities for all students regardless of race, color, ethnicity, economic or immigration status.

Significance of the Study

According to the literature, increased parental involvement leads to students' academic success and to an empowerment of parents. Because U. S. schools are increasingly being populated by immigrants, especially from Latin America, a greater understanding of the needs of Latino population is necessary. Latino students are being left behind at alarming rates, with increased grade retentions and decreased graduation rates, high drop-out rates, and lack of adequate interventions to fix these problems. Latino parents and families want their children to become academically successful, and are looking for ways in which to make this happen. Unfortunately, Latino parents are unsure about how to be involved in their children's education for various reasons. Recently, the south, including Georgia, has experienced tremendous growth in immigration. The immigrant Latino population has especially been on an upward trend. Unfortunately, not enough research focuses on Latino immigrant families' perceptions of their role in school involvement in this region. This research is necessary to help Latino immigrant families and the educational community form partnerships to facilitate student success in school and beyond.

The researcher's interest in this topic is multifaceted. One mission of the urban school district, in which this researcher works, includes building parent capacity in schools. Federal law mandates this mission. Additionally, as a Title I Program Manager

with supervisory responsibilities over several Title I elementary schools in the district, this researcher has professional responsibility to implement this mandate and therefore has been involved in finding creative ways of increasing parental involvement in all elementary schools. Furthermore, the Spanish speaking population in the school district at which this researcher works has been rising, adding new challenges to the need for parental involvement of diverse families. Perhaps the greatest reason for this researcher's interest in the topic of parental involvement is that she is an immigrant herself and has had the experience of raising two children in public education.

The findings of this study will help the educational community of the local Georgia school district understand the needs of Latino families in the area. The results will help the district develop ways to include Latino families in the process of creating a viable parental involvement policy. Additionally, the results of this study will be transferable to other school districts with similar demographics in the region. By finding ways to improve Latino parent involvement, this study will provide information to meet the ultimate goal of creating academic success for Latino immigrant students.

Limitations, Delimitations, and Assumptions

This study aimed to present a snapshot of the barriers to and the facilitators of Latino immigrant parents' involvement in schools. As with any study, the researcher understood that there were limitations. Because the researcher's interest rested with a concentrated group of Latino immigrants, this study was a qualitative one. The researcher's intent was to present a deep and insightful understanding of the problems and successes associated with this group of people as they pertain to parent involvement. Therefore, the numbers of participants were small; only eleven participants were selected

for interviews for this study. Additionally, the focus group meetings involved these interview participants and additional volunteers. This limited the generalizability of the study. However, most qualitative studies are not intended to be generalized, but the researcher hoped that the information from the research will be transferable to other districts with similar challenges. Furthermore, this study was conducted during one semester of the school year, thereby limiting the perspectives of parents who might be able to paint a better picture had they experienced an entire school year. Most importantly, because the literature said that one of the greatest barriers for Latino parents is language, and that they would be most comfortable in conveying their perspective in Spanish, some of the information may have been lost in translation. However, the researcher, by means of an ethnographic design, made every attempt to present the perspectives of the parents in as authentic a way as possible, using their "voice."

The researcher intentionally delimited the scope of the study by selecting five elementary schools in a school district that has twenty five elementary schools. The rationale behind the choice of using only five schools was that the selected schools house the English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) program in the district or have a high number of Latino students. Furthermore, this study intended to understand the perspectives only of the Latino population at the school; students in the ESOL program come from other immigrant populations as well. Additionally, the researcher assumed that the responses from the participants, both of the interviews and the focus group meetings, were open and honest.

Definition of Terms

Critical Race Theory (CRT) – Critical race theory first took shape in the 1970s in the

field of law. It occurred because a few lawyers were concerned that the momentum of the Civil Rights movement was slowing down. The theory states that racism exists and is not easy to address or rectify. Race came about because of social thought, and beyond the obvious features such as skin color, eye color, or texture of hair, humans are very similar. Critical race theory encourages "counter storytelling" where ordinary folks are given an opportunity to tell their story and write their history which has neither been solicited, heard, nor written.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) - The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was first enacted in 1965 as part of the "War on Poverty." The areas of emphasis are high standards and accountability, and equal access for education for all students. In 2001 the ESEA was amended and presented as the No Child Left Behind Act under President George W. Bush. In 2010, after the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 was passed by President Barack Obama, a blueprint of a reauthorized ESEA was submitted by the Department of Education.

English to Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) – English to Speakers of Other Language is a program providing educational opportunities to students whose primary language is one other than English. The intent of the program is for students to acquire English proficiency as quickly as possible to expedite their inclusion in a mainstream classroom. (http://www.sccpss.com)

Latino/a – The federal government defines Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin as "those who trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rican, Cuba, Spanish speaking countries of Central or South America, and other Spanish cultures. Origin can be

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considered as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the

person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival to the United States."

(Census, 2010, Questionnaire Reference Book, p. 26). For the purpose of this

study, Latinos will be defined as people of Hispanic origin who speak Spanish but

are not from Spain. The Latinos will identify their region of origin as being from

Latin America, South America, or the Caribbean. The words Hispanic and Latino

will be used interchangeably in this study.

Parent Involvement – For the purpose of this study, parent involvement will be defined

as parents'/families' level of involvement with their child, the school (personnel),

and other parents and families on school-related matters.

Parent Teacher Association (PTA) – The PTA has been defined as "The largest volunteer

children advocacy association in the nation" (http://www.pta.org). The PTA

provides a platform for the parents to advocate for their child, and equips parents

with resources to create academic success for the children.

Title I – Title I is a federally funded program designed to assist schools that have students

from poverty. The amount of funds received by each school is determined by the

percentage of students on free and reduced lunch. Funding from Title I provides

schools with resources and personnel to assist in improving academic

achievement for all students.

Chapter Summary

In order to facilitate a climate of academic success for America's school children,

school districts need to examine their policies and procedures on involving parents.

Parental involvement is a key component of Title I policies within the federal Elementary

and Secondary Education Act. Meanwhile, the face of America's school is changing bringing in students from all over the world, predominantly Spanish speaking students from Mexico and Central and South America. Unfortunately, statistics on academic achievement and drop-out rates for these Latino students are alarming. Parents of these students are trying to balance the various challenges that moving to a new country can bring, including fostering success in school for their children. Oftentimes, their jobs, their immigration status, or their lack of education prevent them from speaking out and sharing their experiences. Critical race theory encourages storytelling from the perspective of the less heard. Their voices need to be heard.

This qualitative case study, set in a large, urban school district in Georgia, provided Latino parents a platform to share their perspectives on parental involvement in school, and its barriers and facilitators. Using participants from the schools, the researcher conducted eleven interviews and conducted three follow-up focus group meetings to collect data. The researcher analyzed the data and looked for common categories and themes. These themes provided the basis for the description of the phenomenon under study. The researcher hoped to be able to provide some insight for the educational community in the selected Georgia district as well as those that are similar on how to collaborate with Latino families to foster success for all students.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

"Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world" – Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the

Oppressed

The urgency for schools to reach out to the parents and families of the students

who populate U.S. schools is acute (Golden & Fortuny, 2010). As federal and state

funding for schools continues to wane, schools are charged with the responsibility of

providing and maintaining a quality education for all of its students with fewer resources.

In March 2010, the Department of Education presented a blueprint of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965). Title I of the ESEA states the need for

standards-based reform, and the need to raise the academic standards for all students

(Epstein, 2009; Gonzalez, 2002). Additionally, it emphasized the need for parent

involvement, communication with families, and parent empowerment (NCLB, 2001).

Under Title I guidelines, parents are required to be part of the process of creating,

implementing, and assessing a Parent Involvement Policy for individual schools as well

as one for the district. This policy provides concrete guidelines for partnership between

schools and families. The terms of NCLB also state the need for districts to involve

parents early in the child's life by collaborating with programs such as Head Start and Pre

Kindergarten. The language of the law emphasizes the need to identify barriers to

parental involvement, especially of those students who are disadvantaged such as

students with disabilities and English Language Learners (ESEA, 1965; NCLB, 2001).

However, even as schools are making inroads in opening communication lines with

parents and families, some parents feel as if more needs to be done to create meaningful partnerships between home and school.

In order to meet a child's developmental and academic needs, there has to be a strong, supportive link between the expectations of the family and that of the school (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2007). Epstein (2009) reminds us that at the center of the discussion of parental involvement are the students. "The inarguable fact is that students are the main actors in their education, development, and success in school" (p. 10). In order to create success for students in any educational system, educators must know and respect them (Lyons, 2001). Understanding the social context from which the students come is important to create optimal educational possibilities for them (Sheldon, 2002). As Giroux (2004) so eloquently articulated, "Educational work at its best represents a response to questions and issues posed by the tensions and contradictions posed by the broader society; it is an attempt to understand and intervene in specific problems that emanate from those sites that people concretely inhabit and actually live out their lives and everyday existence" (p. 41). For the school to create a successful partnership between themselves, families, and community, they have to understand that the home plays a key part in the overall education of a child and, therefore, an educational environment must be created in schools where collaboration between home and school and high expectations are always highlighted (Jones, 2003). "Although the interactions of educators, parents, students, and community members will not always be smooth and successful, partnership programs establish a base of respect and trust on which to build" (Epstein, p.12). It is these trusting and reciprocal partnerships that form the foundation for a healthy and prosperous society.

Theoretical Framework

Critical race theory, which began in the mid 1970's in the field of law, addresses the realities of race relations in the United States and is an extension of critical theory (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical race theory acknowledged that racism does exist, but with storytelling from unheard voices, deep discourse among theorists and practitioners, and social inquiry, society can begin to mend it (Giroux, 1983; Ladson-Billings, 1999). As pointed out by Murillo (2002), from the very beginning the United States has claimed to be a country of equal opportunity, providing fair and just treatment for all of its citizens, yet, history has shown repeatedly that those who are different from the dominant white Americans continue to exist as second class citizens and do not have access to the same privileges and opportunities. Using history as the source of information, critical theory looks at how social classes were created by the tenets decreed by the dominant or upper class. Under the same lens, it examined society by its potential or what it could be by listening to the stories of the dominated class "…to affirm their own histories through the use of language, a set of social relations and a body of knowledge that critically reconstructs and dignifies the cultural experiences that make up the tissue, texture and history of their [the dominated class] daily lives" (Giroux, p. 31). Just like critical theory, critical race theory also brings to the forefront the experiences of the oppressed, by listening to their stories, valuing their experiences, and exposing the limited understanding of their situation by those in the mainstream (Beck, 2003).

It is commonly believed that the middle to upper classes possess the knowledge and the social and cultural capital that is valued and sought after (Yosso, 2005). This

automatically creates an advantage for students from middle and upper class homes which translate to academic success in school (Caspe, Lopez, & Wolos, 2007; Nieto, 2005). However, parents from minority groups also want their children to access the same resources and opportunities as do the children from the dominant class (Delpit, 1988). "They want to ensure that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, interactional styles, and spoken and written language codes that will allow them success in the larger society" (Delpit, p. 285). They too want their children to have access to resources that can create success both academically and in life.

Unfortunately, students from culturally diverse families and from economically disadvantaged homes experience a different kind of schooling from the mainstream students, where the rules are made by the majority white decision-makers, and followed by the rest (Nieto, 2005). Herrera (2002) articulated that limited educational opportunities were a significant barrier for Latino students. Herrera, a successful lawyer, attended a segregated school in Texas where all the white kids went into college-track courses and Mexican kids were placed in remedial courses. The Latino students' life-experiences did not seem to have the same value as did those of white middle class students; thereby, ensuring success only for those whose culture was the same as that of the school's (Nieto, 2005).

In a seminal discussion about critical race theory, Solorzano (1997) highlighted five of its major tenets. First and foremost, he recognized that race and racism is a part of American society. Additionally, subordination exists based on gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual preferences. He also said that although law and educational policies claim to be objective or neutral, they are not so. Faced with this truth, critical race theory is

committed to working towards creating social justice, providing representation for the underrepresented minority groups, and eliminating racism. The theory acknowledges that the experiences and knowledge possessed by those who are marginalized are true and legitimate. Their stories have to be told and have to be heard for societal change to occur. Finally, critical race theory addresses racism within a historical as well as modern perspective (Solorzano, 1997). "One of the major principles of Critical Race Theory is that people's narratives and stories are important in truly understanding their experiences and how those experiences may represent confirmation or counterknowledge of the way society works" (Ladson-Billings, 1999, p. 219). Critical race theory was designed to offer center stage for discussions about racism and to provide opportunities for the oppressed to be heard, including voices in American classrooms.

Paulo Freire's (1993) use of the phrase "critical pedagogy" blended with the tenets of critical race theory. He believed in the combination of theory and practice (praxis) to empower students and transform society (Freire, 1993; Gottesman, 2010; Leistyna, 2004; Roberts, 1998). In order to create a literate world, Freire believed that students should read and write within a historical, political, and social framework (Jackson, 2007). The purpose of education is to be able to reach all students and their families and transform society into a truly democratic value state, where every learner is given opportunities to experience success (Apple, 2003). Critical race theory brings to light the inequities of the educational process for students who have remained marginalized because of race, language, or disability (Davila & de Bradley, 2010). This holds true even in today's schools although the challenges that present themselves are different from the ones from a few decades ago. Today's challenges include inequities among diverse groups of

students and their families. The achievement gaps among white students and many minority students are large and do not seem to be narrowing (Apple, 2003). Additionally, many families are faced with housing, healthcare, and employment issues that seem insurmountable (Apple). All of these issues both directly and indirectly affect student achievement. This is especially true for minority and recent immigrant families.

According to the American Community Survey (Acosta & de la Cruz, 2011), between the years 2005 and 2009, 13% of all people living in the United States were foreign born. Additionally, within the same time frame, 20.6% spoke a language other than English at home. In schools across the country, especially in urban areas, the number of Latino enrollment has been seeing a tremendous increase. Meanwhile, the dropout rate for the Latino students has been increasing as well. According to the 2009 report from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 17.6% of 16 to 24 year old Latinos were dropouts, a higher rate than their black (9.3%) or white (5.2%) counterparts. Much of this is because Latino students and their parents believe that educators think of them as inferior leading to lowered expectations and a watered down curriculum (Cammarota, 2006). Additionally, as the number of Spanish speaking students (English Language Learners) continued to grow, there has not been a corresponding increase in teachers who were qualified or certified to teach these students (Davila & de Bradley, 2010). Schools, just as society, see students from other cultures, who speak other languages, as those who have deficiencies and do not fit into the expected mold (Davila & de Bradley). "This disregard for Spanish speaking abilities and Latina/o students experience and culture continues to permeate public education in the U.S." (Davila & de Bradley, pp. 50- 51). This kind of discrimination leads to a segregated system of

education with limited potential for change. Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) suggest a paradigm shift in the way educators consider reaching out to the families of their students by using their strengths, seeing them as partners, and building trust.

Indeed, not much has changed as many of the Latino students who were labeled as "at risk" were tracked along educational paths that almost seem to be doomed for failure (Flores, Tefft Cousin, & Diaz, 1991). Because of the lack of cultural capital, these Latino students are already seen as incapable of dealing with the requirements of the American education system (Yosso, 2005). Furthermore, critical race theory suggests that an unfair standard of comparison is set up when considering the involvement of black and Latino parents to that of white parents as the Anglo American culture is considered the standard (Smith, 2008).

Critical race theory was a result of the inequities and the realities of racial politics in America. It sheds light on how power and resources are distributed based on the practices and values of the dominant race. It takes on the role of a social activist and aims to transform society by shedding light on the realities of the social situation (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Public education, with all of its challenges and shortcomings, stands at the center of the debate set forth by critical race theorists (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). By recounting the stories of Latino parents of elementary school students, as they attempt to understand and assimilate within a new system of education, this study will attempt to highlight some of the barriers and facilitators of new immigrants' experiences in schools, especially in areas with recent immigration trends such as Georgia.

Parent Involvement

The business of educating the young men and women and helping them achieve academic success and accomplishment in life as an adult cannot be separated from the need to include parents and families of these students in all areas of their schooling (Epstein, 2009). Now is the time, more than ever, to move beyond the traditional frameworks of parent involvement such as attending school events, chaperoning field trips, and assisting the teacher to making decisions about curriculum and instruction and being involved in all levels of school governance (Gordon & Nocon, 2008). Because American school culture represents the mainstream Anglo culture, it is easier for white parents to involve themselves in policy making and governance and participate beyond the traditional models of involvement (Lee & Bowen, 2006). However, that could leave minority families behind, and also place families with language barriers even further behind.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, between 1978 and 2008 children aged 5-17 who spoke a language other than English increased from 9% to 21% in U.S. schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). A Pew Hispanic Center report predicts that by the year 2025, 30% of America's public school students will be Latino (Fry & Passel, 2009). These students have to be prepared for college, for careers, and for productive civic participation in society (Kober, Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Dietz, 2010). In 2005, only 62% of Latino students completed high school while 88% of black students and 94% of white students did (National Center for Educational Statistics). Even with the knowledge that parent involvement creates an overall benefit for student

achievement, and that it is mandated by federal law, an exhaustive means of reaching out to all parents has not been fully explored, especially for immigrant Latino families.

The political, economic, and cultural value systems in the United States have been a product of white middle-class thought (Stovall, 2006). Even today, American school systems continue to make most decisions and policies based on white, middle-class values (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), and teachers mainly represent that dominant culture (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Howland, Anderson, Smiley & Abbot, 2006; Reyes-Blanes, 2002). Success in school comes more easily when the home culture and the school culture are aligned (Nieto, 2005; Warren, Hong, Rubin, & Uy, 2009). Additionally, many educators believe that low-income and minority parents do not value schooling and that they are less encouraging or apathetic (Lott, 2001). Most teacher preparation programs do not include parent involvement as a component of the program resulting in teachers who are not adequately prepared to understand or to deal sensitively with issues of parent involvement especially with diverse families (Howland, et al., 2006). Furthermore, not enough is done by school districts to collaborate with colleges and encourage a diverse pool of educator candidates to reflect the growing diversity in the schools. In spite of the directive given by the Department of Education to include parents and families in policy and decision-making, many of the marginalized groups are being left behind resulting in alarming statistics on grade retentions and drop-outs (Chapman, Laird, & KewalRamani, 2010), and the changing demographics of schools do not correspond to the demographics of educators and policy-makers (Ramirez, 2003; Reyes-Blanes).

The fastest growing population in America's schools is the Latino population

(Fry, 2004). These children come to school with all of the issues associated with many

new groups of immigrants. There are the issues of poverty, crime, lack of education, and

a sense of hopelessness (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). According to the U.S. Census

Bureau (2010), the poverty rate for Latinos increased from 23.2 % in 2008 to 25.3% in

2009. Additionally, Latino youth are more likely to continue to live in poverty than other

ethnic sub-group of youth in the United States (Gandara, 2010; Martinez, DeGarmo &

Eddy, 2004). Most immigrant and minority students are concentrated in urban, low

socio-economic schools (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Jeter-Twilley, Legum, &

Norton, 2007) reverting to a segregated system (Gandara). These high-poverty schools

often lack trained teachers and instructional resources and their isolation limits the

opportunities for the students and their families to interact with native speakers of

English (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Gandara, 2010). Additionally, 40% of Latina

mothers may not even have a high-school diploma (Gandara, 2010) putting them at a

disadvantage from the start. Instructions sent home by teachers are often vague and

unclear to parents, and the parents' lack of response is seen as uncaring by the teachers

(Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Warren, et al., 2009).

"The schism between Latino families and schools was reflected both in the

children's underachievement and in the parents' and teachers' frustrations" (Delgado-

Gaitan, p.20). Villenas (2002) brings to light some of the frustrations of Latino mothers

in a small town in North Carolina, where, according to the mothers, even the teachers that

the parents perceived as caring did not fully understand the differences in culture or

language. The voices of the fastest growing immigrant group need to be heard and

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valued (Wainer, 2004). Knowing that involvement is crucial to the success of Latino students (Orozco, 2008; Ramirez, 2003), not much research about parental involvement and its long term benefits exists for this group (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008; Jeynes, 2003).

In a report written by Crosnoe (2010), the author suggested strategies be used that directly focus on Latino parents in order to boost involvement and thereby ensure educational success for the children. Some of the strategies suggested by Crosnoe are helping parents become teachers at home and helping them understand American schooling. Additionally, he suggested that it is important to improve parent literacy by providing Latino immigrants opportunities to learn English concurrently with their children. Many of the parents Crosnoe spoke with felt frustrated with the perceptions of the educational community, because they believed in being involved with their children's education but did not seem to be able to communicate that with the school personnel.

Definition of Parent Involvement

Arriving on a simple definition of parental involvement may be impossible. However, researchers have attempted to narrow down the facets of involvement. Some research has indicated that supporting learning and literacy at home may be the main form of parental involvement (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Peterson & Ladky, 2007; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Other parent involvement activities included attending school events, volunteering in the classroom, maintaining communication with school personnel, talking with other parents about issues relating to school and child-rearing, and holding high expectation for the children (Golan & Peterson, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Ladky & Peterson; Leong, 2007; Sheldon, 2002). Perhaps

the most comprehensive typology of involvement developed by Epstein (2009) contains six items.

Type 1 – Parenting: supporting, nurturing, loving, and child raising

Type 2 – Communicating: relating, reviewing, and overseeing

Type 3 – Volunteering: supervising and fostering

Type 4 – Learning at Home: managing, recognizing, and rewarding

Type 5 – Decision making: contributing, considering, and judging

Type 6 – Collaborating with the Community: sharing and giving (p. 26)

Epstein (2009) emphasized that at the core of the typology of involvement are trust and caring. Parent involvement begins at birth and continues through the lifetime of the child. Early and continuous involvement leads to a love of learning, disciplined behavior in school, and a well-rounded student in school and adult in later life.

In spite of the available information about parental involvement, limited research exists in how cultural and ethnic differences play a role in parental involvement in schools. Language, culture, work, transportation, and lack of education have all been cited as barriers to parental involvement (Quezada et al., 2003). Additionally, psychological barriers exist as well. Low income minority parents often lack confidence and remain concerned about encountering negative teacher attitudes in schools (Van Velsor & Orozco, 2007). These barriers can be insurmountable if nothing is done by the educators or by the parents. Most parents want to see their children learn and grow and make a better life for themselves, and believe that education is the way to get out of poverty (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). Beck's (2003) oral history participants recounted the important role of their parents in their lives, and credited them for being instrumental

in their breaking away from the onion fields of Vidalia, Georgia, to being educators in the public school system in the same town. On the other hand, Herrera, a successful second-generation Latina, was able to provide a multitude of educational opportunities for her son, something that she did not experience growing up with immigrant parents (2002). Additionally, Ceballo (2004) interviewed ten Latino Yale undergraduate students, and discovered that they all attributed their personal success to the emphasis placed on education at home and to the support of their parents throughout their academic career as one of their major influences.

Many Latino parents in the United States may not be fully aware of what they need to do to provide the opportunities for their children. They know the value of education and the need for their children to be successful not only in school but also in life with *una buena educación,* deference, values, and familial pride (Villenas, 2002). By collaborating with schools and networking with other parents, Latino parents can be empowered to make the right decisions and provide the supportive climate needed for the academic success (Warren et al., 2009). A prime example of an ongoing success story may be found in ENLACE. In 1997 the Engaging Latino Communities for Education (ENLACE) initiative was born. The initiative maintained three core goals: to provide strategies to serve Latino students' academic needs, to include parents and the community, and to change policies that impact education (Springer & Callam, 2007). As some of the successes experienced by ENLACE partnerships reveal, the ability for Latinos to experience success in school and beyond bodes well for not only the Latino community but for all of American society (Springer & Callam).

Benefits of Parent Involvement

However defined, research indicates that parental involvement provides multiple advantages. Parental involvement leads to academic achievement (e.g., Anderson & Minke, 2007; Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Englund, et al., 2004; Jeynes, 2003; Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). This is especially true if involvement begins at a very young age and continues all through college (O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008; Quezada, 2003). Because of family expectations, aspirations, and attitudes, students take schooling seriously and strive to do well (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Lopez, 2001). Also, parental involvement helps build cultural and social capital for the families (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Dika & Singh, 2002; Kim, 2002; Springer & Kallam, 2007). They do so by networking with other parents and community agencies in order to further the educational cause for their children and the children of other families that may follow (Wang, 2008; Warren, et al., 2009). Finally, involvement helps parents to understand the processes in place, to navigate the system, and to advocate for causes that are important to them (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002; De Gaetano, 2007; Ferrara, 2009; Reyes-Blanes, 2002; Quezada, et al.).

There are several strategies adopted by school systems with large Latino populations such as those in California, Texas, Arizona, and Florida among others, and many of these strategies have witnessed successful outcomes for the students and their families. However, states that are experiencing a new influx of Latino immigrants, such as Georgia, are still struggling to create frameworks of success for the students and their families (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atiles, 2005). "The future success of our society is just as closely tied to the education of today's immigrant children as our past success was to

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the education of the previous generations of immigrants" (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002, p. 58). It is, therefore, imminent that the states with recent immigrants prepare themselves to educate the children using the cultural strengths of the families and creating partnerships that work for educators and communities alike.

Parent Involvement and Academic Achievement

Time and again, research has indicated that parental involvement is one of the leading causes of increased student achievement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Daniel-White, 2002; De Gaetano, 2007; Englund et al., 2004; Turney & Kao, 2005). If parents provide the support needed at home (Lopez, 2001) and in school (Orozco, 2008) and work together with teachers and the rest of the educational community (Ladky & Peterson, 2008), the chances of their children completing school and going on to college increase tremendously (Nieto, 2005). Even though parent involvement may mean different things to people from different cultures, most parents want their children to have a better life than they had, and agree that education provides the opportunity to do so (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Lopez, 2001; Orozco).

Interestingly, research indicates that students of low socio-economic status and diverse ethnicities can and do experience academic success if their parents are involved in their education (e.g., Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Englund et al., 2004; Ferrara, 2009; Jeynes, 2003, 2005; Sheldon, 2003; Tinkler, 2002; Warren, et al., 2009). When parents involve themselves in their child's school, their active presence alone is enough to send a message about the value of education (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008). The effects of parent involvement are even greater and longer lasting if it begins with young children (Jeynes; Quezada, 2003).

A longitudinal study conducted by Englund et al. (2004) followed 187 children from birth through 3rd grade. The mothers of these children were of low socio-economic status, and 34% were minority. This study tried to understand the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement. The study looked at parental interaction with the child before and after entering school. The researchers used parental educational level and the children's IQ as other variables. The study concluded that when mothers interacted positively with their children at a young age, stayed involved in their schooling, and held high-expectations for them, the children achieved academic success. Another interesting finding from this study was that parental educational level or the child's IQ did not impact academic achievement as much as parent involvement or expectations.

Many Latino parents and family members come to this country without completing high school, and suffer from shame because of it (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Daniel-White, 2002; Zarate, 2007). They may not be literate even in their home language. Over 40% of Latina mothers lack a high school diploma (Gandara, 2010). Most of these immigrant families reside in the inner city and their children attend high poverty, segregated schools. Jeter-Twilley, Legum, and Norton (2007) conducted a study of high poverty schools. They revealed that the standardized test scores were low and also that fewer parents were members of the Parent Teacher Association, and were less involved in school activities, thereby making a connection between poverty, parental involvement and student academic success. However, the Latino culture defers to the expertise of the teachers, and considers the parents' role to be that of the provider, nurturer, and keeper of the culture (De Gaetano, 2007; Ferrara, 2009, Lopez, 2001). This

cultural tendency would keep Latino parents from coming to school and asking teachers

questions about classroom practices or the curriculum as they would consider it rude or

intrusive (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Latino culture also considers education to be a

broader concept than that received in school. They believe in inculcating values such as

respect, social and moral responsibility, and the need for community (Drummond &

Stipek, 2004). With a strong foundation of basic values, Latino parents believe that their

children would experience academic success in school. Many teachers, on the other

hand, considered that the parents were not involved in their children's education, and did

not make attempts to change the perception (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Herrera, 2002;

Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). Schools need to find ways to emphasize the need for parent

involvement and use creative means to do so, all the while keeping these cultural

practices in mind in order to create academic success for the students (Delgado-Gaitan,

2001) such as experienced by Camino Nuevo Charter Academy, in Los Angeles,

California. In a community riddled with transience, crime, and poverty, an Episcopalian

minister created a new charter school with 97% of the students on free and reduced lunch

and 65% of the students in English Language programs. This community school

included parents at every phase of its development, used the school as the center of the

community and as an agent of social change, and experienced tremendous academic

success for its students (Warren, et al., 2009).

A study conducted in Texas looked at nine public middle schools that experienced

success with high-poverty Latino students (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004). The

students' test scores made consistent gains from grades 6 to 8. The researchers

concluded from observations, interviews, focus groups, and readings of documents that

culturally sensitive leadership, teacher expertise, a sound organizational structure, rigorous curriculum and instruction with high expectations, respect for language and culture, and constant communication with family led to academic success for all. Likewise, Warren and his colleagues (2009) saw dramatic increases in both Math and Reading scores at schools that actively involved parents as partners.

Barnard (2004) interpreted the results of a longitudinal study conducted in Chicago. An aggressive intervention program by the Chicago Public Schools for low income, minority families began in preschool and continued for six years. The study found that early parent involvement predicted lower retention rates, greater graduation rates and long-term success for the students. It was also noted that high school completion and possible post-secondary education creates a workforce that was less dependent on government for hand-outs and more productive for a stable economic future for themselves and the nation as a whole (Barnard, 2004).

Willson and Hughes (2006) noted that grade retentions early in a students' career usually led to the student dropping out of school altogether. This was even more likely among Latino students. Their study found that grade retained students seemed less engaged in the classroom, performed poorly in academics, and were supported less by teachers (Willson & Hughes). An important finding of this study was that there was a negative association between parents' sense of shared responsibility for their child's success in school and grade retention. Because the Latino culture tended to defer school-related decisions to the teachers, they were less likely to ask the school questions about the rationale for grade retention (Willson & Hughes). Therefore, it is important to educate Latino parents about the need to remain involved in their child's academic

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progress by asking the right questions, and providing the right opportunities for their child's continued success (Ortiz & Ordoñez-Jasis, 2005).

Even though constant contact with teachers and the school serves as a way for parents to remain involved, there are other ways for parents to create a climate of academic success for their children. An ethnographic study of a migrant family reinforced that, despite the perceptions by teachers and staff that the parents were uninvolved, strong values and high expectations do lead to academic success for students (Lopez, 2001). The Padilla family, in this study, did not believe in the traditional model of parent involvement that included parental participation in school-based activities. Instead, they instilled the values of hard-work, a love of learning, and constantly reminded their children, through example, of the kind of life they would have if they were not educated. This family did not attend school functions or come to parent conferences, yet their children were academically successful.

This concept of emphasizing the need to stay in school and get an education was highlighted in Beck's (2003) dissertation, as he presented the narratives of Mexican heritage women who had all suffered hardships in their move to the United States and continued to do so as they attended schools in rural Georgia that were not prepared for Latino students. However, even at a very early age, these women understood that the only way out of the sweltering, low-paying onion farming job was through education. Their parents used fieldwork as a threat or as punishment in order to emphasize the need to stay in school and motivate them to do well so that their lives would be better than that of the previous generation.

In another study, Orozco (2008) analyzed the transcripts of a live Spanish language radio talk show and discovered that Latino parents, whatever their educational background, were interested in creating a future for their children that was better than their own. The parents participated in the radio talk show not for entertainment purposes but to gain an understanding of what needs to be done in order to improve the quality of life for themselves and their children. They believed in hard work and education, and made that known to their children while maintaining a caring and trusting relationship with them. They emphasized the need to be obedient, stay focused, and keep pushing themselves to try harder. The parents looked for ways to use their cultural strengths to help their children succeed in school.

Parent Involvement and Social Capital

Coleman's (1988) classic definition of social capital explained it as a relationship between persons who exist within a social structure and facilitate a common purpose both for themselves and for the network within which they exist. Theorists and researchers identify social capital as another layer to the power structure that exists in education (Wang, 2008). Gender, race, and class have remained three variables of importance as researchers created and explored theories of social and cultural structures in schools and communities. The idea of social capital, however, extends beyond the boundaries of home and school (Warren, et al., 2009). Wang stated that social capital consists of "the network woven by the individual parent around him/herself for a specific purpose –better education for the child" (p. 120). In a review of literature on social capital, Dika and Singh (2002) discussed Coleman's study which demonstrated that students from families with higher social capital, usually white middle to upper-class, stay in school and

experience greater academic success. Coleman's (1988) indicators of social capital were

intact families, parental expectations, communication between parent and child,

education levels of parents, and relationships maintained between families with common

purposes. For communities to experience social justice, building social capital at the

grassroots level with parents, educators, community activists and students as a collective

group is necessary (Warren et al., 2009). However, few empirical studies have been

conducted to correlate students' success in school and parents' social capital (e.g., Kim,

2002; Wang), especially with immigrant families. Wang (2008) stated that it is an

important avenue for research, particularly for immigrant parents who have to begin the

process of creating social networks all over again.

Several roadblocks exist for Latino immigrants seeking to create social capital.

Without social networks, immigrant parents remain isolated. Often, they work long

hours and are afforded very little flexibility in their schedules (Carreon, Drake, & Barton,

2005). In addition, an anti-immigrant sentiment that is enveloping this country creates a

fear within the Latino community, and prevents them from reaching out to social

networks such as churches and schools. However, when asked about their opinion on

education, immigrant parents believe that they remain near the bottom of the power

hierarchy, and feel helpless as they cannot fully express their views or be heard (Carreon,

Drake, & Barton).

Of all the barriers identified by Latino parents, language is the preeminent one

(De Gaetano, 2007; Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Peterson & Ladky, 2007). Because of the

language barrier, many doors remain shut. Many educators are of the opinion that it is

the responsibility of immigrant Latino families to learn English but do not attempt to

provide the services or direct them to service providers (De Gaetano; Ferrara, 2009).

Some educators also believe that because of the lack of language skills, parents do not

have much to offer as far as education is concerned (Conteh & Kawashima, 2008). In

Herrera's (2002) words, "Nobody has ever tested me on all the cultural information *I*

(emphasis in original) have that's very rich and rewarding. We enter with what is

perceived of as a deficit, indeed it is a deficit, because if they are using a frame of

reference that is unfamiliar, you're lost…" (p. 57). The deficit thought among educators

places minority students at a disadvantage because they are believed to come to school

unprepared and without the knowledge that is acceptable by the dominant culture (Yosso,

2005). Additionally, families from the dominant culture tend to be more involved with

schools because of their familiarity with the language and the norms of the school

(Abrams & Gibbs, 2002) thereby providing opportunities for success for their children.

In order for all parents and families to provide opportunities for success for their

children, they have to be able to access social networks and organizations and build

social capital (Gordon & Nocon, 2008). If there are inequalities in opportunities and

benefits among demographic groups of parents, there will be inequalities in achievement

of the students (Lee & Bowen, 2006). Opportunities arise within a system of exchange of

information and knowledge among families in the middle and upper class (Gordon &

Nocon). "The children in these groups acquire from birth cultural capital that can be

exchanged at school, giving them a distinct advantage over the children of groups whose

capital, although valuable in their own social networks, does not always have exchange

value within the institution of schooling" (Gordon & Nocon, 2008, p. 323). Therefore,

low income, minority and immigrant parents have a harder time integrating within these networks.

In Gordon and Nocon's 2008 study conducted in a suburban southwestern United States elementary school, there were three groups of parents: the neighborhood, middle-class, white parents; parents who used "choice" to send their children to this school as their neighborhood schools were failing; and parents of bilingual children who were bussed to the school. Middle class parents were able to self-organize and dominate the decisions about school governance. The three groups rarely met or interacted. Even when the parents of the bilingual students gathered momentum and asked for the bilingual program to be eliminated, it resulted in the departure of the bilingual teachers from the school, leaving no school-based representative for them. It seemed as if every step towards equity by the low income parents was countered by two steps away from it by the middle-class parents. "For parents to become a positive force in building successful integrated schools that do not reproduce social inequities and social stratification, understanding of the interplay among diverse groups of parents and schools must increase" (Gordon & Nocon, p. 337). It might be beneficial for schools to set up forums for open dialogue among parent groups, so an increased awareness of each groups' strengths and needs may be reached. This could create the climate for renewed conversations and a positive interplay among the groups. By getting the groups to interact, social and cultural capital builds, creating an advantage for all groups.

Ladky and Peterson (2008) conducted a study in Toronto, Canada, where they documented the perspectives of immigrant parents as well as teachers and principals. The purpose of their study was to identify the barriers to parental involvement as seen by

parents as well as school personnel. Some of the themes that emerged from their study were the role of parents at home, formal and informal parental involvement in school, and efforts by the school to foster parental involvement. Parents remained unsure of how much to be involved without being too intrusive. This is where it is important for schools to communicate their "open-door" policy to immigrant parents, and encourage the interactions of families and schools. In this study, parents revealed that being able to visit the school gave them an opportunity to interact with school personnel and other students so they could improve their language skills and see how things worked in school. School leaders have to create a welcoming climate of collaboration and collegiality, especially in schools with large immigrant populations (Auerbach, 2009). This kind of collaborative approach empowers parents and creates social capital, which in turn empowers students and promotes success, good family relationships, opportunities and a spirit of learning for life (Auerbach).

Abrams and Gibbs (2002) conducted a study in Northern California, where they closely examined the power structures in an elementary school. The school had a diverse student body with students from poor white families, wealthier white families, and working-class Latino, Asian, and African-American families. Overall, the population was of low socio-economic status. The school was being rebuilt after an earthquake and underwent major physical restructuring. In the study, the researchers identified several layers of involvement with accompanying power structures. The PTA consisted of mostly white mothers, who were always at the school. Their presence helped build relationships with the teachers and the school staff, and they acted as monitors of instructional programs at the school. Their aim was to make sure that a high quality of

education was maintained so that their children were recipients of the same educational opportunities as their racial and economic peers who chose to send their children to private schools.

In the same study (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002), the Latino mothers, who were part of the Bilingual Advisory Committee, were concerned with the issue of language. They wanted to ensure that their children received a fair and equitable education within a bilingual program. They asked for interpreters to be available at the school, and struggled to maintain their place in the school. Often, they felt that their needs were not met, and they were not listened to. The wealthier white parents made most of the decisions that affected the school, and the marginalized groups such as the Latinos and the African-Americans continued to struggle for a piece of the power.

Even though many Latino parents feel helpless and are not sure where to turn, other studies show ways in which Latino mothers could be empowered. A three-year study by De Gaetano (2007) in two schools with a high English Language Learner (ELL) and low socio-economic population helped empower Latino mothers to understand the value of their language and culture. De Gaetano with the support of a team began her study by building rapport with the participants, the school, and the community. They listened to the voices of these parents, and asked them to share their experiences and feelings. They developed an understanding for how these parents viewed the community, and how they built their experiences around it.

The researcher and her team in this study (De Gaetano, 2007) worked concurrently with teachers and parents. Teachers were given lessons on cultural norms and practices and ways to use the information within their classrooms. They encouraged

dialogue between teachers and parents, and had parents observing classroom practices and procedures. As the study progressed, the parents realized that the work of teachers was not easy; while they also saw the inequities that existed in the classrooms such as in the selection of reading groups. They began to network with other parents, all the while building social capital. The parents became aware of where to go for help and to whom to direct questions, thereby, taking control of the education of their children.

     In DeGaetano's (2007) study, these interactions helped parents become cognizant of their role as teachers in the lives of their children. They were encouraged to take pride in their language, heritage and culture and share it with everyone. DeGaetano and her team stressed the value of sharing the stories of their lives and of the lives of the family members that preceded them, a major component of critical race theory. As the research project entered its third year, the team noted that parents were less involved in non-instructional tasks and more involved in instructional ones. The parents became empowered to make their voices heard and their experiences count.

     The need for parents and families to build social capital thereby overcoming one of the barriers to student success is argued in the studies mentioned above. The need for immigrant Latino parents is even more imminent as they have to do so in spite of many other barriers such as socio-economic status, language and culture. Schools with large immigrant populations have to reach out to the families and create a sense of community and belonging, in order to raise the academic outcome for all students (Auerbach, 2009). Camino Nuevo Charter Academy "…has started to establish a systematic way of building parent leadership by meeting parents where they are at, building on their strengths, supporting them in taking the next step forward, and providing a range of opportunities

for participation and leadership" (Warren et al., 2009, p. 2228). Just as a teacher would provide the scaffolding that a student needs to experience academic success, so too should schools for Latino immigrant parents in order to provide the best learning climate for all.

However, states, such as North Carolina and Georgia, with large recent increases in Latino student population, are not fully prepared to create a climate that fosters the building of social capital. Schools with large Latino enrolments should have bilingual staff to help parents with their concerns. Tragically, these regions lack educated, bilingual teachers and support staff. "If educators embrace the value of celebrating and building on the culture of the home with the same conviction with which they embrace the value of achievement in basic skills in English, they will be able to create coherent schools in which Latino students excel academically without losing or devaluing the rich elements of culture that they share with their parents and grandparents" (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004, p. 40). By building social capital for the families of the students that populate schools, transformative social change can occur along with the preservation of a rich cultural eclecticism.

Parent Involvement and Advocacy

Title I of the ESEA clearly identifies the need for parental involvement in school governance. The mandate also states the need for schools to provide opportunities for decision-making for families of marginalized groups that include low-income, minority, and those of immigrant status. By being involved, parents can familiarize themselves with school issues that are bigger than just the needs of individual students such as curriculum, school laws and policies. Immigrant parents of students with disabilities have

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a bigger hurdle to cross as they not only have the need to understand the system of education, but they also have to stay informed of Special Education laws and regulations (Al-Hassan & Gardner III, 2002). Special education educators are legally mandated to advocate for their students; however, there is no such mandate for educators of English Language Learners.

In a study by Howland et al. (2006), a large urban district in Indianapolis hired school liaisons, one African-American and one Latino, who represented the school district's demographic. These liaisons helped the parents of students with disabilities or who were considered "at risk" understand the processes set by the system in order to provide the best possible educational opportunities for their children (Howland et al., 2006). This helped the parents build the social and cultural capital needed to understand and navigate the system. As Latino parents build social and cultural capital, they become aware of the inequities in education (De Gaetano, 2007). They have the information to advocate for causes that are important to them and to other parents.

A qualitative study by Quiocho and Daoud (2006) revealed that the opinions of the teachers about immigrant parents did not correspond to the expectations of the immigrant parents themselves. While the parents wanted to see more Science and Social Studies integrated in the curriculum, more work provided for the students during weekends and holidays, and differentiated instruction given to the students, they were unsure as to how they could go about it. The researchers were able to share the results of their study with the schools and highlighting parent concerns to the teachers. Armed with this information, the school realized that it needed to hire language and culture liaisons and include parents in the school leadership team.

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The current PTA Standards (2011) state that parents are part of the team that makes decisions which directly affect children and families. Only by collaborating with schools and communities can parents help in making schools better for all children (Ferrara, 2009). Many teachers and staff use a deficit approach when it comes to parent involvement (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). They believe that some students come in to classrooms less prepared than their white or higher socio economic peers because of their ethnicity, immigrant status, or English language deficiencies. Even when parents involve themselves in school by volunteering in classrooms and helping in general areas, they feel as if their opinions and ideas don't matter (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). Many educators only look at what the parents lack in terms of support instead of also considering the parents' strengths that could be used to help all students in the classroom.

A study by Ferrara (2009) sought the perspectives of parents, administrators, teachers, and support staff at the school to understand the role of parents as advocates for the education of their children. The entire system had to fairly and truthfully assess where they were as far as including Latino and other immigrant parents in the governance of the school. The common themes that emerged from Ferrara's study were the lack of communication, the value of using parents as resources, and providing staff development to emphasize the need to involve parents in the school's decision making process. Using the information, the district corrected their biases and misconceptions, understanding that including parents in the educational process helps strengthen the learning of all students.

Ramirez (2003) conducted open-ended group interviews with low-income Latino families to gain a perspective on what some of the barriers to parental involvement might be for them as they acculturate in the schools. He recruited, with the help of a local

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immigrant parent who was well known by Latino families, and interviewed a total of 29 females and 14 males. Many parents indicated that they were afraid to say anything, because they were concerned that it would somehow affect their children. Some were afraid of deportation. But they did want the school to listen to their concerns. They believed that the teachers had low expectations of their children, and were frustrated that they could not do much about it. However, by keeping the conversation going and talking to other parents and Bilingual Advocacy Groups, these parents were made aware of their role in advocating for the children. Their voice began to count and a feeling of empowerment developed. Such is the power of collective conversations.

By building partnerships with immigrant parents, school districts can create leaders from within the community to advocate for the cause of all students. Parents can be empowered to involve themselves in causes that extend beyond the school campus. Immigrant parents can come together and form a support system that connects them from preschool to college and beyond (Sobel & Kugler, 2007).

Successful Programs for Parental Involvement

In many parts of the United States, there are programs that have been in existence for a few decades committed to helping parents understand their role in their child's education. Some of these programs came about because parents became advocates for the cause of other parents. Many of these programs exist and flourish in parts of the country rich with immigrants. However, with dedication and commitment from the educational community, these programs could meet the needs of individual school districts all over the country.

A successful parent involvement enterprise by two schools in California earned them recognition by the California School Boards Association (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003). James Monroe Elementary School focused on family literacy and designed workshops on a process-based approach of developing literacy. Data from Parent Interaction Observation Checklist, Parent Self-Assessment, and a survey revealed that over a two-year period, literacy increased by 20% at this school. Franklin Elementary School, the other school in the study, targeted parents of students who were entering kindergarten. The program, Parent Assisted Reading Training (PART), created readiness for young children entering school, while increasing awareness among immigrant parents on the process of education in the United States. By conducting parent and teacher surveys, the researchers found that parent participation in school-sponsored activities had increased by 30%, and that non-English speaking parents felt more connected to the school. These initiatives were successful because they were novel, sustainable, involved the community and met the needs of all students.

Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) began in San Diego, California, in 1987 when a Baptist minister realized that something had to be done to stem the tide of low academic achievement and high drop-out rates among Latino students (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Golan and Peterson (2001) evaluated the PIQE program through observation and interviews. Since 1987 PIQE has been running an 8-week course for parents designed to help build social and cultural capital as they understand their role in the education of their children. Key components of this program include maintaining a supportive learning environment at home and providing strong emotional and social support. Parents are also taught ways to navigate complex school systems in order to

take advantage of all the resources available to them (Chrispeels & Rivero). They are encouraged to take charge of their own educational growth, and either complete high school or attend college. After the initial training, parents are kept in the program for four months for follow-up coaching. PIQE's success testifies to the fact that growing an informed and educated body of parents helps the educational community foster success for its students in the present and for the community in the future (Chrispeels & Rivero).

Another program that has experienced success on the west coast is the California Association for Bilingual Education (CABE). CABE encourages parents to take an active role in the education of their children. The program is designed to provide the parents with the tools needed to navigate the educational process. Parents are encouraged to ask questions, join committees, be part of school council, and advocate collectively for all children. Leong (2007) reported that this program creates parent leaders, and strong advocates of bilingual education.

The Intergenerational Literacy Project (ILP) in Massachusetts provides literacy classes for parents and supports family literacy projects in the area (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). *Proyecto de Literatura Infantil* (Children's Literature Project) in California encourages parents to read, listen to, and discuss children's literature both at home and as a group (Arias & Morillo-Campbell). *Comite de Padres Latinos* (COPLA, Committee of Latino Parents) is a parent advocacy group from California that was created by parents. They formed this leadership group to learn about their rights as parents, and their role in providing an equitable and quality education for their children (Arias & Morillo-Campbell).

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The Migrant Education Program (MEP) was created for migrant populations in all states. This program began with the intention of providing migrant students with their basic needs, such as clothes and school supplies, but slowly evolved into a social service outreach and networking group. In Arizona, the program provides migrant families access to resources for school and for their own needs. The program encourages parents to participate in school activities, and advocates for those who have students with disabilities (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

All of these initiatives provide an effective way for Latino immigrant parents to understand how they could be involved in their children's education. Programs such as PIQE and MEP have been developed and utilized in areas that have a longer history of Latino immigrants but not in areas with a new influx of Latinos such as in urban and rural Georgia. Nevertheless, Latino parents everywhere know that education holds the key to their children's future and are willing to do their part in it (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

Challenges for the New South

Most Latino immigrant families settled in areas around the country where there were other families of similar backgrounds. These provided them opportunities to network and learn the ways of the host culture (Valdivieso & Nicolau, 1992). During the last decade, however, immigration patterns have taken on a new direction. Southeastern United States has offered more economic opportunities for immigrant families. As more work became available for "low-skilled" workers in poultry farms, construction, and other industry, more and more immigrants, especially from Mexico and Central America, continued to pour into the area (Terrazas, 2011). For decades, the racial milieu in the South had remained primarily black and white. Adding a third dimension to it has

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perhaps created a need to reinforce the "structures of exclusion and displacement" (Murillo, 2002, p. 219). The new faces that do not belong in the traditional black/white frame of reference now were the new "other." The South has become home to the new Latino Diaspora (Murillo & Villenas, 1997).

North Carolina, Georgia, and Arkansas are the first, second and third fastest growing states in foreign-born population (Wainer, 2004). Usually, an initial wave of immigrant men arrive at these regions to look for work in agriculture, poultry processing plants, construction, and low-skill service sectors. Many of them soon bring their families with young children, and look to schools to meet their educational needs. Interestingly, Beck (2003) highlighted that migrant parents in rural Georgia knew that education was the only way out of the onion fields, even if they were not sure as to what kind of life awaited their children beyond farm work. Additionally, Mohl (2003) brought attention to the fact that most Hispanics in the South were the low-skilled, low-paid workers. These parents and families did not want the future generations of Latinos to remain in similar situations. "Schools are a place where fundamental values and assumptions about cultural difference get played out in varying policies and practices. And where school actors consisting of teachers, administrators, students, and their parents - develop strategies in response to one another and to prevailing policies" (Levinson, 2002, p. ix). Because of the rapid rate of immigrant influx coupled with a lack of understanding of their needs, the educational communities in the South are, despite attempts, unable to provide the education that the children of these families need (Wainer).

Brown and Souto-Manning (2008) researched a young Puerto Rican family in South Carolina struggling to find their place as Latino immigrants in a new part of the country with limited access to information. The parents aspired for their children to assimilate to the new culture as well as maintain their primary identity as Latinos. Although the mother and the father were college educated, they felt as if they had to let their children sacrifice their native culture to be American. They did not possess the social capital needed to seek advancements in the community. They knew that English was the language of power and wanted their children to have access to it. In spite of the fact that families like theirs were considered upwardly mobile in Puerto Rico, they needed to establish themselves all over again in order to create success for their children and the future generations.

Educational issues plague immigrant families in the South. An in-depth study by Bohon, MacPherson and Atiles (2005) revealed that the reasons for the underachievement of Latino students in Georgia were several. Besides the lack of infrastructure and an understanding of the needs of the students, the study identified low support from the schools, fewer incentives for higher education, and low parental involvement. According to the latest (2010) report from Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement, only 77.6% of Latino students in the state graduated from high school compared to 84.4% white students and 91.9% Asian students. Although this shows improvement from 49% graduation rate for Hispanics in 2003, and shows a steady three year increase, it still remains a long way from closing the achievement gap.

As highlighted by critical race theory, racism is institutionalized in the United States, against people of color and Latino immigrants, especially African American and

Latinos and occasionally against Asians. Many say that illegal immigration issues should not be linked with racism, but they are (Hing, 2009). According to Hing, there are several uncounted undocumented Canadians living and working in the United States, but there have never been raids on them. Also, in the 1980s and 90s many undocumented Irish lived in San Francisco, but they were not bothered. On the other hand, several harsh and dehumanizing raids have been conducted by immigration authorities in factories and working areas where the workforce was primarily Latino such as one in Stillmore, Georgia, in 2006 (Hing, 2009).

These incidents of raids against illegal immigrants has caused trauma to families, especially children. The psychological effects are long lasting, communities are damaged, and the economy suffers (Hing, 2009). Furthermore, with the passing of House Bill 87 in Georgia, Latino immigrants who have made a home in the new Latino Diaspora fear "racial profiling" by law enforcement. Those who entered the United States illegally are afraid to remain and fear for their American-born children (Redmon & Guevara, 2011). This bill, patterned on the immigration reform bills of Arizona and Utah, gives state and local police officers the authority to ask for immigration documentation from anyone they suspect of criminal behavior (Brown, 2011). The law also requires all employers to "e-verify" the immigration status of employees, and if found hiring illegal immigrants are subject to harsh punishment (Brown). Immigration remains at the forefront of much debate and discussion and is a critical issue because it affects the economy as well as other important policy areas such as education (Batalova & Terrazas, 2010).

As the new frontier for Latino immigrants, the South has several challenges ahead. The schools and institutions of higher learning have to make the necessary accommodations for the students and their families so they can achieve academically and be productive citizens of a robust economy. This can only be done by forging partnerships between home and school and by providing the necessary interventions early and continuously.

Chapter Summary

Knowing that the number of Latino students in U.S. schools continues to increase, and with the new patterns of immigration leading to the south, policy makers and educators have a serious responsibility of creating academic success for immigrant Latino students. Immigrant Latino parents and families want their children to be provided with the same opportunities as everyone else in school and beyond. They know that education holds the key for success for their children and future generations. However, in the United States, schools and systems are grounded in white middle class values. Expectations remain low for minority children, leading to disenfranchisement by the students and their families. Many new families that move to the South have questions that need to be answered, experiences that need to be recounted, and voices that need to be heard. For Latino students to experience academic success, their families must connect with other families, learn about the educational processes, and find opportunities for their children to be given the best education possible. Critical race theory asserts that by allowing the voices of these marginalized groups to be heard, by heeding their message, and by making the necessary changes in the way all students are educated, academic success can be achieved.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

"Stories provide the necessary context for understanding, feeling, and interpreting."

Gloria Ladson-Billings

The demographic make-up of schools in the United States, particularly in Georgia, is undergoing tremendous change (Wainer, 2004). Between the years 2000 and 2009, the United States experienced a 57% increase in foreign born population; Georgia alone saw a 59% growth in foreign born population (Batalova & Terrazas, 2010). Furthermore, Georgia's Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2009-10) data indicated that 11% of Georgia's students were of Hispanic origin and 6%, some of whom are in the former category, were Limited English Proficient (LEP). Nationwide, statistics of grade retentions, dropout rates, and low academic success for Latino students is alarming (Fry, 2003). According to the Georgia Governor's Office of Student Achievement (2010), the graduation rate for Latino students in 2009-10 were 77.6% and black students was 75.8%, compared to 84.4% for white students and 91.9% for Asian students. Only 63% of Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, a majority of whom are Spanish speaking, graduated from high school in 2009-10. Undoubtedly, there is an urgent need to reverse the trend for Latino students and find ways to close the achievement gap.

Graduating from high school is a major academic step for any student. However, a foundation has to be built from students' early years in order to accomplish the major goal of graduating high school. Research has indicated that a very important variable in

creating academic success for students is parental involvement (e.g., Daniel-White, 2002; Golan & Peterson, 2001; Jeynes, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). Therefore, it is important to understand what some of the barriers against and facilitators of such involvement are for immigrant Latino families. Additionally, critical race theory suggests "a counter story is needed to identify the desire for said [communities of color] for quality education despite mainstream accounts that depict communities of color as 'anti-school' or 'anti-intellectual'" (Stovall, 2006, p. 244). Without a concerted effort by school districts and a sincere attempt to understand and relate to their cultural needs, parental involvement may be impossible for an increasing Latino population.

Studies have been conducted on parental involvement among immigrant populations in states with large numbers of immigrants (Daniel-White, 2002; Jeynes, 2003; Ramirez, 2003). Additionally, existing quantitative studies have established that parental involvement leads to student success (e.g., Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Jeynes; Jeter-Twilley, Legum, & Norton, 2007). The Georgia district under study has steadily witnessed a growth in Latino population in its schools. Three elementary schools in the district serve non-English speaking students through the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Currently, 5% of the district's students are of Hispanic origin (GA Governor's Office of Student Achievement, 2010). However, these schools' demographics reveal that they have a 22%, 8%, and 5% Latino population. Additionally, because some parents choose not to enroll their children in the ESOL schools, there are other elementary schools in the district with a large Latino enrolment. Many of the parents of these students speak little to no English. Unfortunately, there are very few systems in place to help these families understand their

role in creating sustained success for their children. Therefore, knowing that parental involvement plays a critical role in creating success for students, and knowing that Georgia is experiencing a demographic shift, it is important to gain perspective on how the barriers and facilitators might be different for Latino parents in the region.

Research Questions

The intent of this researcher was to understand the perspectives of immigrant Latino parents as it pertains to parent involvement. The following overarching question served to guide this study:

What are Latino parents' perceptions of their role in the education of their elementary school children?

In addition, the following sub questions further clarified this study:

1. What is the impact of school involvement on immigrant Latino parents and their children?

2. What do Latino parents identify as barriers to their involvement in their children's education?

3. What do Latino parents identify as facilitators of their involvement in their children's education?

4. What do Latino parents think their role is at home?

These questions can be better answered by conversations and probes in an interview or focus group setting rather than by surveys or questionnaires. Therefore, the study justified the use of a qualitative research design.

Rationale for a Qualitative Study

Philosophical worldviews, a set of belief systems, play an important role in the selection of a research design (Merriam, 2009). A social constructivist worldview presupposes that "…individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Qualitative research strategy relies on the words and the actions of the participants, which are closely connected to their social, cultural and historical frameworks, to convey the meaning of the study. Critical race theory encourages the use of storytelling and narrative to understand issues that may provide answers to questions about race and racism (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Additionally, Creswell has recommended the use of qualitative study to gain a deep understanding of issues that are unique to a group of people. Social or human issues come to light through exploration and understanding (Creswell). A qualitative study is inductive in nature with phenomenon that is specific to the individuals who are being observed or interviewed, and questions develop as the study progresses. A study of this nature is not possible in a laboratory setting with controls and experimental manipulations. Qualitative research is a quest to understand the interpretations of the experiences of the participants (Merriam, 2009). The words of those who are at the forefront of the issue provide the best source of data. Because the purpose of this inductive, ethnographic case study was to understand the perspectives of Latino parents' involvement in their children's school, and to understand the barriers and contributors to sustained involvement, a qualitative study was most appropriate.

Rationale for Case Study

A case study analyzes the nuances and intricacies of a single or multiple cases in an attempt to comprehend its unique circumstances. Case studies tell the stories of programs as well as individuals and collective group of people within a bounded system. Multiple sources of data are collected in a case study providing opportunities to construct the stories that emerge and analyze them as they present themselves (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, "well constructed case studies are holistic and context sensitive" (Patton, p. 447). Therefore, even if individual narratives are collected as data, the collection is viewed in its entirety and analyzed. Additionally, the researcher will need to consider his/her own world-view as he/she interprets the words of the participants.

According to Flyvbjerg (2006), "the closeness of the case study to real-life situations and its multiple wealth of details are important in two respects." It portrays reality from the perspective of the subject as well as that of the researcher making "truth" subjective and not absolute. Secondly, by maintaining proximity to the context and soliciting constant feedback it provides the researcher an opportunity to learn and grow as a researcher (p. 223).

Therefore, central to the case study are the experiences and reactions of the observer/researcher (Patton, 2002). The need for the researcher to maintain "reflexivity" throughout the process by remaining true to her cultural and political consciousness and by owning her world-view is tantamount to the successful presentation of the research. Patton recommended that the researcher maintain detailed field notes as a "database for constructing case-studies and carrying out thematic cross-case analysis in qualitative research" (p. 305). In order to remain close to the truth of the participants, the researcher

maintained a reflexive journal, constantly addressing her own thoughts and reactions to the words and the setting of the participants.

Additionally, using several sources of data in several different contexts enriches the information collected. In the current study, interviews and focus group meetings were conducted in coffee shops, homes of participants, schools, and churches. Patton emphasized that the ultimate purpose of a case-study is an interest in the general phenomenon rather than in the individuals. The researcher used the urban school district in which she works as the bounded system and parent involvement among Latino immigrant families as the context for the study.

In order to have as much information as possible about the phenomenon under study, several methods of data collection are needed. For this study, data was collected by various means (e.g., interviews, focus group meetings, and observations during these meetings) in order to triangulate the information and ascertain common themes. By using the case-study design in the ethnographic tradition, the researcher was able to investigate the phenomenon more fully and provide an in-depth analysis of the findings, giving voice to the participants.

Rationale for an Ethnographic Design

Ethnography is the qualitative study of a cultural group with similarities in language, behavior, and beliefs in the setting in which they live and work, over a period of time (Creswell, 2009). Typically, data is collected by various means including interviews and observations and presenting it in an interpretive and experiential manner (Rock, 2001). Ethnographic research began in the field of cultural anthropology and was dedicated to understand the nature and upkeep of culture (Goulding, 2005). The purpose

of ethnography is to present the behaviors and experiences of the subjects as they live and allow the reader to interpret the information as it makes sense to his world view (Goulding). The researcher unveils "thick" description (Geertz, as cited in Merriam, 2009), the actual words of the participants, for the reader to make sense of their world. "An openness to people, data, places and theory was intrinsic to the ethnographic process, so a strict set of criteria cannot and should not be applied" (Deegan, 2001, p. 11).

Critical ethnography brings to light the socio-economic condition of the subjects who have remained marginalized, the class structures within which they exist, and their life's "truths" as divulged by the subjects (Merriam, 2009). This form of narrative exposes power structure and its negotiation in the political, social and cultural contexts in society, and hopes to create understanding and transformation for all and particularly for the marginalized (Merriam). No one can recount their life story better than the people who lived it. They may not be fully aware of the world outside of their own, but they are the true "chroniclers of their own experience" (Delpit, 1988, p. 297). Qualitative ethnographic research in a case-study design, such as presented by the researcher, brings to the forefront the stories of the subjects as critical race theory suggests is done, and provides an opportunity for change and transformation. By telling the stories of Latino parents, in a new destination state, their experiences in their interactions with schools, and their beliefs and understandings of parent involvement, the researcher in the current study provided a voice to the somewhat unheard cultural group.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher is significant in this type of study. The researcher served as an instrument, carefully observing the phenomenon under study in its natural

setting (Creswell, 2009). The researcher lived the experience of being an immigrant and raising children in Georgia's public schools. The phenomenon of parental involvement continued to be personally important to the researcher. Additionally, as a Title I Program Manager for the district, increasing parental involvement district wide is a major part of this researcher's professional responsibilities. Furthermore, the researcher believed that information obtained though this study will help the district formulate concrete policies to involve the increasing Latino families in schools.

Interestingly, an ethnographic design requires the researcher to be a participant observer of the subjects' world. As a participant, she enters the world of her subjects, and attempts to assimilate in it. On the other hand, as the observer, she distances himself from it and makes systematic observations. In spite of this dichotomous nature of a researcher's responsibility, she must produce "…some of the subjective knowledge of the world under view, but knowing always that the reproduction will never be wholly 'genuine' because it is an artifact produced by one who was not, after all, a complete insider with the insider's aims and understanding" (Rock, 2001, p. 32). Therefore, the role of the researcher is complicated in addition to being significant.

The researcher interprets the words and actions of the participants from a very personal and intimate perspective (Creswell, 2009). One of the traits of qualitative research is the honesty by which the researcher addresses her own interpretation of the information based on life experiences (Creswell). Moustakas (1994) suggested that the researcher maintain consciousness of personal thoughts and feelings, but analyze the words of the participants free from subjective opinion. In order to limit personal opinions about the issue of parental involvement, the researcher will analyze the data by using

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participant's direct quotes to ensure descriptive validity. Additionally, as recommended by Creswell, the researcher maintained a reflective journal highlighting phenomena that resonate closely with her and addressed them in the study.

Participants

In an ethnographic case study, the researcher's primary sources of data are the experiences and opinions of participants (Goulding, 2005). Participants are selected purposively, based on the criteria established by the research (Merriam, 2009). The participants were a homogeneous sample (Patton, 2002), as the study called for an understanding of immigrant Latino parents' experiences with their child's school from a cultural perspective. Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) stated that these participants must be willing to participate in the various forms of data collection such as interviews, observations, and meetings.

According to the information from Data and Assessment for the school district under study, there were a total of 1,180 Hispanic students or 6.3% of the student population for the 2010-2011 school year. The previous year's record indicated that 5.7% of the students were of Hispanic origin and the 2005-2006 records show only 4.1% being of Hispanic origin. For this study, however, the researcher selected immigrant Latino parents of students who attended one of the three elementary schools with the ESOL program and parents from two other elementary schools that have a high percentage of Latino enrolment. The ESOL schools had over two hundred students in the program and ESOL teacher specialists that serve them. The two other schools had a high Latino enrolment because the parents opted not to send the students to the ESOL schools and sent them to the neighborhood schools instead. Permission to conduct the research

was obtained from the university's Institutional Review Board, followed by written permission from the school district officials as well as the principals of the schools before the study was undertaken.

After obtaining permission, the researcher contacted the appropriate principals of the schools and asked them to send a pre-drafted letter to all Spanish language ESOL and Latino families informing them about the study (see Appendix B). In the letter, drafted in both English and Spanish, parents were told that the study consists of interviews and focus group meetings. An insert was attached with the letter asking for volunteers for the interview and focus group phase of the study (see Appendix C). The researcher intended to contact a minimum of ten participants who volunteered to be interviewed and set a date, time, and place for the meeting. The rationale behind the selection of ten participants was to be able to obtain deep and meaningful information that would provide answers to the research questions. The participants were assured that their identity would not be revealed by this study, and that they would be allowed to select a pseudonym by which they would be referred. They were also informed that if they felt uncomfortable at any point they could stop the interview or the meeting without any repercussions. However, as suggested by Moustakas (1994), the researcher developed a trustful relationship with the interviewees so that they would offer honest and open insights into the phenomenon being researched.

After the interviews were completed and the researcher had looked at the emerging themes, focus group meetings were set up. The parent volunteers from each school made up the focus groups. The researcher set up a tentative agenda for the focus group meeting, and the questions were based on the responses from the interviews that

needed further explication, or new questions that emerged out of the data from the interviews. Three focus group meeting were held, either from the volunteers at the ESOL schools or from the non-ESOL schools. Additionally, the researcher took field notes during the interviews and the focus group meetings looking for non-verbal cues that added valuable information to the phenomenon under study. Upon completion of each interview and meeting, the researcher wrote in her journal, making observations of non-verbal cues and reflective observations in order that there was minimum bias.

Instruments

The first instrument was the pre-set questions for the interview (see Appendix A). These questions were formulated based on the information presented in the literature as well as the direction of the current study through the research questions. The interview followed a semi-structured format allowing the participants to fully share their experiences. The interviews began with a few relatively easy descriptive questions relating to the phenomenon, to put the participant at ease, followed by the prescribed questions (Merriam, 2009). The questions for the focus group meetings emerged from the data collected during the interviews. They served as the instrument during the meetings. However, the questions remained fluid and changed as the participants interacted with each other and developed new directions for the meeting. The conversation among the participants remained lively and informative as the focus group meetings progressed.

As in all qualitative research, the researcher served as the main instrument. By serving as an instrument, the researcher was able to adapt and respond to the data as it presented itself (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, because the researcher did not speak

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Spanish, the translator, who had signed a confidentiality agreement, was present and served as the second instrument. The translator helped the researcher and the participants by either reformulating the questions, or clarifying responses as needed.

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher collected data through the responses from the audio recordings of the interviews, focus group meeting recording and field notes. A timeline was established for all data collection. Using the literature on Latino immigrant parental involvement and the interview and focus group meeting questions, the researcher created a preliminary set of codes that covered the themes that might emerge. Following that, the researcher critically analyzed the responses and identified responses that fit into existing codes and those that created new ones or disconfirmed them (Patton, 2002), constantly refining the codes. In a qualitative design, the researcher must remain open to changes in the order or format of the questions as new information may emerge at any moment that may need additional probes (Patton). The researcher observed that, with the help of the translator, finding ways to ask the questions differently, or by splitting questions into sub parts, some of the participants were able to articulate their responses more fluently.

The first method of data collection involved semi-structured interviews. The researcher selected a minimum of ten Latino parents whose children attend the selected schools based on their willingness to participate as indicated in the response to the insert that were sent with the initial letter informing the parents of the study. However, the researcher conducted eleven interviews, based on the responses to the phone class made while trying to set up the meetings. A semi-structured interview format allowed the interviewer the flexibility to ask probing questions within the pre-designed structure of

the interview. After procuring informed consent from each participant, the interviews

were conducted at a set time and place agreed on by the researcher and each participant.

The interview questions were developed by the researcher and the interviews lasted for a

minimum of twenty-six minutes to a maximum of fifty-eight minutes. All the names of

the interviewees were kept confidential. The translator for the study was present at all

interviews. Although the researcher had a set of written interview questions, the answers

from the participants required additional probes or sub-questions. The researcher

transcribed the interviews verbatim with the help of a web-based Spanish to English

transcription service, which followed all protocol for confidentiality. As the researcher

studied the transcripts, she continuously applied meaning to the words and actions of the

participants, creating themes as they emerged. Just as critical race theory teaches that the

words of the participants, although rooted in the world in which they live, extend beyond

it, creating shared history and an outlet for social justice to occur, (Ladsdon-Billings,

1999), the researcher continuously sought universal themes that were relevant to the

current situation as well as those that provided venues for further discussion.

　　To ensure that all valuable information was retained, the researcher began to

transcribe and analyze the interviews soon after they were completed. The researcher

followed the seven-step model recommended by Colaizzi (as cited in Goulding, 2005)

except for the final step. The first step was to read the transcript holistically to

understand the views of the participants. The next step was to identify key statements

that connect to the phenomenon under study. The third step was to make meaning for

these key statements. The fourth step was to look at all the transcripts to find common

key statements and the fifth step was to categorize them. The sixth step was to filter the

themes in order to explain them, and the final step was to go back to the participants to

cross check and validate the findings (Goulding, 2005, p.303). For the current study, the

researcher did not follow the final step of cross checking and validating, because of

logistical issues such as moves, changed phone numbers, and/ or change of school. All

interviews were completed within an eight-week period.

Three focus group meetings provided the second set of data for the study. These

meetings were set up after the interview phase of the study, in order to gather additional

information or clarification of the interview data. Parents who volunteered to participate

in the study made up the focus groups. Only one of the parents who were interviewed

participated in a focus-group meeting as well. The researcher created an initial set of

questions that arose out of the responses from the interviews. However, the researcher

allowed the discussion to digress as needed within the boundaries of the personal

experiences of the parents in the schools.

All the data collection methods yielded valuable information to the researcher.

During the data analysis process, the researcher identified themes that repeated

themselves during the interviews and the focus group meetings. These repeated themes

formed the basis of discussion for this study. Additionally, the researcher identified

themes that had not emerged in the literature as yet. These findings were unique to the

experiences of Latino families in the area. Finally, the researcher identified themes that

countered the information presented in the literature. These themes will provide

substantive information to future researchers as they continue to study the phenomenon

of parent involvement. Cumulatively, the information will provide insight to the

educational community under study and to communities that serve a growing diverse population.

Throughout the transcription phase and even after all of the data were transcribed, the data was securely stored in the researcher's private home office and will be for a period of five years (Merriam, 2009). Only the researcher will have access to the data, which will be locked in a filing cabinet. All the interview and focus group participants were given an informed consent form to sign, and a confidentiality statement was signed by the researcher and the translator. The researcher informed the parents before the interview phase of the study that their identities will not be revealed at any point. Also, the interview and focus group participants were informed that they will be given the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms and that their identities will remain confidential. The researcher provided opportunities for the participants to ask any questions they may have prior to making a commitment. The researcher did not anticipate any more than minimal risk to the participants during this study. To maintain objective validity the researcher used the words of the participants as they were told and reassessed confidentiality and risk-factors at every phase of the study. It is the belief of the researcher that the information obtained through the careful analysis and interpretation of the data provided valuable resources to the Latino community as well as the educational community.

Chapter Summary

The most effective way to understand the core experiences of a phenomenon is through qualitative research. For this study, a case study method within an ethnographic design was the optimal way to collect and present data. The researcher, though

interviews and focus group meetings gained a perspective of how Latino immigrant families understand, deal with, and stay involved in their child's education. Not too many studies exist that seek to understand the needs of Latino immigrant parent involvement in schools because the urban area in Georgia in which this researcher lives and works has only recently been seeing an influx of Latino families.

The interviews provided in depth information about parents' view on involvement in schools. Their stories and experiences uncovered the need for changes in the way schools communicate with parents. By the same token, they shed light on what some of the successful practices are. The focus group meetings answered the research questions as well as brought some new information to light. The researcher maintained confidentiality protocol throughout the process of collecting, analyzing and preserving the data. The researcher is confident that the data provided some much needed information to the school district about creating partnerships with Latino families and understanding their role in creating academic success for their children in school.

CHAPTER 4

REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

"Education cannot continue to be guided by definitions of parent involvement that may not include so many children and families of rich and complex sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds." Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006

In the interest of providing a climate that fosters academic success for all students as mandated by federal law, schools are making attempts to include all stakeholders in decisions that affect aspects of schooling (NCLB, 2001; ESEA, 1965). Although parent involvement has been proven to be an important factor in student achievement (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; O'Donnell, Kirkner, & Meyer-Adams, 2008), and some parents have been included in their children's education, many parents continue to be left behind. This is especially true of parents who are from poverty and parents who are immigrants and/or have limited English speaking capabilities (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Gonzales-DeHass & Willems, 2003; Lott, 2001). Immigrant families continue to make their way into the United States by whatever means possible, seeking as better life for themselves and their children. Traditionally, these families settled along the southern border of the United States and in big cities such as Chicago and New York (Kober, Chudowsky, Chudowsky, & Dietz, 2010). However, as immigration trends shifted during the final decades of the 1900s and as jobs became available in non-traditional destinations, more Latino immigrant families made their home in southeastern United States creating an urgent need for infrastructural changes both in mindsets of the

educational communities and in resources in schools in the area (Bohon, MacPherson, & Atiles, 2005; Wainer, 2004).

The current study is set in one such new destination for Latino immigrants. This qualitative case study, set in a large urban school district in Georgia with a rapidly increasing Latino population, attempted to understand some of the perspectives of the parents of this group as it pertained to parent involvement. The researcher purposively sought volunteer immigrant Latino parents from the three English to Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) and two other elementary schools with a considerably large Latino population in the district under study. Using an ethnographic design within a case-study method, the researcher interviewed Latino immigrant parents and conducted focus-group meetings. Many interviews were held at the home of the participants, providing rich information to the researcher about the participants' living conditions. Other meetings were held in coffee-shops, schools, and a church. The results of the discussions with the parents both corroborated the existing literature on the topic and added new and interesting information specific to the region under study.

Research Questions

The rationale behind the researcher selecting elementary school parents was to identify barriers and facilitators that exist early in the process of parent involvement, thereby providing vital information to the educational community in order to effect changes in the way the district under study considers involving parents, especially immigrant parents. The research questions were developed based on the typology of parent involvement developed by Epstein (2009), and based on the information obtained from the literature.

The overarching question for this research was:

What are Latino parents' perceptions of their role in the education of their elementary school children?

In addition, the following sub questions further clarified this study:

1. What is the impact of school involvement on immigrant Latino parents and their children?

2. What do Latino parents identify as barriers to their involvement in their children's education?

3. What do Latino parents identify as facilitators of their involvement in their children's education?

4. What do Latino parents think their role is at home?

The answers to the research questions will help the educational community under study see a perspective of the growing Latino community, and incorporate them within the policies and procedures that are developed.

Schools Profiled

The district under study is one of the larger urban districts in the state of Georgia. Over 34,000 students attend public schools in the county. There are twenty-five elementary schools (Pre K – 5); seven schools that house Pre Kindergarten to eighth grade, nine middle schools (6 - 8), and nine high schools (9 – 12). Three of the elementary schools, one on the west side of town, one on the south side, and one covering the north and east side of the district, were selected by the district as the English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) sites based on their location. However, many Latino families choose to opt out of the ESOL program and send their students to

neighborhood schools. The county has been experiencing tremendous growth of its

Latino population on the west side as a result of which schools in that area have been

seeing an influx of Latino enrollment. Table 1 highlights the racial and ethnic

composition of the five schools selected for the current study.

Table 1
Racial Profile of Selected Elementary Schools
SY 2010-2011

Name of school (pseudonym)	Total Enrollment	Asian	Hispanic/ Enrolled in ESOL Program	American Indian	Black	White	Multiracial	Title I School Y/N	ESOL School Y/N
West Side Ele.	450	3	141/128	0	171	110	25	Y	Y
South Side Ele.	589	17	88/75	1	341	106	35	Y	Y
East Side Ele.	796	53	37/26	2	46	638	20	N	Y
Alpha Ele.	765	23	93	1	362	252	34	Y	N
Beta Ele.	721	21	61	0	341	257	41	Y	N

Participants

The researcher sent out "Invitation to Participate" letters in English and Spanish

with a response insert to the five elementary schools under study. A total of three

hundred invitations to participate were sent to the five schools. The researcher received

twenty-five signed responses indicating a willingness to participate. Out of the twenty-

five, some had working phone numbers and others did not. However, the researcher,

with the help of the translator, was able to set up eleven interviews and three focus-group

meetings spanning a period of ten weeks. Interestingly, nearly all the interview

participants were from Mexico and were younger parents. All but one went to school in

their home country and most of them did not have an education beyond high school, and

many of them only had a sixth grade education. Juan came to the U.S. as a young boy

and did some schooling in America. Pedro was the only interview and focus group

participant from Costa Rica. The researcher and the translator met José and Vanessa,

Juan and Juanita and Pedro at coffee shops. Every other interview participant invited the

researcher to their home. Table 2 highlights the demographic profile of the interview

participants, and Table 3 highlights the focus group participants' profile.

Table 2
Interview Participants' Profiles

NO.	Name/s (Pseudonyms)	Country of Origin	Number of Years in the U.S.	Child's Grade in School	Participant's School Completion
1	José and Vanessa	Mexico	14, 7	K (twins)	6, 6
2	Maria	Mexico	11	2, 4	6
3	Juan and Juanita	Mexico	22, 11	2, PreK (3 older kids)	8, 6
4	Carmen	Mexico	11	2, and a middle school child	6
5	Pedro	Costa Rica	7	K	Completed High School; some college
6	Carlos	Mexico	12	K	2
7	Lisa and Ivan	Mexico	13,13	3, 5	High school; Technical school
8	Guadalupe and Hector	Mexico	9, 8	1	7, High School
9	Bernita	Mexico	7	2	High School
10	Flora	Mexico	7	1	7
11	Sylvia	Mexico	5	1	High School

The focus group participants came from a very diverse background, and supplemented much of the data collected via the interviews. The first focus group was held at a school. The participants, Mary, Raul, and Sarah brought their children with them for the meeting. There was a sharp contrast between the childhood experiences of Mary and Sarah. Mary's husband Raul remained quiet for most of the meeting and let his wife do the talking. The second focus group meeting was held at a church that served a Latino congregation. Here too, the children were present during the meeting. Ivana worked part-time at the church and helped set up the meeting. She was very articulate and led the discussion on many occasion. However, all the parents at this meeting seemed eager to share their views on parent involvement. The final focus group meeting was held at a school. Although there was a contrast and diversity among the participants, the meeting was very focused and informative. All the focus group meetings were lively, conversational, and demonstrative of Latino culture.

Table 3

Focus Group Participants' Profiles

NO.	Names	Country of Origin	Number of Years in the US	Child's grade in School	Participant's School Completion
1	Mary	Mexico	4	3	6
	Raul	Mexico	5	3	No recall
	Sarah	Columbia	5	3	Some college
2	Rosa	Mexico	10	3	9
	Joseline	Mexico	5	3	6
	Ivana	Mexico	4	PreK	College
	Samuel	Mexico	6	2	9
3	Pedro	Costa Rica	7	K	Some College
	Vernita	Peru	11	5	High school
	Jasmine	Ecuador	13	3	Some college

Findings

Critical race theory emphasizes the need for "counterstorytelling" in order to make current and future citizens aware of the inequities that exist to make changes and transform society (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1999). The purpose of critical race theory is to study how race, racism, and power interact to the advantage of some and the disadvantage of others (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001) and use the information to make critical societal changes. Since schools are a microcosm of society, many counterstories exist within the school communities, and have not been told. Parents and families of students who do not represent the dominant Anglo culture have stories to tell about their experiences in schools.

In the current study, the researcher noticed several themes emerge that provided answers to the research questions. The conceptual map (see Figure 1) provides the themes identified for the overarching research question as well as for the four sub-questions. Many of the themes reflected the findings in the literature and some deviated from them. The themes, although general in value, seemed specific to the new immigrants to the region as their experiences shared similarities with the older immigrants yet had a few differences as well. The interviews, observations, and focus group meetings provided a wealth of answers to the research questions.

Figure 1

Conceptual Map of Emergent Themes

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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│              PERCEPTION OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT (PI)                    │
│                                                                       │
│                   • Responsibility as a parent                        │
│                    • Pride in being a parent                          │
│                      • Hope for the future                            │
│                                                                       │
│                                                                       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
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IMPACT OF PI	BARRIERS TO PI	FACILITATORS OF PI	ROLE AT HOME
• Future success	• Language	• Value of education	• Nurture
• Learning	• Lack of education	• Satisfaction with schools	• Cultural preserver
• Trust	• Isolation		
• Relationship	• Fear		
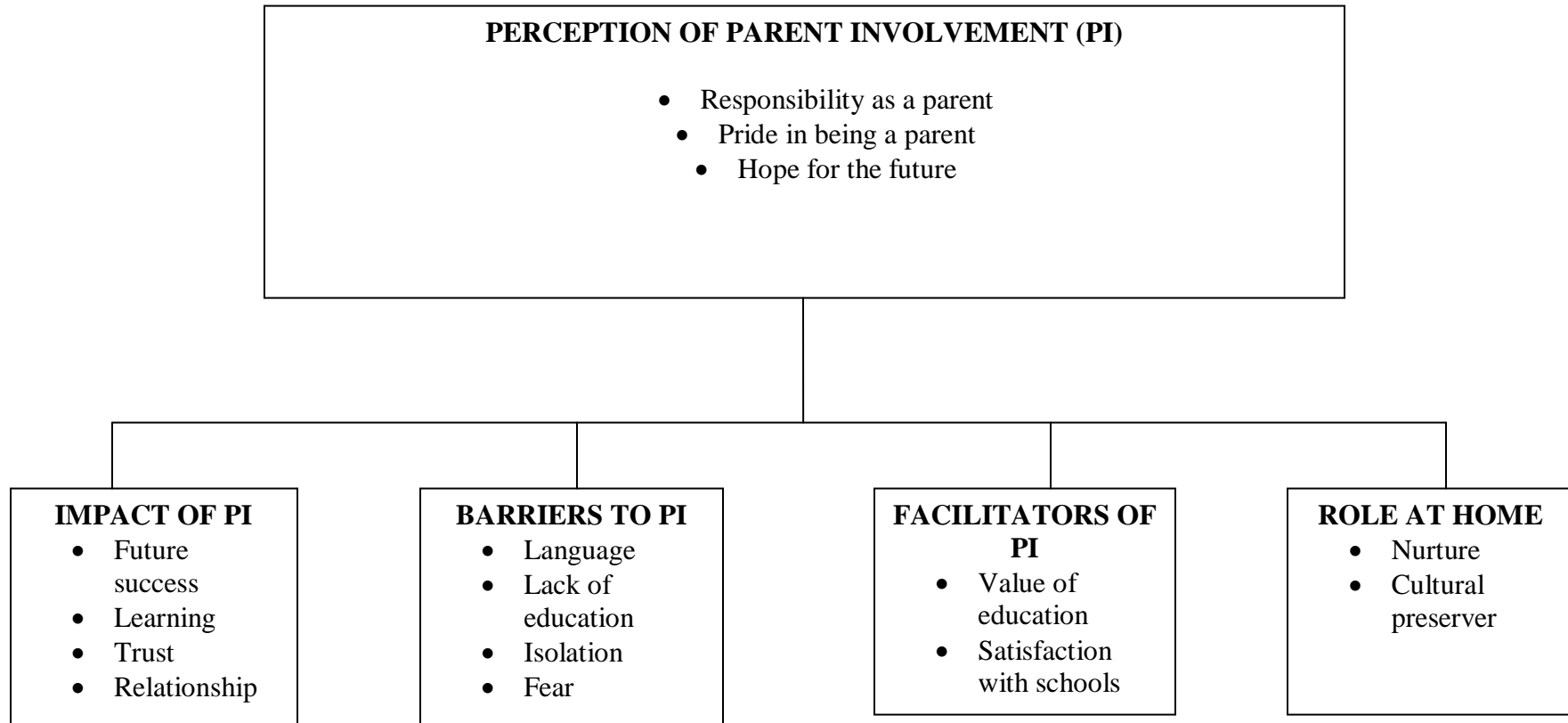
Impact of Parent Involvement

There is no doubt that parent involvement impacts the students and their learning. However, the researcher in the current study was interested in seeing if parent involvement impacted the parents as well as the students and how it did so. The researcher saw two themes emerge from the question on the impact of parent involvement. The first theme was the more common one, and it was about the future in terms of gainful employment and quality of life. The second theme, predominant among fathers, was about the relationship between parent and child, and was different from what the literature revealed. The responses addressing the first theme of student success, elicited varied answers such as one from Carmen, "*Educación, es como algo para supéranos, para ser más mejores en la vida y tener una buena carrera y mejor éxito.*" It's something we need to improve and to be better in life and to have a good career and success." Maria, mentioned the importance of being in school every day when she considered the impact of her involvement, "*Que tengan buenas calificaciones, por eso no me gusta que falten a la escuela, para que tengan buenas notas.*" "…That they have good grades, that's why I don't like them to miss school, so that they can have good grades." Jasmine, at her focus group meeting said that her involvement impacted her children's future. She said, "They can do whatever they wanna do, but be the best at it; be a professional, just be up here (she held her hand over her head), because this is the best country to do it." Pedro, also at the same focus group meeting, was excited for what the future held for his son, "This generation is gonna be completely different than my generation or other generations. We want them to take advantage of everything." José, a parent who spoke some English believed that the greatest impact of parent involvement

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was that he suffered hardships to bring his family to the United States. "Now, we are here, we have the chance to send them to school, might as well use it, as long as everything is OK, considering everything that is going on, that's my focus." José was referring to the opportunities available in the U.S., but addressed his concerns about the new immigration law in Georgia. Ivana highlighted José's sentiment by saying, "*Que ellos puedan crecer, que ellos se puedan desarrollar aunque este no es su país, pero que lo puedan hacer libremente sin problemas, sin tabúes.*" "We want them to grow up fine, with good development even if this is not their homeland, we want them to do that freely without any problem, without any taboo." The researcher noticed that Ivana addressed the issue of their immigrant status as well as spoke as a collective unit on behalf of all Latino parents and children.

The second theme addressed the relationship aspect of parent involvement. It addressed its impact on the parent as mentioned by Pedro, "To me, more than I realize – yes, by now he feels proud, more when he sees me." Juan, who has been in the US the longest among all the participants in the study, felt that his involvement would have long-term benefits for his children "…they (the children) would have a better life, later, not now, because they wanna say, 'Oh, my dad teach me everything that that he know, what he learned.' And that's what I try to teach them." It was obvious that he wanted his children to feel proud of the job he had done as a father. Carmen, in spite of her negative experiences, felt that it was important for the children to know that the parents were supportive and always there for them. Parents' responses highlighted that the impact of parent involvement had far reaching implication for parents and students.

However, Carmen did feel that her involvement with the children might have a negative impact. When asked about the impact of parent involvement, she said, "*Pues a veces yo creo que no, que yo misma les hago daño porque me siento triste a veces.*" "Sometimes I think it (parent involvement) won't (help), I feel that I'm harming them because I feel sad." Carmen responded in this manner because she felt as if the communication between school and home was lacking. She mentioned that the school did send notices home about events that were taking place, but they all happened during the day when she needed to work. Also, when she did go to school, she could not communicate because there were no translators available, *"Porque no hay un desenvolvimiento tranquilo entre maestros, por ejemplo si no hay alguien que nos traduzca, no."* "Yes, because it's not an easy process with the teachers, there is no one that translates to us." However, Carmen, in spite of her experiences, believed that parent involvement did have positive effects when she said, *"Pues que ellos sientan confianza, que uno los apoya y que uno está con ellos."* 'That they (the children) feel confidence, that they feel you support them and that you are there for them." Carmen reinforced the feeling of hope and determination in spite of the barriers that may exist in the way.

Barriers to School Involvement

Parents have often cited barriers to include lack of time, transportation, childcare, or job restrictions, preventing them from coming to the school for conferences or to attend events. Four significant themes emerged as the participants responded to the question about the barriers they faced as they tried to be involved in their child's schooling: language and communication; lack of education; isolation; and fear.

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The first theme was about language and communication. Language barriers for the participants are literal as well as psychological. Mary referred to the language barrier as a "wall" between her and the school. What was interesting was that even parents who spoke English, such as Pedro, Juan, Jasmine, or Sarah, having either learned it in their home country or having acquired the language after they moved here, thought language was a barrier. They thought so, because they felt that there was a stereotypical reaction by teachers based on external appearances.

When asked about her biggest barrier, Maria, felt badly that she did not know the English language because she could not help her child do her homework, *"La terea de inglés porque yo no sé ingles y para poder ayudarlos cuando ellos me preguntan, - 'mama, ¿qué tengo que hacer aquí?' Y yo no comprendo lo que dice allí. Eso es algo muy difícil para mí."* "The English homework because I don't know English and to be able to help them when they ask me – 'mom, what do I have to do here?' And I don't understand what it says there. That's something difficult for me."

The psychological toll of not speaking the language had a greater hold some of the parents. One parent mentioned an incident at school where she felt invisible. Carmen said, *"Una vez fui a la escuela di mi hija porque se hizo tarde y fui ahí a la puerta del salon di mi hija para dar los Buenos días y estuve 5 minutos ahí en la puerta y la maestro no me atendió."* "One day I attended my daughter's school because she was late and I went to the teacher's classroom I said good morning and I was there for about five minutes and the teacher didn't even approach me." This created a negative feeling for Carmen.

College educated Ivana, in a focus group meeting mentioned a similar feeling for her, "*pero a veces estoy yo ahí siento, yo he sentido personalmente como los papas de otros niños, no hay mucha aceptación en mi caso, precisamente porque en la escuela donde yo estoy en hay muy poquitos hispanos.*" "But sometimes I am there and I feel how other parents don't accept me because there are very few Hispanics." She went on to say that the non-Latino parents were nice to her, smiled at her, but never asked her for an opinion nor included her in the conversation. The researcher found this interesting as this particular parent seemed very confident, was very forthcoming, receptive, and articulate during the focus group interview.

Another interesting angle on the language barrier came from Jasmine who moved to the United States when her older daughter, who is now in college, was five years old. When she started school, the teachers told Jasmine at a conference that her daughter was not smart. This remark made Jasmine very angry. In her best English she told the researcher, "Now, she's smart. Only thing, she don't speak English. So, from that day until now, it's hard for me, year by year, trying to explain [to] her…don't let it stop you. She bring up her grades, until she got the letter for perseverance for good grades. Then she was the teacher's helper!" Her passion and confidence in her child helped her overcome the odds that a language barrier might cause.

The second theme regarding a significant barrier was the lack of education in their home country. Mary particularly mentioned that she understood the "knowledge" barrier because, growing up in Mexico, she noticed that her mother, who lacked formal education, could not communicate with her teachers, even though they spoke a common language. José mentioned that he wished he had learned more, but he is now learning

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along with his children. Carlos, who works in construction now, only has a second grade education from Mexico. He tries to help his son with his homework, but is limited in his capacity. Carlos said he spent six years in first grade, and was finally sent to second grade. When asked about the importance of an education, he said, *"Yo pienso que sería mucho porque a veces uno trabaja muy duro, a veces. Hay días que uno llega…a veces me arrepiento por qué no estudié. Mi papa me mandaba, pero un poco la cabeza no me ayudó, un poco de que ya, pues, ya dejé, después empecé a ganar dinero, me empezó a gustar…"* "I would say, it means a lot to me because sometimes, I work too hard. Some days I come home saying to myself, why didn't I study? My father used to send me to school; he forced us to go to school and would even spank me if I didn't want to go. But, I wasn't too smart and well, I started making money and started liking that." Parents regretted that they did not complete their schooling, but were willing to "study" alongside their children to pick up on the missed opportunity.

The third theme that emerged as a barrier in the interviews and the focus group meetings was that of isolation. Many of the parents (7 out of 11 interview participants) felt as if they were alone, without a family and community network to help provide the best opportunities for their children. Some parents did not have the time, because of their work schedules, to network and interact with other parents. Other families had moved recently to Georgia because of employment opportunities. Additionally, many of the families had only recently moved to the United States. They had left their families and friends behind to try to make a living and provide a future for their children. Guadalupe, who had recently moved from Alabama said, *"Pues, ahorita el cambio que hicimos de Alabama, pues sí, la verdad nos sentimos un poco solos porque allá estaban todos*

nuestras amistades de la iglesia, de la escuela, de la fiestas que eran cada ochos días,

cada fin de semana y aqui casi no hay mucha gente" "Therefore, right now the change

we just made from Alabama, then yes, the truth is we feel a bit alone because there were

all our friends from church, school, there were fiestas every eight days, every weekend,

and here there are almost no people." Some of the parents (8 out of 21 participants) were

not sure what networks existed for Latinos in the area, and felt isolated.

However, Sarah did reach out to other Latino families within the school

community to talk about their experiences with schools. She commented on the need to

network, but also to keep in mind what is best for your child and your situation. She said,

"Por ejemplo, que unos dicen que es una escuela es mejor que la otra y yo le digo que no

porque ahí depende de los niños de cómo se desenvuelvan en las escuela. Pues, el que

sale, sale adelante y el que no, pues ahí se queda." For example, some say that some

schools are better than others and I say that it all depends on how a child develops in

school. And so, those that want to get ahead will succeed and those who don't will stay

behind." This parent's experience with building social networks reinforced the need for

her to stay involved with her child and keep in mind the specific needs of her child.

Perhaps the most significant and topical theme that emerged as a barrier was fear.

Fear created a formidable barrier for many parents, some who mentioned it and some

others who were afraid to even broach the subject of the new immigration bill in Georgia.

Guadalupe mentioned that she was afraid to go to school for fear that the police would

pull her over and deport her. Juan mentioned that he has several Latino friends with

children who have legal documents in secure locations stating who their children should

be placed with in case the police arrested the parents. Carmen mentioned that she was

asked to produce a social security card for her son if she wanted him to go to school. She was aware that the law stated that schools could not mandate students to provide social security numbers, and was concerned that the school was trying to intimidate her. Sylvia commented on the new immigration law by comparing it to what the African Americans went through in the past. She said, "*Sí, porque aunque uno sea ilegal, yo creo que somos humanos, y bueno, por la historia de aquí, cuando hubo la abolición de la esclavitud siento que estamos pasando lo mismo que pasaron los morenos.*" Yes, because even though we are illegal I say we're still human beings and well, it's just like the abolition of slavery, I feel that we're going through the same thing that the African-Americans went through." She completed her thought by saying, *"El día que uno muere par air para arriba o para abajo no nos van a pedir seguro social, una tarjeta, un ID."* "When you die, whether you are in heaven or hell, no one is going to ask you for a social security number, a card, any identification." Sylvia's tone during this comment was emphatic and powerful. Pedro, a business owner, said that many Latino's who were here legally, were of the illegal mindset, because of the fear of the new law. This statement was very significant, because it meant that legal immigrants were also afraid of authority even though they had nothing to fear. Critical race theory does bring to light the fact that minorities and immigrant groups are forced to live like second class citizens even though the law allows them the same rights and privileges as any other citizen, and is supposed to be "colorblind."

Facilitators of Parent Involvement

As the researcher spoke and interacted with the parents in the interviews and in the focus group meetings, a recurring theme that that emerged was that of hope. The

researcher believed that hope was a facilitator for parent involvement because it was something that they could look forward to. Many of the parents (13 out of 21 participants) repeated that they were happy to be in the United States, where there were numerous opportunities for their children, and that their children could be "somebody." Maria spoke of how her children wanted to go back to Mexico to be with their family, but she told her children that *"En nuestra época, cuando éramos niños necesitábamos zapatos par air a la escuela. Íbamos aún con zapatos rotos. Sufrimos en muchos aspectos, con relación a la comida…en todo, pasamos por muchos sufrimientos. Ahora ellos quieren volver a estudiar allá, pero yo tengo miedo de que vayan a sufrir, ¿me entiende?* "In our time, when we were kids, we needed shoes to go to school. We used to go to school even with worn-out shoes. We suffered in many ways, regarding food…everything, we went through a lot of suffering. Now, they want to go there to study there, but I'm afraid because they are going to suffer, do you understand?" She seemed certain that the children should remain in the U.S. Maria thought that her children did not need to be exposed to the consequences of moving back to Mexico.

Ivan, who works in construction, takes his son with him to work, to show him what it would be like if he didn't go to school. *"Por ejemplo, ahorita que está de vacaciones el niño, me lo estoy (*says his name*) conmigo al trabajo para que él vea qué es lo…si no va estudiar, qué es lo que le espera."* "For example, right now it is vacation; I take my child with me to work to enable him to see what it is like…if he is not going to study, what is waiting for you." Also, this parent happened to be doing construction work on a college campus, and felt that by taking his son there, he could inspire his son to want to go to college and be educated. The parents unanimously wanted their children to make

the best use of the opportunities available to them in the United States and remained hopeful that their children's life would be better that their own.

Besides the intrinsic rewards to parent involvement, most parents were pleased with their children's schools and the role the teachers played in educating them. Carlos, Guadalupe, Juanita and Lisa praised the teachers for making attempts to contact them by notices sent home or by telephone. Both Mary and Sarah, at the first focus group meeting were very appreciative of their child's classroom teacher. Many schools made interpreters available for the parents when they came in for conferences. Those that did not had a harder time communicating with the parents, but made attempts to do so. Carlos, who has a child with a disability, was pleased with the services his son was receiving. He said that he went to parent conferences where an interpreter was always available and where the school gave him concrete suggestions on how to help his son at home. They even arranged for his son to attend summer school so that he would not lose the gains he had made during the year. Maria specifically mentioned that she appreciated that the teachers constantly supervised the children, even on the playground. She mentioned her experience in Mexico where they would have long recess and teachers would just let the kids run around and not supervise them. Parents also appreciated the fact that teachers motivated the students by giving them stickers, small toys, or pencils when they did well. Except for two parents, Carmen and Ivana, who had negative experiences with the schools, the rest spoke positively about the schools their children attended.

Role of Latino Parents at Home

Because of the barriers that exist in the way of parents from going to school and involving themselves, their role at home is of immense importance. The researcher noticed two themes emerge in response to the question of parental involvement at home: nurturing and pride in heritage.

The parents were supportive, nurturing, and loving. Maria, Lisa and Bernita spoke of the structure they had in place at home, where they made sure that the children ate nutritious food, got play time for good health, and were comfortable in their homes. Many parents talked about making self-sacrifices for the sake of their children. Jasmine was very particular about limiting TV time for her children, and making sure that they read a lot. Almost all the parents talked about how they wanted their children not to worry about anything expect to study well and do well academically.

Parents also spoke about their role as the first teacher in the life of the child. Sarah said, "*Pues yo pienso que la educación, primeros, es en la casa, ósea en el colegio uno no puede esperar traer a los niños y que aquí lo vayan a educan, no uno los educa en la casa y aquí van a aprender a socializarse y lo que en es sí, pues las materias. Pero la educación comienza en la casa.*" "First of all, I think the education comes from the home, so in school we can't expect to bring our kids to the school so they would fully educate them, no, we give them the education and then after that they will learn to socialize with other peers and get the academic education, but the education begins at home." This connects with the Latino concept of *educación* that includes manners and respect and morals. As a contrast, Ivana, who also believed that parents are the first teachers and schools are resources, felt as if the school did not think so. She said, "*Y*

ellos me han hecho sentir que son como los primeros, pero realmente ellos son los que

nos ayudan a nosotros. Porque ellos tienen los programas de educación, todo, pero

nosotros a veces estamos como que aislados, y creemos que no tenemos parte, pero

nosotros somos los principales que debemos ayudar a nuestros hijos y estar al

pendiente." "I think that the school expects that we as parents be the first ones in being

responsible for helping the child. And they have made me feel like they are the first, but

in reality they should be there to help us, because they have the educational programs, but

we are sometimes isolated and we believe that we are not part of it, but we are the first

people that should be helping our children." The researcher felt that she attributed this to

the fact that they were deficient in the "knowledge" needed for school because they were

linguistically and culturally different from the school.

Added to this, their role also included that of cultural preserver. Most of the

parents (17 out of 21 participants) emphasized that they wanted their children to be

bilingual, to be proud of their heritage, and to always remember their roots. Ivana was

concerned that her child might want to "become American" just so he could fit in. She

said that her son, who was born in Mexico, told his classmates that he was born in the

United States. She said, *"Entonces eso para mí es una luz, es un foco de que yo debo de*

sembrar en mi hijo la nacionalidad como algo que él se sienta seguro y orgulloso,

porque quizás mienta para no sentirse menos por las escuela donde está que muy

disciplinada y muy elitista porque es la verdad." "So that for me is a light, it is a focal

point that I should instill in my child the nationality where he feels safe and proud.

Because he is probably lying to feel better about himself, because of the school where he

goes to, which is very disciplined and elitist to say the truth." Her interpretation of her

son's dissonance was that she had to reinforce cultural pride in him, and make him comfortable about being a Latino in America.

Many parents spoke about making sure that they cooked food from their home country, showed their children pictures of their home and the different sights in the country, talked about their life at home, growing up, and their families. Rosa mentioned that she took her son to a Latino festival and witnessed a Mariachi band play. Her son was very excited to see the band and asked her questions about how it was in Mexico. He even expressed a desire to go back and see a "real" Mariachi band in Mexico. Vernita, from Peru, added, "*Pero en sí, como nosotros tenemos otras costumbres y entonces no son igual, pero que a ella no le afecten, que no se sienta como excluida por nuestra diferencia de culturas.*" "She was born here but we have other customs which are not the same, we don't want her to be affected because of this and I don't want her to feel segregated because of the cultural differences." The act of balancing the home culture as well as assimilating into the mainstream culture was a delicate one for this parent. Pedro spoke proudly of the heritage his son had inherited when he said, "So it will be interesting, because when people ask him, so where are you from, he's gonna be like, well, I'm American, but my dad is Costa Rican and my mom is Puerto Rican. I mean, I can see that picture already." The researcher noted the contrast between his optimistic pride in the heritage that his son would be proud to claim as his own and the comment made by Ivana who felt that she needed to inculcate that pride in her son.

Additionally, many of the parents expressed nostalgia as they spoke about their home countries. Ivan said that he felt as if he had more freedom growing up in Mexico compared to his children growing up in the United States. When asked if he spoke with

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his children about his life in Mexico, he replied, "*Sí, yo le digo al niño que mi infancia no la cambiaría por la infancia de ellos, porque ellos solo están encerrados aquí, y en México no.*" "Yes, I tell the children that my childhood is different from theirs because they are locked here, and in Mexico, not." His statement hinted at the fear that Latino immigrants felt being in the U.S. Some of the parents seemed nostalgic as they spoke of the celebrations and traditions in their home countries. But they were quick to add that their decision to come to the United States, in spite of the hardships faced to do so, was the best one for their children.

Latino Perceptions of Parent Involvement

In order to understand the current perspectives of parent involvement of the participants, the researcher believed that it was important to understand how they perceived their own parents' level of involvement. Therefore, the researcher asked the participants to recall their school years and how their parents involved themselves. The answers were as varied as the participants' themselves. Two major themes emerged as the participants recalled their growing years with their parents; they were survival and knowledge about schooling in some instances or lack thereof in others.

Juan, from Mexico, said that if the child did not want to go to school, it was an advantage for the parents, because he could go to work, earn money, and supplement income for the family. He added that his family was very poor, and that it was more important to have a roof over their heads and food to eat than for the children to go to school. Maria also said that her parents did not seem very involved, but she added, "*Ahora yo trata de darles todo lo que necesitan,y aunque mis padres querían hacer lo mismo, no tenían los medios para darnos lo que necesitábamos*" "Now, I try to give

them all they need and although my parents wanted to do the same, they didn't have the means to give us what we needed." She seemed to understand her parents' plight and sympathize with them. On the other hand, Pedro, who is from Costa Rica, said, "Well, it was all mom. Thank goodness for moms, they always are involved. Mom, she was always involved, kind of, you know, not full time involved, but she was in all the meetings, presentations, talent shows, graduations, and stuff like that. It was always nice to see that." He added that his father did not have the time to come to school and participate, but was the disciplinarian and added that he was afraid of his 38-size belt! Interestingly, Pedro was most vocal about the role of a dad in a child's education, and believed strongly that both parents needed to take an active role in their children's life both in school and at home.

At the first focus group meeting, although the two female participants were friends because their children were friends, there seemed to be a stark contrast between them. Mary, who was from Mexico, remembers her mom lacking the educational skills to help her with her school work. She added that she was a good mom but was limited in her capabilities. Sarah, who was from Colombia, said, "*Mi mamá siempre me ayudaba muchísimo o estaba pendiente de mí, de mis tareas, de mi uniforme, de que limpiara mis zapatos, de que tuviera mi maletín ordenado, de meterme en las actividades de la escuela de baile, de cosas, en todo, muy buena mamá.*" "My mother always helped me a lot; she always took care of me with my homework, with my uniform, she always made sure I had clean shoes and my backpack in order and she always tried to send me to the school activities, for example dancing class at school or contests, she was a very good mom."

They had created their own network and learned from each other because now that they are both in the United States, their level of involvement with their children is the same.

Although the participants in the current study are men and women from various backgrounds, with varied life experiences, and varied English skills, the overwhelming response to the question of what parent involvement meant to them was the same. The main theme to emerge from the question of their involvement was that of responsibility of being a parent and being involved with their children, and pride in having and meeting that responsibility. Latino culture defines the words pride and responsibility differently from the Anglo culture to include pride of family and responsibility beyond school and home. The other themes that emerged were that of trust and success.

They all knew that their involvement with their children was vital for the success of their children. Many responded saying that it was important to provide homework help, communicate with the teacher, make sure that the children are respectful and obedient, and that they represent their home well. In a focus group meeting Ivana said, *"Yo creo que como todo padre siempre queremos que nuestros hijos sean mejores que nosotros. Que tengan una preparación mejor que la que nosotros tuvimos. El estar aquí en este país ya es una ganancia. Es un punto a su favor de ellos, porque ellos pueden tener un mejor futuro, una mejor preparación.* "Like all parents I want for my children to have better preparation than what we had. Being here in this country is already an advantage. It is a point in their favor because they can have a better future and preparation." She felt that as an involved parent, she created a setting for her child to succeed. All of the parents in the focus group agreed with her and Joseline added, *"Yo*

creo que tiene mucho que ver la visión de los padres y a veces sembrarle a los hijos." "I think the parents' vision has a lot to do with it and, instill that in the child."

Another prominent theme emerged as the parents responded to their perception of involvement. The researcher observed that many parents of younger children learned with their child. They created a "level field of learning" at home and established a partnership with their child. Sylvia, whose son is only in first grade, said, *"Pero mi hijo es el que me traduce. Lo estoy enseñando a que me tiene que traducir."* " But my son is the one who translates for me. I'm showing him how to translate for me." On the other hand, parents of older children specifically mentioned that they trusted their children. They felt that they had done their part in instilling the values of hard work and a love for learning, and now they trusted their child to do the right thing. Many of the parents used their own child as interpreters when they went in to conference with the teacher. Vernita had a daughter in middle school and one in fifth grade, and she would use the middle school student when she met with the elementary teachers and the elementary school student when she met with the middle school teachers as her translators.

However, Vernita also said, *"Ella es la única que ella sola estudia, ella sola hace su tarea, todo."* "She does, she studies on her own. She does her tasks, all of it." *"Yo confió en ella. Desde niña siempre ha salido muy bien."* "I trust her all the time since she's always a good student." She held high expectations for her child and was confident that she would meet them.

Yet another theme that emerged in response to parents' perception of involvement was that of being the best that they could be. Many parents knew the value of education as they had lived the experience of having to work extra hard to make a living because of

the lack of education. Even so, the parents did not say that they wanted their children to be doctors or engineers or lawyers, they wanted them to be the best at whatever their chosen career might be. Ivana talked about the diverse career plans of her son, *"En el caso de mi hijo el más grande, él dice que quiere ser dentista, a veces me dice que quiere ser un buzo. A veces los niños tienen ideas en la menta pero como le digo, depende de la preparación."* "My oldest son wants to be a dentist, sometimes he wants to be a diver. Sometimes kids have ideas in their head, but it depends on the preparation." For this parent, it did not matter what the career choice was, it mattered that he prepare himself and be good at it.

In addition to being the best they could be, many parents emphasized that they wanted their children to be good people, respectful and followers of the law. In one of the interviews Lisa, who is very involved with her children and their schooling, mentioned, *"En general, pues ayudarles…o sea, explicarles cómo es la vida, que tienen que respetar a las demás gente."* "In general, I explain to them how life is, and that they have to respect other people." Her husband, Ivan, who also participated in the interview, added, *"Que acaben una carrera buena, que sean buenos hijos y buenos hombres en la vida."* "That you finish a career, be good children and good people." This further reinforced the Latino value of *educación* that included respect, duty, and kindness.

For Pedro, who is from Costa Rica, it was important to emphasize the role of the father in the involvement of the child. He said that he grew up in a home where only his mother was involved in his schooling, and that he wants to change that as he raises his children in the United States. He said that expected his children to explore the

opportunities available to them, and that he would do all he could as a parent to provide the best educational opportunities for them.

Throughout the interviews and focus group meetings, the parents expressed deep concerns about the future of their children, but had great hope for them as they had taken the most important step for their future by bringing them to the United States. They knew that barriers existed in their way, but also knew that there were ways to overcome the barriers and strive for success.

Chapter Summary

In order to foster success for students, it is important to build relationships and trust with their families. More and more of the schools are being populated by students from increasingly diverse backgrounds, speaking different languages, and following different customs. Many of these students are Latino immigrants and are in poverty. Several of them have suffered severe hardships to get here. Cookie cutter parent involvement strategies do not work in these instances. It is important for schools to reach out to parents, identify their strengths, and build on them. There are many examples of meaningful partnerships between school and home all across the United States. Since the school district under study has only recently experienced a demographic shift to include Latino families, the researcher's interest lay in understanding the Latino parents' perspectives on involvement in school and at home. Based on the responses from the participants, positive steps were being made by several schools to help the families who needed the help.

The participants in the study came from various countries with various backgrounds and experiences. However, they all were rooted in the conviction that an

education would help their children forge ahead in this country and experience success. They believed that their involvement with their child would create a more meaningful relationship between parent and child. However, they knew that barriers existed in their way.

The single most formidable barrier that lay in the way for Latino immigrant parents was that of language and communication. Added to this was the fact that several parents were not formally educated, even in their home country. This created psychological barriers as well. Because of the fact that many of these immigrant families were new to the area, they experienced fear and isolation in their new setting. This was not caused by schools, but because of the new immigration law in Georgia. The parents were unsure as to the reach and enforcement of the law, and were not willing to take a chance. They knew that they would do what they could to keep their children and families safe, even if it meant that they remained in their homes. Even parents who were here for years, who were legal residents of the United States, feared the law. They felt that, even though the law was supposedly on their side, they were not safe. Additionally, because the Latino community in the district under study is relatively new and scattered around the city, not many systems are in place to help families network with each other.

When considering the facilitators of parent involvement, many parents spoke about hope for a better future. They knew that if they provided the setting for success for their children, they were bound to have a better future. Pride in their culture and heritage also came though during the conversations. Latino immigrant families wanted their children to remain bilingual and feel proud of their heritage.

Finally, the overarching theme uncovered during the interviews and the focus group meetings was that of responsibility and pride. Parents revealed that they were willing to do what it took to help their child be successful, not only academically but also in life. Latino parents and children formed a trusting bond with each other and parents sought to establish a trust with the school community as well. Some parents were able to establish close bonds with the school and the teachers, while others were not able to do so. In spite of it all, the parents seemed unanimously positive about what the future held for their children. Although they had fears and trepidations along the way, they were hopeful and knew that they could overcome the obstacles.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Summary

"We must keep the perspective that people are experts on their own lives. There are certainly aspects of the outside world of which they may not be aware, but they can be the only authentic chroniclers of their own experience. We must not be too quick to deny their interpretations, or accuse them of 'false consciousness'." Lisa Delpit

Providing the best resources and opportunities for the students to experience success in schools is a vision established by school districts all over the country. But, these resources and opportunities may not be the same for all students and the reality may be different from the vision (Nieto, 2005). When it comes to school in urban areas, where the population often consists of minority students or students from poverty, the statistics are alarming. There are high grade retentions, drop-out rates, and non-completion of schooling (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2010). This is even more severe for students who are English Language Learners and/or immigrants (Marschall, 2006). Research has indicated that parent involvement is a crucial factor that determines student success (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Barnard, 2004; Jeynes, 2005). According to Lott (2001), many teachers and administrators believe that low-income parents do not value schooling, seem apathetic, and do not help their children with school work, and this belief transmits itself to the parents who in turn feel less welcome in schools and relegated to the sidelines. Gandara (2010) likened the situation for Latino students to a "crisis" (p.47). She attributed this crisis to poverty, lack of parental education, and segregated schools for Latino students.

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As immigration trends began to shift in the United States, more and more Latino families began to arrive in new destinations such as North Carolina, Alabama, and Georgia (Census, 2010; Wainer, 2004). Latinos who had been in the United States and new immigrants, encouraged by job opportunities in the South, made their homes in areas of the country where lately there had been a low incidence of immigrants and almost all historical debates about race and racial inequities concerned only black and white populations (Beck & Allexsaht-Snider, 2002). The introduction of the new Latino faces in the South added a new dimension to the ongoing debate about race and racial issues. During the latest economic downturn, long standing anti-immigrant sentiments became amplified and resonated with increasing number of voters - forcing politicians to look at the existing immigration laws and modifying them to make it very difficult for undocumented workers from Mexico and Central or South America to continue living in the southern United States. Nevertheless, immigrant Latinos have made their homes in these new destinations, their children are attending schools there, and they need the opportunity to be educated. Critical race theory encourages the use of "voice" by allowing these parents to share their experiences with parent involvement at the schools. Their stories are important and need to be heard by the educational community so that changes and accommodations can be made in order to create a climate of academic achievement for the students.

The researcher, who works in one such new destination city for Latinos, a large urban school district in Georgia, wanted to get the perspectives of a cross-section of Latino parents who sent their elementary children to one of the three English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) schools or neighborhood schools with a large Latino

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population. The researcher's interest lay in the area of parent involvement, its barriers, its facilitators, and its impact. Using the help of a translator, the researcher sent letters in English and Spanish to Latino parents in the three ESOL schools and to two additional schools with a reasonably large Latino population. The letters introduced the researcher, addressed the area of research, and included an invitation to participate in interviews and focus group meetings. From the three hundred letters that were disseminated, twenty five were returned expressing an interest to participate. Out of the twenty five, eleven interviews and three focus group meetings were set up. The results of the conversations corroborated many of the identified barriers and facilitators in the literature as well as revealed new information that were unique or specific to the area.

Analysis of Research Findings

Parents everywhere want nothing short of the best for their children (De Gaetano, 2007). Privileged and mainstream parents have the resources and the wherewithal to find the best opportunities for their children. Usually, their cultural norms are the dominant norms in the United States, are Eurocentric, and reflect that of the school's (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). However, there are the other parents, who, for various reasons, are not able to access this information or these opportunities for their children, even though they would want nothing more than to do so. These parents and families tend to be in poverty, usually minority or immigrants (Peterson & Ladky, 2007). Teachers and administrators mostly represent the dominant class, and many of them have stereotypical ideas of minority or immigrant families (Abrams & Gibbs). As patterns of immigration seem to be changing in the United States, more Latino families have been moving in to areas of the country where the immigrant population has been until now, minimal. Nevertheless,

these immigrant families settle in their new destinations, and how they and their children experience schooling is the new frontier of educational research.

The researcher was interested in understanding the perspectives of Latino immigrant parents of elementary school children. As data were analyzed, the researcher found several interesting themes emerge.

The impact of parent involvement affects not only the children, in terms of academic achievement; it also affects the parents in terms of increasing their own language skills and their relationship with the children (Ladky & Peterson, 2008). Added to this, obvious involvement such as volunteering in schools and attending school events, improves the relationship and trust between parent and teachers (Jesse, Davis, & Pokorny, 2004; Zarate, 2007). In the current study, the researcher noticed that many of the parents were learning to read and write English with their children, and using the children as their translators. Being involved with the children and their school work helped the parents better their own skills. The second theme that emerged in this study was the level of trust between parent and child. Parents depended on their children to translate for them, to do their work, and to be honest about whatever happened at school. Parents who addressed the trust issue were unanimously trusting of their children.

Barriers to parent involvement included language, lack of transportation, lack of communication, work schedule conflicts, and childcare issues, all of which had been identified in the literature. However, in this new destination city in Georgia, new immigration laws and its repercussions was yet another barrier to many Latino families. There was a sense of fear among the parents, as many were unsure of how the law would affect them. Also, many families remained isolated, without the support of a network to

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turn to with questions or concerns. Even though many of the families were here legally, they did not trust that the system would work fairly for them.

As the parents expressed their opinions on the facilitators of parent involvement, the overarching theme that emerged was the value of education. No matter where they were from or what their educational level was the parents knew that education was the only way for their children to make a good life for themselves, to be "somebody." Yet, as if by contradiction, the researcher noticed that many parents remained isolated, did not attempt to network with other parents, and seemed content with the way things were at school. However, a few parents who were dissatisfied with the level of interaction between school and home, did reach out to resources in the school and in the community, but were still not pleased with the outcome.

The researcher was pleased to have several fathers participate in the study. The general trend in Latino homes tend toward gender specific traditional parenting roles (Bohon, MacPherson, & Atiles, 2005). Mothers are the ones who handle the home and school, and fathers are the breadwinners. However, the researcher noticed a departure from the norm among the fathers who participated in this study. Almost unanimously, the fathers saw the value of being involved with their children as relationship building. The fathers wanted their children to be proud of them; they wanted to have a bi-directional relationship with their children, something that they had not experienced with their fathers. Additionally, they wanted to have a good relationship with the schools. They wanted their children's teachers to know that they were supporting their children as a family, emphasizing the Latino value of family and collectivism (Zarate, 2007).

When addressing perceptions of parent involvement, the researcher uncovered a few common themes as well as some that seemed new. Nearly all the parents (18 out of 21) addressed the fact that it was their responsibility to be involved in their child's education. There was no choice in the matter. They accepted the responsibility, and in spite of the barriers that existed, they did their best to meet it. However, Carmen did mention that she was worried that her being involved might actually harm her child. She was concerned that the teachers might have a negative perception of her because she could not attend all the school events, and that might impact her children. She was self-conscious of the fact that she did not speak English, and had felt disrespected when she went to school. All the parents in the study had a very definite opinion of their role as an involved parent, some of which was formed by their upbringing and some of which despite their upbringing.

The other overwhelming theme to emerge from the question of perception of parent involvement was that of hope. Many of these young families immigrated to the new destination areas hoping to provide a better life for their children. The saw opportunities and grabbed them. However, they were faced with barriers both physical as well as psychological. Through all of it, these families remained determined, hopeful that their sacrifices would be worth it for the sake of their children and their future.

Discussion

The ultimate goal of parent involvement, with all of its dimensions, is to create the setting for academic and future success for all students (Warren, et al, 2009). According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler model of parent involvement, level 1 in the model addresses three major components. The first component is what parents consider as their

role as a parent. The next component is their belief that they can make a difference for their child, and the final component is the opportunities they have to do so from the school and from the student (Walker, Wilkins, Dellaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005).

The school district under study places family involvement as a top priority in its goals by providing outreach to families. Additionally, many of the schools in the district are Title I schools that have a federal mandate to include parents in all aspects of schooling. As this district continues to experience growth, especially in its Latino enrollment, a review of the policies and goals is needed in order to serve its changing demographics.

Concepts of parent involvement vary depending on who is asked. Most traditional concepts of parent involvement involve membership in the PTA, volunteering in school, and coming to parent-teacher conferences and other school events (Anderson & Minke, 2007). However, many Latino families involve themselves with their children in ways that may not be obvious to educators (Crosnoe, 2010; Lopez, 2001). By listening to their stories and giving them an opportunity to think about how they perceive their role as parents, the researcher unveiled valuable information that will help the educational community create a partnership between Latino homes and school.

It is no surprise that questions relating to parent involvement can elicit a wide variety of responses, as different as each participant is from the other. Because of the diversity that existed within the group of participants for this study, the researcher observed that the answers to the questions were varied yet interestingly similar. Critical race theory highlights the need to provide an outlet for "counterstories" to be told, so that

history may be written from the perspective of all citizens (Solorzano, 1997). In order to understand and make transformational changes to systems that continue to exist based on rules made by the dominant class, voices of the "unheard" must share the stage. Immigrant Latino families have been making their way to regions of the country where their presence is new such as the district in the current study. The researcher, because of the nature of her job as a Title I Program Manager and because of her interest in the perceptions of immigrant families, provided a platform for these Latino families to tell their stories.

Impact of Parent Involvement

The most researched impact of parent involvement is academic success for students. When parents involve themselves in their children's education early and continuously (Englund, et al., 2004), the students develop a love for learning, enjoy school and do well academically (Warren, et al., 2009). Parents involve themselves by helping with homework, attending school events, talking to the children about school, and providing a climate at home that encourages learning such as buying books, and providing resources such as computers, learning software, a quiet place to study, etc. (Tinkler, 2002). Perhaps the most direct way of creating academic success is for parents to continuously emphasize the value of education by demonstrating it through stories and conversations (Gonzalez-De Hass & Willems, 2003; Jones, 2003).

In the current study, the researcher gleaned from the participating Latino immigrant parents that the academic impact of parent involvement was forefront in all their minds. However, the difference lay in how they went about involving themselves. Many parents helped their children with their homework as much as possible as language barriers

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sometimes made it difficult for them. Other parents provided structure by enforcing rules at home such as homework first, reading time, and TV viewing restrictions. Yet other parents, made sure that they visited the child's school on a regular basis and kept up communication with teachers and school personnel. By whatever means possible, the parents made sure that the children knew that education was a priority and that its impact created long term benefits for them.

Parent involvement also builds social capital for the parents. This happens because of the networks that they create with other parents towards the common goal of providing better academic opportunities for the children (Kao & Rutherford, 2007). When parents begin networking with other parents and with teachers early, when their children are young, they create an academic advantage for their children (Kao & Rutherford). They are able to access information related to schooling through their network, and provide the needed interventions for their children.

However, in the case of immigrant Latino families, especially in areas where there are not many other Latinos, building social capital may be a monumental task. Parents in this study revealed in the interviews and in the focus group meetings that they felt alone, that they were not sure where to turn for help. There were no systems in place for these Latino families to turn to for help with understanding processes and procedures. Some who did reach out to other families only did so because their children were friends, but were unsure as to how to ask for help.

Parents have to be able to advocate for their children. In the current study, some parents (4 out of 21 participants) with students in English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs were not sure what the program meant. They knew that the

children were in the program because their home language was one other than English. However, they felt as if they were not informed of what happened in the program and when their children would exit the program. Of course, parents of students with disabilities had yet another hurdle to cross because they had to make sure that the children received services for language as well as for their disability. However, Carlos, in the current study who has a child with disabilities seemed pleased with the services being provided for his son. He praised the teachers and added that they met with him and continued their services even when the school was closed for summer break.

Barriers to School Involvement

As anticipated by the researcher, and as evidenced in the literature, the parents unanimously said that language was the number one barrier. Many parents felt badly that they could not speak English or read and write it. However, many of them also regretted that they were not literate in Spanish either. They felt as if education was not a priority in their homes when they were children, and knew that they had to make it a priority in their homes now so that their children would be able to access opportunities to be successful in life. One unusual revelation came from parents who did speak English. Even though they spoke the language, they still felt as if communication was an issue for them. They felt prejudged by the teachers, and so lacked the confidence during meetings. As Guo (2006) stated, teachers tend to use educational jargon with parents, and also assume that the parents understand the system. Meeting the parents where they are, educating them, and building trustful relationships is crucial in developing partnerships with Latino parents and ensuring success for their children (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

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The other barrier that parents experienced was that of isolation. Because of the fact that this region of the country has only recently been witnessing a steady growth in immigrant population, especially from Mexico and Central and South America, not many systems are in place to help these immigrants settle down and find answers to their questions. Many of the questions relate to education for their children, and Latino families are unsure as to where to turn for answers. Even though many of the parents knew that by forming networks among themselves, and seeking answers as a collective group would help them access information for their children, they did not do so. Their work schedules, distances between their homes, and a general feeling of distrust were some of the reasons why they kept to themselves. Therefore, they remained isolated and did the best they could within their means to help the children.

Besides isolation, fear was another barrier for the new Latino immigrants to this region in Georgia. Because of the new immigration bill, some parents expressed fear in even leaving their homes. They feared "racial profiling" by the police, and some even feared the school authorities. Carmen was asked to submit a social security card for her child, even though policy states that schools cannot require social security numbers from the students. Instead of finding help to settle the issue, Carmen chose to take her child to another school. Because Latino immigrants were new to the area and were spread out in the county, they were unsure of who to turn to for help and advice about the new immigration law and other rules that apply to them.

Facilitators of Parent Involvement

Almost unanimously the participating parents agreed that parent involvement bodes success for their children. By being involved, they were able to provide opportunities for

their children's future and secure their place in their new homeland. The parents were very hopeful that their involvement would only mean good things for their children, both academically and in their future careers.

Many parents also spoke about how their involvement with their children helped build a trusting relationship. They believed that it strengthened their families and that they could overcome all obstacles together. Many parents trusted their children to do the right thing because they felt that they had provided a firm foundation for them. Children were used as translators during parent/teacher conferences, and the children helped them in other areas as well such as grocery shopping or payment of bills.

Most of the participants in the study had positive experiences of their children's schools. Parents who sent their children to ESOL schools as well as those who sent their children to the neighborhood schools said that the teachers were very kind, tried very hard to communicate with them, and provided excellent services for their children. Overall, it seemed as if the district was making an effort to communicate with the Latino immigrant families. However, the researcher was surprised by the positive tone of most of the participants in this study. Although Carmen and Ivana shared some of their negative experiences in their children's school, most of the parents were pleased with the system. The researcher remained unsure if this this was because the parents knew that the researcher worked for the system and reserved their "real" comments for fear of backlash, or if their experiences were indeed positive.

Role of Latino Parent at Home

Ceballo (2004) interviewed ten Latino/a Yale undergraduates to understand what forces were in play for their success and discovered that all of these students had parents

who emphasized education, placed tremendous value on it, and encouraged them to do their best. Many of the parents were not familiar with curricular details or what career tracks to follow, but they communicated with their children, asked questions, and displayed their pride on the children's accomplishments. The role of a parent at home cannot be overstated. Just as in Ceballo's study, the researcher of the current study found that the parents did all that they could to provide an optimal learning environment for their children at home. Some parents mentioned going to the library for books on a regular basis, a couple talked about buying learning software for the computer, and yet others talked about doing homework together in order to inculcate good learning habits from the beginning.

The other aspect of a parent's role at home came in the form of cultural preservation. As declared by Ortiz & Ordoñez-Jasis (2005), learning at home should include family histories, folk tales, cooking of food from the culture, and the use and maintenance of the language. Many participants in the current study also believed in preserving their culture for the future generations. Some of the parents said that they would not allow their children to speak in English when they were at home. Others talked about taking trips back to their country of birth and showing the children their homes, introducing them to friends and family, and familiarizing the children with how they lived when they were children. Yet other parents encouraged their children to do research projects about their country of origin, thereby providing them an opportunity to learn about the country. Nearly all the parents said that they talked with their children about holidays and festivals, made sure that they cooked foods from their culture, listened to music, and provided as much exposure as they could to their culture.

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Latino Perceptions of Parent Involvement

The overarching research question for this study had to do with the perception of parent involvement. Carréon, Drake, and Barton's (2005) study revealed that parent involvement was a dynamic concept, subject to change depending on context. All of the participants in that study understood the value of parent involvement; some approached it more aggressively than others. In the current study, the parents took their role very seriously and felt that it was their responsibility to be involved, no matter what the barriers. All the parents showed resilience even if some of them felt helpless. They knew that they had made the right choice by moving to the United States, and they were hopeful that their children would be able to make a better life for themselves.

All the parents also exhibited great pride in their accomplishments. They were pleased that they had a trusting relationship with their children. They wanted to build a similar relationship with the schools, but were restricted because of language. Therefore, many of them learned as their children learned. Parents and children had created a "level knowledge" field when it came to language acquisition. Again, if this was the way they were going to overcome the language and communication barrier, then so be it, reinforcing resilience among them.

The greatest feeling that all of these parents had was that of hope. They knew that their involvement would provide opportunities to the children and they hoped that the children would avail of them to make better futures for themselves. They were hopeful, that in spite of the barriers that lay in the way, this country was the only one that could help their children become "somebody." They were patient and knew that the schools and teachers were not used to the rapid influx of Spanish speaking immigrant students

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and families and hoped that changes would come to help them work as partners in their children's education. Perhaps the best comment from a parent was that of gratitude that the researcher was interested in the perceptions of Latino families and that there was hope that something could be done. *"Pues estuvo muy bien que hicieran esto porque del tiempo que ha estado mi hija en la escuela no, no había habido nadie que se interesara o que dijéramos, nos hablaron porque les importa si nuestros hijos están aprendiendo o no y pues, agradecida, ¿verdad? De que lo hayan hecho y a lo mejor esa sería una opción para que los demás padres también podríamos hacer algo que, para poder ayudar a nuestros hijos de alguna manera."* "It was really good to have this interview, since my daughter has been in school this is the first time that I see someone interested in this topic, I have not heard from the school about this matter and if our children are learning or not and I'm really thankful that you are here and maybe we as parents can do something together to help our children in some way." The researcher felt hopeful as well that, as recommended by critical race theory, these stories might lead to transformational understanding of Latino issues in the area.

Conclusions

Parent involvement is a dynamic concept that is related to context and adapts as needed. Immigrant Latino parents, who arrive at new destination regions, know that, by being involved in their children's life both at school and at home, they provide opportunities for success for them. They develop trusting relationships with their children, and inculcate in them a sense of pride in their heritage. They are aware of barriers that may exist as they continue to involve themselves, and that some of the barriers emanate from the outside such as fear and distrust of the law, isolation, and

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others emanate from within such as a lack of knowledge of language and systems; however, they also know that there are facilitators to their involvement that would provide the opportunities for their children to experience academic success in their new homeland.

Latino immigrants come to these new destinations with the hope that they can provide consistency and quality life for their children. They place their confidence in the schools and hope that school systems would educate their child while they fulfill the role of the parent at home. They feel impeded by their lack of language skills and often shy away from direct contact with school officials. Others that do get involved at school feel that they are either ignored or feel unwelcome in the school. Many use their own children as translators. Some are even afraid to come to the schools for fear of the new immigration law. However, they build a strong and trusting relationship with their children and remind them at every point that they are lucky to be in the United States and should take advantage of all the opportunities that present themselves. The parents continue to be hopeful that their decision to bring the family to the United States will only help their children experience success in school and in life.

Implications

This study intended to understand the perceptions of Latino immigrant parents as it pertained to parent involvement, its barriers and its facilitators. The researcher was able to provide information on how parent involvement may be unique depending on the context. This information will help the school district generate policies to provide Latino families opportunities to be heard and represented in order that their children experience success in schools. The researchers particularly focused on elementary schools because

early and continuous communication gets the parents involved and stay involved. This study addressed a need for school districts to consider its immigrant population, however large or small, and find ways to build bridges between home and school by enlisting the help of resources in the community, faith based organizations, and other parents in the school system.

Recommendations

1. Since, in this study, most of the participants' country of origin was Mexico, future studies may wish to purposively select participants from an eclectic group representing various Central and South American countries to understand a cross section of Latino groups.

2. A follow up study may be conducted using teachers' perceptions of parent involvement.

3. Based on the responses from the fathers who participated in this study, a study using only fathers may benefit an understanding of their perspectives.

4. Since Latino families live and work in surrounding rural communities in Georgia, a study to understand their perspective as compared or contrasted with the urban families may be useful.

Dissemination

The researcher will prepare the research findings for publication in journals such as *Journal of Latinos and Education, Urban Education, Leadership Quarterly,* and *The School Community Journal*. The researcher also believes that the results of her findings may be of interest to other urban school districts as well. Therefore, the researcher will prepare a presentation of her research to showcase at leadership forums and conferences

in the region. The dissertation will also be made available at the university library, and will be available electronically on line.

Concluding Thoughts

Besides the predominant themes that emerged as the researcher analyzed the data, there were a few anecdotal observations made by the researcher. As the researcher reflected on the reactions of the participants and the comments made by them, she was overwhelmed by the need for her to convey their "stories" to the educational community. Although, a majority of the participants responded favorably to the schools and the educators, there were a few with experiences that were less than favorable. If a school district believes that it must include all parents in the process of educating the young men and women, then it must do so. Even if this ideal might be impractical in the real world, every attempt must be made to do so. These parents need direction, support, and encouragement, and they need the educational community to be their partners.

The researcher thought that the reaction of the participants was heart-warming. Almost all of the participants spoke with great passion and sincerity. There was an overwhelming commitment to the cause of educating their children and preparing them for bright and successful futures. They were realistic enough to know that there would be obstacles in the way, but they were prepared to meet them in order to move towards their goal. Added to the passion was a sense of humility as well. They lived simply and essentially. They made sacrifices for their children and believed that the children's single minded focus would have to be their education.

As this researcher was invited into some of the homes, she noticed that most of the homes had minimal furniture, the bare essentials. The researcher asked the translator as

to why this was so, and found out that they remained ready to move at a moment's notice. However, the researcher also saw that many of the homes had vegetable gardens and flower gardens, where they grew fresh and nutritious vegetables. Many of the homes had the inviting aroma of freshly cooked food. All the participants who were interviewed at home offered the researcher and the translator something to drink and eat. It was obvious that the Latino culture placed great value on being hospitable to guests.

The other observation made by the researcher was that all of the participants had a very strong work ethic. As a matter of fact, many of them talked about their jobs very proudly, emphasizing that they were self-taught. Juanita worked in a greenhouse and she mentioned that she had a very creative job and how much she enjoyed working with plants. Her husband, Juan, who worked fixing European cars, took out his phone and showed pictures of some of his car restoration work to the researcher. Yet another parent, Carmen, who worked in a watermelon field, insisted that the watermelons and cantaloupes were some of the best in the city, and made the researcher and the translator take one home. Pedro, who owned a house cleaning business, ran his operation efficiently and proudly. He talked about how his work spoke for itself and about how his business had grown simply by word of mouth. It was refreshing to see the pride that these men and women took in their profession.

Additionally, the researcher observed that many of the participants had a sense of nostalgia as they spoke about their birth country. Ivan felt that his children did not have the same freedom he had as a child. Others talked about the celebrations during holidays and how it used to be festive and fun. They regretted that their children could not experience it here in the United States. Even though they spoke fondly and nostalgically

of their birth country, they had no regret that they were now in the United States, because they were sure that it was the best decision for their children.

Finally, the love that these immigrant Latino parents had for their children was obvious. Many parents brought their children to the interviews or allowed them to be in the presence of the researcher and the translator. They were patient with them, as they articulated their responses to the questions posed by the researcher. If the child needed attention, they were quick to pause the interview and attend to the child. The children were very well mannered, sitting silently and patiently as the interviews progressed. Some were even quietly involved in listening to the questions and the responses from the parents. The fact that the parents were willing participants in the study only went to show that they cared deeply about issues that would affect their children's success in school and beyond.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part I: Demographics

After reading the initial interview protocol as developed by Georgia Southern University,

the interviewee will be asked:

a. What is your country of origin?

b. How long have you lived in the United States?

c. What grade/s is your child/ren in?

d. Are there any questions you would like to ask before we proceed?

Part II: Interview Questions

No.	Question	Literature	Research Question addressed
1.	How would you define parental involvement? What do you want for your children's education?	Delgado-Gaitan, 2001 Tinker, 2002 Turney and Kao, 2005 Wang, 2008 Zarate, 2007	What is your perception of parental involvement?
2.	What things do you do to help achieve this outcome – being involved?	Arias and Morillo-Campbell, 200 Orozco, 2008 Tinker, 2002	What is the impact of school involvement on Latino parents and their children??

3.	What do you think the school's expectations are for your involvement?	Denessen, Bakker and Gierveld ,2007 Jeynes, 2003 Leong, 2007 Wang, 2008	What are some of the barriers/facilitators?
4.	In what ways does the school encourage your participation in your child's education? Can you give specific instances?	Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008 Catalano, 2008 Golan & Peterson, 2001 Orozco, 2008 Turney &Kao, 2005	What are some of the facilitators?
5.	In what ways does the school discourage your participation in your child's education? Can you give specific instances?	Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008 Catalano, 2008 Golan & Peterson, 2001 Orozco, 2008 Turney &Kao, 2005	What are some of the barriers?
6.	Do you and your child talk about being from a different country and how they feel about the schools here?	Specific to the participants' situation	What do they think is their role in school and at home?

7.	Have other parents talked with you about their experiences in American schools?	Specific to the participants' situation	What do they think is their role in school and at home?
8.	How is this educational system different than what you experienced when in school?	Specific to the participants' experiences	What do they think is their role in school and at home?
9.	Were your parents involved in the school when you were in school?	Specific to the participants' experiences	What do they think is their role in school and at home?
10.	What do you think is the impact of parent involvement on the child? What is its impact for you?	Specific to the participants' opinions	What is the impact of parent involvement?
11.	Is there anything else about parental involvement you would like to add?		

APPENDIX B
LETTER TO PARENT/GUARDIAN REQUESTING PARTICIPATION

Dear Parent/Guardian:

My name is Lakshmi Subramaniam and I am a Doctoral student at Georgia

Southern University. I am also a full-time employee of the ██████████████

████ and work as a Program Manager with the Department of Compensatory

Programs. The requirements for my job as well as my personal interests have led me to

researching parental involvement in schools. As an immigrant parent, I am particularly

interested in immigrant parent issues. As the Latino population in our district has

increased significantly, the participants for my study will be Latinos.

I believe that the findings of this study will help the educational community

understand the needs of Latino families in the area. By finding ways to improve Latino

parent involvement, this study will provide information to meet the ultimate goal of

creating academic success for Latino immigrant students.

If you are interested in participating in an interview and a follow-up focus group

meeting please indicate so in the accompanying insert and I will contact you soon. At no

time during or after the study will your identity be revealed to anyone. I appreciate your

participation in my study, and I am confident that your input will help create meaningful

partnerships between Latino families and the school district. If you have any questions, or

need further clarification about the research, please feel free to contact me at 912-596-

2946.

Sincerely,

Lakshmi Subramaniam

SPANISH

Estimado Padre/Tutor:

Mi nombre es Lakshmi Subramaniam y soy estudiante de Doctorado en Georgia Southern University. También soy empleada a tiempo completo en el ██████ ████████████████████████████ y trabajo como Gerente de Programas con el Departamento de Programas Compensatorios. Los requisitos de mi trabajo, como también mi interés personal; me han guiado a investigar el envolvimiento de padres en las escuelas. Como padre inmigrante, estoy particularmente interesada en los problemas de padres inmigrantes. Como la población Latina en nuestro distrito a aumentado significativamente, los participantes de este estudio serán Latinos.

Entiendo que los resultados de este estudio ayudaran a la comunidad educativa a entender las necesidades de las familias Latinas en el área. Al encontrar aneras de mejorar el envolvimiento de padres Latinos, este estudio proveerá información que alcanzara la ultima meta de crear el éxito académico de los estudiantes inmigrantes Latinos.

Si usted está interesado en participar en la entrevista y reuniones de seguimiento para grupos de enfoque por favor indíquelo en el formulario adjunto y nos comunicaremos con usted muy pronto. En ningún momento durante o después de la entrevista su identidad será revelada a nadie. Yo agradezco su participación en este estudio y estoy confiada que su aportación creara una relación significativa entre familias Latinas y el distrito escolar. Si tiene alguna pregunta, o necesita clarificar acerca de la investigación, no dude en comunicarse conmigo al (912) 596-2946.

Sinceramente,

APPENDIX C

RESPONSE FROM PARENT/GUARDIAN TO PARTICIPATE

I would like to participate in the interview and focus group meeting being held for this study. I understand that my identity will remain confidential throughout. I am fluent in both English and Spanish _____ I am fluent in Spanish only _____ Name: Phone Number: Email address:	I would like to participate in the interview and focus group meeting being held for this study. I understand that my identity will remain confidential throughout. I am fluent in both English and Spanish _____ I am fluent in Spanish only _____ Name: Phone Number: Email address:
I would like to participate in the interview and focus group meeting being held for this study. I understand that my identity will remain confidential throughout. I am fluent in both English and Spanish _____ I am fluent in Spanish only _____ Name: Phone Number: Email address:	I would like to participate in the interview and focus group meeting being held for this study. I understand that my identity will remain confidential throughout. I am fluent in both English and Spanish _____ I am fluent in Spanish only _____ Name: Phone Number: Email address:

SPANISH

Me gustaría participar en la entrevista que se llevara a cabo en este estudio. Entiendo que mi identidad permanecerá confidencial. Hablo fluente Ingles y Español _____ Hablo fluente Español _____ Nombre: _____ Numero Telefónico: _____ Correo Electrónico: _____	Me gustaría participar en la entrevista que se llevara a cabo en este estudio. Entiendo que mi identidad permanecerá confidencial. Hablo fluente Ingles y Español _____ Hablo fluente Español _____ Nombre: _____ Numero Telefónico: _____ Correo Electrónico: _____
Me gustaría participar en la entrevista que se llevara a cabo en este estudio. Entiendo que mi identidad permanecerá confidencial. Hablo fluente Ingles y Español _____ Hablo fluente Español _____ Nombre: _____ Numero Telefónico: _____ Correo Electrónico: _____	Me gustaría participar en la entrevista que se llevara a cabo en este estudio. Entiendo que mi identidad permanecerá confidencial. Hablo fluente Ingles y Español _____ Hablo fluente Español _____ Nombre: _____ Numero Telefónico: _____ Correo Electrónico: _____