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Investigating the motivations of parents choosing language immersion education for their child

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University of Iowa

INVESTIGATING THE MOTIVATIONS OF PARENTS CHOOSING LANGUAGE

IMMERSION EDUCATION FOR THEIR CHILD

by

Fatima Baig

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Doctor of
Philosophy degree in Teaching and Learning
(Foreign Language and ESL Education)
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2011

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Leslie Schrier

ABSTRACT

Immersion programs have been identified as the vanguard of effective K-12 foreign language teaching. Through their early start and prolonged sequence of language learning, these programs allow students to develop intercultural sensitivity, high levels of functional language proficiency, and literacy in at least two languages. Despite immersion programs' proven effectiveness and benefits they remain relatively unknown to the larger public. Yet the recent national momentum toward developing a language-competent society has brought with it an opportunity to both improve and learn from these programs.

This qualitative study explored the motivations and decision-making processes of parents who chose to send their children to new German immersion schools. Parents are the subjects of this study because, as primary stakeholders in their children's education, they have been recognized as a key feature in making school programs effective and successful. Particularly, attitudes and beliefs have been found to influence parents' decisions to become involved in their child's education. The instrument selected is comprised of semi-structured interview questions that were developed to examine how parents' educational goals, language beliefs, program perceptions and expectations impact the educational decisions they make. A second aspect, this study investigated the kinds of roles parents had constructed for themselves by asking parents about their own school experience, and perceived roles and responsibilities in their children's education. Using content analysis, this study examined sixteen parent interviews, reflective notes, and school observation write-ups.

The study revealed that parents are of utmost importance to immersion programs. Participants are huge supporters of immersion education and very involved in their child's school. They enrolled their children in these programs for reasons such as their family language background or a true passion for language learning. Parents appeared

very reflective and knowledgeable of immersion education, child rearing, and their impact on their children's education. They had very high expectations but saw themselves as partners to schools in providing their children with the best education possible. Implications for immersion program administrators, teachers, and parents are offered.

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Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee
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degree in Teaching and Learning (Foreign Language and
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iv

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

Much educational research of recent years has been examining the role of parents in their children's education. Numerous studies have shown that parental involvement can enhance students' academic achievements, behavioral outcomes, and their sense of well-being (e.g., Anderson & Minke, 2007; Catsambis, 1998; Gonzalez-DeHaas, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008). Yet parents not only impact their children's education but also are invaluable assets to schools. Parents' beliefs and attitudes about a school or program have a tremendous impact on the decisions of other parents seeking a good school for their child (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Sheldon, 2002; Wesely & Baig, 2011) as well as on the success and effectiveness of the school itself (Heining-Boynton, 1990). It seems established among practitioners and researchers alike that parents are key stakeholders in their child's education and simply need to be part of successful educational planning and decision-making. In order to continue improving the partnership between schools and parents, it is vital to know how parents approach educational decisions such as which school to choose for their child and the various factors that guide their thoughts and beliefs. Particularly language immersion schools, which are the focus of this study, require parents' support and involvement as they generally need to make extra strides in attracting students, locating funds, and justifying their worth and success (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000).

In a language immersion program, students, mostly at the elementary school age, learn another language by learning content (language arts, mathematics, social studies, science etc.) taught to them in the second language. Immersion education effectively provides its students with "academic achievement, bi- or multilingualism, literacy in at

least two languages, and enhanced levels of intercultural sensitivity" (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p. 10). This way of language learning has proven to be very successful and powerful since its first implementation in the United States at the beginning of the 1970s (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Genesee, 1985; Genesee, 1987).

There are two main language immersion models: foreign language and bilingual immersion. Foreign language immersion programs, also referred to as one-way immersion, serve a student body which largely consists of "speakers of the societally-dominant language (English in North America, for example)" (Genesee, 2008, p. 25). At the elementary level, these programs use the immersion language for at least 50% of the school day to teach subject matter (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). To date there are about 310 one-way immersion programs in the U.S. serving languages such as Spanish, French, German, Italian, Russian, or Arabic (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2006).

Bilingual or two-way immersion programs serve a student body where "ideally, half of the students in each class are members of the majority language group (e.g. English speakers) and half are members of a minority language program (e.g. Spanish speakers)" (Genesee, 2008, p. 27). In these programs, minority language use varies from 90% to 50% in Kindergarten, to 50% of instruction time in each language (e.g. English and Spanish) in the remaining elementary grades. Two-way immersion programs, in particular, have seen a dramatic increase in recent years with currently 319 schools in 27 states (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2009).

Both one-way and two-way immersion models are subgroups of what is termed dual language education by a number of researchers and educators (Cloud et al., 2000; Fortune & Tedick, 2008; Genesee, 2008) serving a variety of purposes and contexts. One-way immersion programs aim to create high proficiency foreign language speakers with an enhanced level of understanding and appreciation for cultural diversity (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). The same applies to two-way immersion programs in addition to their offering language minority children a path to "higher levels of academic language and

literacy development in English" (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p. 11). Indigenous immersion (assisting revitalization programs of endangered and formerly oppressed Native languages and cultures) and developmental bilingual immersion (all students are native speakers of a minority language, e.g. Spanish in the U.S.) are two additional subgroups within dual language education.

Due to the nature of a given immersion program and the specific need it fulfills in its community "no one program will exactly resemble another" (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 6). Nonetheless researchers have described certain core characteristics that any immersion program needs to contain to a "greater or lesser degree" (Johnson & Swain, 1997, p. 1) in order to qualify as a prototypical immersion program. Johnson and Swain (1997) established eight core features:

> (a) The L2 [the language that is taught] is a medium of instruction
> (b) The immersion curriculum parallels the local L1 curriculum
> (c) Overt support exists for the L1
> (d) The program aims for additive bilingualism
> (e) Exposure to the L2 is largely confined to the classroom
> (f) Students enter with similar (and limited) levels of L2 proficiency
> (g) The teachers are bilingual
> (h) The classroom culture is that of the local L1 community (p. 6)

Due to the steady rise in numbers of especially the Hispanic school population nationwide, two-way immersion programs in Spanish have increased noticeably. Much of the related research has focused on two-way immersion programs; likely because these programs dominate the landscape as far as language education is concerned yet also because bilingual education has been under attack nationally with antibilingual initiatives in a number of states (e.g. Proposition 227 in California in 1998; "English for the Children" initiative in Colorado in 2000; Proposition 203 in Arizona in 2000). Stritikus and Garcia (2005) describe Arizona's Proposition 203 for example as "a direct challenge to the belief that languages other than English have a legitimate and valuable place in the education of students who are diverse" (pp. 733-734). Walker and Tedick (2000) make

the point that no school involved in language learning and teaching "can escape the wide social issues surrounding language policy and status within the United States" (p. 21).

As a direct result of such initiatives and the understanding that parents are key stakeholders in their child's education, research involving the two-way immersion concept has been done on parents' attitudes and beliefs about the effectiveness and quality of such language immersion programs (e.g., Amaral, 2001; Cava, 1998; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Parkes, 2008; Shannon & Milian, 2002; Stritikus & Garcia, 2005). These studies often focused on American parents versus immigrant parents and their different perspectives on their child's education in a two-way immersion setting and the success of these programs. The link between English/Spanish two-way immersion programs and the national debate which focuses on immigration has, however, resulted in limited research on programs which offer a language other than Spanish as the immersion language.

<u>Inspiration and Statement of the Problem</u>

While working on my Master's degree, I was contacted by an American family who was looking for a German tutor for their daughter. Her father explained to me that his daughter had attended a German elementary school in the area, was very fluent in German, and that they were looking for someone who could continue working with her on the language, as she did not attend any German classes at this point and they did not want her to loose the language. I still remember that it puzzled me when he said, "she had attended a German school" as I did not know of any "German school" in the area. I expected a tutoring job like any other – reviewing grammar concepts and working on vocabulary. I still remember vividly the first time I met the daughter – Mary Beth (all names used in this study are pseudonyms) – and how impressed I was by her near-native fluency and knowledge of German.

This was the beginning of my personal involvement with immersion language learning. My knowledge of and fascination with immersion programs started then – nine years ago – and has resulted in this dissertation study. Before meeting Mary Beth, I knew very little about the concept of immersion education. Coincidentally, the very same school Mary Beth had attended – a one-way total German immersion elementary school – hired me as a second grade teacher after I completed my Master's degree. For two years, I had the opportunity to observe and learn first hand about all aspects involved in immersion education; curriculum design, teacher training, administrative challenges, and school population. Yet one thing I have always been intrigued by, from the day I met Mary Beth and her family, is why parents would want to send their child to an elementary school of this nature and why of all languages they chose German. I still wonder about this today and have come to realize while working on this study that research is scarce on exactly these questions.

<p align="center">Purpose and Significance of the Study</p>

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations of parents who chose to send their child to a newly opened language immersion program. It describes the various factors that influence their decision-making as well as the perceptions and expectations these parents have of their child's program. The immersion language of focus in this research study is German.

The invaluable role parents play in a child's education has been well documented in empirical research (e.g., Anderson & Minke, 2007; Catsambis, 1998; Gonzalez-DeHaas, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Jeynes, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008). It has been proven that parents who are involved play a significant role in their child's academic success and learning experiences. Research studies have shown that parental beliefs often influence these involvement decisions (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Sheldon, 2002). In addition, parental attitudes, aspirations, and

encouragement improve children's performance in school and influence their attitudes and values about school and about learning (Bartram, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jacobs & Bleeker, 2004; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003).

Parents are also fundamental in their role as volunteers giving their time, energy and sometimes even money to schools, most of which have been affected by recent budget cuts for teacher aides and paraeducators. Educational reforms such as Goals 2000 or the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act have made efforts to define parental participation and stipulate the promotion of family-school relationships (Stritikus & Garcia, 2005). Parental involvement is of vital importance to a school, yet it is often enough underestimated and undervalued. Parents serve as advertisers and communicators of a school's success and quality of education it provides (García, Lorenz, & Robison, 1995). They promote the school in the community as well as amongst other parents who are seeking a good school for their child. Parents' beliefs and attitudes about programs play a vital role in a program's continuation or its termination (Heining-Boynton & Haitema, 2007). Language immersion schools in particular rely heavily on parents' patronage since they generally need to make extra strides in attracting students. Parents, as invested participants in their children's education, are a key feature in making a school program effective and successful (Heining-Boynton, 1990). Hence more research is needed to understand their motivations and decision-making processes.

Studies in immersion language education have aimed at shedding light on parents' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations of these programs (e.g., Boone, 2007; Cava, 1998; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Parkes, 2008; Shannon & Milian, 2002; Stritikus & Garcia, 2005; Wesely & Baig, 2011). Yet as far as parents are concerned who choose some form of immersion education for their child, this research has often been carried out using forced choice survey methods and involved well-established programs. Studies also often revolved around the attitudes and beliefs of immigrant versus non-immigrant parents or high-demand languages such as Spanish. It is to be expected that a lot of

attention has fallen on Spanish programs as they clearly dominate the language education landscape. Draper and Hicks (2002) report that in grades seven through twelve alone Spanish accounts for nearly 70% of all language enrollments. These programs also visibly represent the current changes in American society. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2003) there has been a 62% rise in Spanish speakers from 17.3 million in 1990 to 28.1 million in 2000. In 2003 of the 33.5 million foreign-born living in the U.S. 53.3% were from Latin America (Larsen, 2004). Consequently, this has had an impact on the demographics in our public schools as well. Of those school-aged children and adolescents who speak a language other than English at home, 75% speak Spanish (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). In order to keep up with these changes in American society and its implications on public education, much of educational research has simply had to focus on bilingualism and the various forms of Spanish language programs.

In order to add to and expand the existing knowledge base of immersion education, my research study will employ qualitative methods to explore the motivations parents have for sending their child to a newly opened German immersion elementary school and the various factors behind this decision. Through an in-depth study of these families, I hope to provide arguments that speak for the early and prolonged learning of a foreign language especially when such programs face a decrease in fiscal support and difficulties in staffing nationwide. Additionally, this study attempts to explore how languages such as German which have not seen a significant increase in learner numbers recently, can regain a stronger student base.

The organization of this research around parents stresses the important role they play as partners to schools, teachers, and administrators. The results of this study will aid school districts and new language programs on how best to utilize and work with those parents who consider enrolling their child at a newly opened immersion school. It will provide practical and realistic insights into parents' expectations and concerns. This in

turn can benefit language teachers who regularly interact with parents and who play a crucial role in parents' views of schools. Lastly, this study can influence other parents considering the decision of sending their child to a language immersion program.

Research Questions

This descriptive study explores the motivations of sixteen parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools focusing on why they chose immersion education for their child and what influenced these decisions. Semi-structured interviews are used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the stated motivations for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language program?

    1.1 What educational goals do immersion parents have for their child?

    1.2 What perceptions and expectations do parents have of their child's immersion program?

    1.3 Do beliefs about the German language influence immersion parents' decision?

2. What are the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making?

    2.1 Does an immersion parent's own school experience influence his/her decisions?

    2.2 Does an immersion parent's role perception influence his/her decision?

Conceptual Framework

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model of the parental involvement process served as the underlying framework in the development of the research questions this study is based on as well as the questions guiding the parent interviews.

In their research on parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler have taken a strictly psychological perspective to explain why parents become involved in their children's education, illustrating that "status [alone] does not determine parents' thinking, actions, or influence related to their involvement in children's schooling"

(Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p. 7). They put forth a theoretical model with the intention "to explain the process of involvement and its influence [more] than to prescribe educational or parental practice" (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005, p. 86). The model consists of five sequential levels, ranging from factors that influence parents' basic involvement decisions, to modes of parents' involvement, to child/student outcomes. A decade of research has resulted in the development and revision of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's original model. For my study the revised model by Walker et al. (2005) will serve as the conceptual framework (see Figure 1). It should be noted that within the model's revised levels I chose to focus on one specific construct in level 1: parents' motivational beliefs (see Figure 2).

In the original model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler hypothesized that "parents' basic involvement decisions were primarily influenced by what they believe they should and can do in the context of their child's education" (Walker et al., 2005, p. 89). Two constructs are suggested to reflect these beliefs: (a) *parental role construction*, and (b) *parental self-efficacy*. In the revised model, Walker et al. (2005) organized these two ideas under one conceptual umbrella: parents' motivational beliefs. Although this model was developed to explain why parents become involved in their child's education, the psychological predictor of motivational beliefs is applicable to this study as it focuses on parents' own attitudes, ideas and experiences as basis of their decisions within their child's education. As Nell (2006) suggests, "Hoover-Dempsey's perspective uses a more caring, realistic, and judgment-free model for understanding parents' perspectives" (p. 26).

Figure 1 Revised Levels 1 and 2 of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's theoretical model of the parental involvement process (Walker et al., 2005, p. 88)
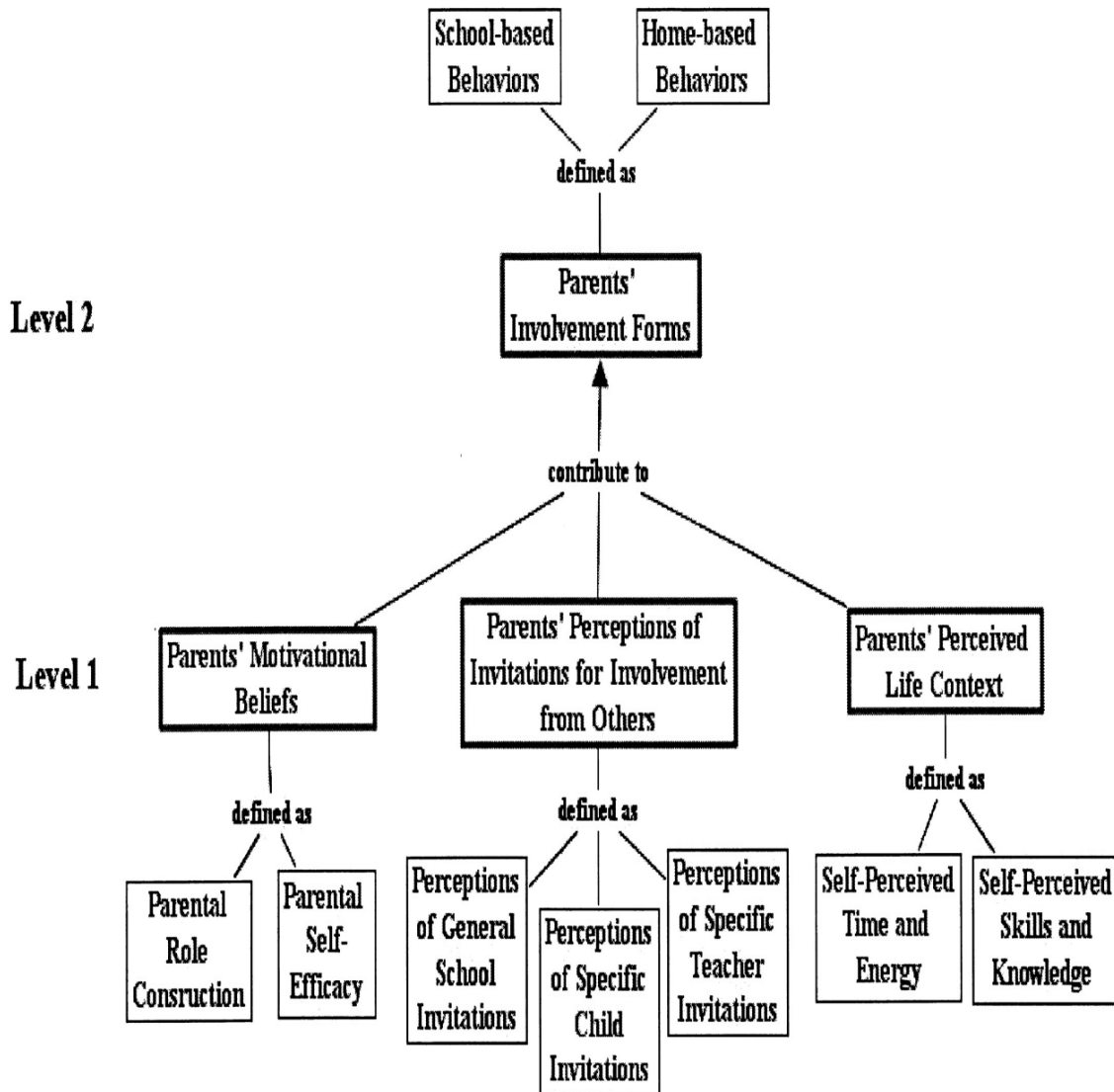
Figure 2 Conceptual framework for this study (Walker et al., 2005)

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            ┌─────────────────────────────┐
            │  Parents' Motivational Beliefs │
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                      defined as
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  ┌───────────────────────────┐   ┌─────────────────────────┐
  │ Parental Role Construction │   │  Parental Self-Efficacy │
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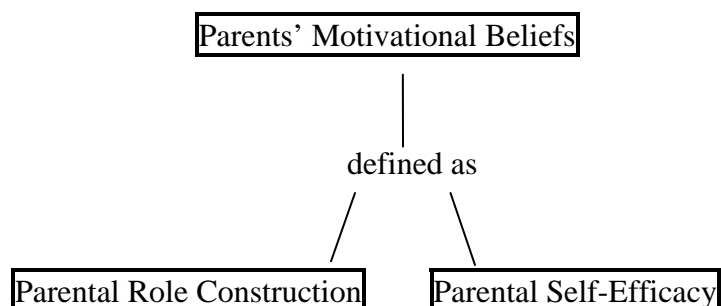
Parental Role Construction

Walker et al. (2005) define role construction within parents' involvement process "as parents' beliefs about what they should do in relation to the child's education" (p. 89). This includes beliefs about parents' rights, responsibilities, and obligations as well as their "personal history with and affective responses to school" (Walker et al., 2005, p. 92). These beliefs and attitudes help parents to "imagine and anticipate" (Walker et al., 2005, p. 89) behavior towards best practices necessary for their child's educational success. In addition, they define the kinds of involvement activities parents consider important, necessary, and permissible. Parents develop these beliefs and understandings while being members and participants in groups relevant to child-rearing such as families, schools, churches, and the broader culture (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). While assessing the construct of parental role construction, three major patterns were suggested: (a) parent-focused, (b) school-focused, and (c) partnership-focused (Walker et al., 2005). A parent-focused role construction sees the ultimate responsibility for the child's education with the parents whereas a school-focused role construction sees the responsibility with the schools (Walker et al., 2005). Lastly, a partnership-focused role construction reflects "beliefs and behaviors that parents and schools together are responsible for the child's education" (Walker et al., 2005, p.90).

Parental Self-Efficacy

Walker et al. (2005) define parental self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capability to act in ways that will produce desired outcomes [influencing] people's goal selection, effort, persistence, and ultimate goal accomplishment" (p. 93). Parents' beliefs in their abilities to help their child succeed in school influence their goals, persistence and what they will do. Self-efficacy theory applied to parental involvement suggests that parents' actions are guided "by thinking through, in advance of their behavior, what outcomes are likely to follow the actions they might take. They will develop goals for their behaviors, based on these anticipations, and will plan actions designed to achieve these goals" (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p. 17). Parents with positive self-efficacy are more likely to conceptualize their contributions to their child's learning and engage in a range of involvement activities than parents with low self-efficacy (Walker et al., 2005). It is therefore suggested that schools "need to be aware of a parent's efficacy levels in light of the impact it has on the parent's decision making concerning school" (Nell, 2006, p. 32).

Design of the Study

In order to offer an in-depth exploration of parents' motivations and their perceptions and expectations of their child's immersion program, I chose a qualitative research design as the methodological framework for this study. Convenience and snowball sampling resulted in the participation of sixteen parents in this study who had enrolled their child in one of two newly opened German immersion schools; one located in California, one in the Midwest. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews. Demographic questionnaires and reflective journal notes provided an additional source of biographical and background information. Due to the qualitative nature of this study, the process of data analysis began with the first parent interview and went through the writing and editing of the final document. The digitally-recorded interviews were transcribed and coded employing content analysis to find emerging

patterns and themes with reference to the conceptual framework and research questions presented earlier. Constantly comparing participants' responses allowed me to establish categories within parental motivations, beliefs, and expectations. To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I collected several sources of data and requested the assistance of a fellow doctoral candidate to check the codes and themes I had established.

<div align="center">Definition of Terms</div>

L1 – (first language) refers in the context of this study to a person's first or native language.

L2 – (second language) refers in the context of this study to the foreign/target language to be acquired.

Heritage language learner / background – "a student of language who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken. The student may speak or merely understand the heritage language and be, to some degree, bilingual in English and the heritage language." (Valdes, 2005, p. 412). In the context of this study, the home language is also the language of instruction in the child's educational program.

Bilingual education – "education in an English-language school system in which students with little fluency in English are taught in both their native language and English" (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary).

Immersion education – a language learning approach where the L2 is used as a tool to teach subject content. Immersion education aims to make its students functionally proficient in the L2, to maintain and develop the L1, and to offer cross-cultural understanding (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

Two-Way Immersion programs – (also called dual-language or bilingual education programs) serve a linguistically heterogeneous student group. In the U.S. context, this group is generally composed of language majority (English speaking) as well as language

minority (Spanish speaking) students (Fortune & Tedick, 2008; Genesee & Gándara, 1999).

One-Way Immersion programs – (also called one-way foreign language immersion programs) serve a linguistically homogeneous student group. In the U.S. context, this group is generally composed of language majority (English speaking) students with limited to no proficiency in the immersion language (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs – non-immersion language programs with the goal "for students to acquire listening and speaking skills, gain an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, and acquire limited amounts of reading and writing skills" (Rosenbusch, 2002, p. 517).

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Since parents are considered primary stakeholders in their child's education, I will begin this chapter with a discussion of relevant literature on the importance of parents in education and the crucial role they play as partners to schools but particularly immersion programs. The present study mainly draws on research on parental involvement in their child's education. I will highlight studies done on the various benefits of parent participation and how it influences students' academic achievements, motivations, and well-being.

In order to examine parents' motivations and the underlying factors for choosing immersion education, I will continue this chapter with a review of relevant literature that has aimed at exploring attitudes and beliefs of parents. I will highlight studies done in the education field in general as well as in different language learning contexts: (a) two-way immersion settings – as they have become the focus of much of the immersion research; (b) one-way immersion programs; and (c) elementary non-immersion language options called Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) programs. This literature review is designed to provide a theoretical background to my study of parents' motivation to send their child to an immersion school. It is to make a case for the exploration of parental attitudes and beliefs in school choice and decision-making particularly in immersion education.

The Importance of Parents in Education

It is well documented that parents play an important part not only in their child's education (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Hung & Marjoribanks, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008; Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002), but also as founders and continuous supporters of alternative education programs such as immersion or FLES (e.g., Cloud et al., 2000; García et al.,

1995; Heining-Boynton, 1990; Heining-Boynton & Haitema, 2007; Lambert & Tucker, 1972). When reviewing the body of literature, it becomes evident that parents are crucial to their children's education, and invested partners to schools and their staff. As such, parental support needs to be solicited (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Heining-Boynton, 1990) and their motivations and decision-making processes understood to ensure the continuation of all forms of language programs. Even the very first immersion program in North America, the St. Lambert experiment in Canada, would not have been possible without the determination, enthusiasm, hard work, and dedication of a group of parents who wanted to improve their children's education.

Parental Involvement

The amount of current research on parental involvement is extensive. This is most likely due to its empirically proven positive effects, which appeal to educators and the public alike, who in turn consider "parental involvement an important ingredient for the remedy for many problems in education" (Fan & Chen, 2001, p. 1). However, parental involvement has also become a federal mandate within the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. To be entitled to federal funding, schools have to make every effort and employ appropriate practices based on the most current research to involve parents in their children's education (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005).

In reviewing the literature it becomes apparent that various definitions for the concept of parental involvement are applied in current research. Examples include parents' educational aspirations for their child (e.g., Hung & Marjoribanks, 2005), parenting behaviors (e.g., Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005), or engagement at home (e.g., Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). It is therefore suggested to see parent involvement as multifaceted since it encompasses a range of parenting practices and patterns of behavior (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Fan & Chen, 2001). Introduced in Chapter I as the conceptual framework of this study, I primarily draw on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995,

1997) revised model of the parental involvement process (Walker et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) have taken a strictly psychological perspective to explaining why parents become involved in their children's education. Within their model of parental involvement, they suggest that parents' basic involvement decisions are largely shaped by two belief systems: (a) their *role construction* and (b) their *sense of efficacy.*

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) define *role construction* as parents' "beliefs about what they are supposed to do in relation to their children's education and the patterns of parental behavior that follow those beliefs" (p. 107). Parents are hereby influenced by their knowledge of and attitude toward child rearing and development, effective parenting as well as educational support at home. Parents develop these beliefs and understandings while being members and participants in groups relevant to the parent and child-rearing such as families, schools, churches, and the broader culture (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In addition, parents' role construction is shaped by their personal experiences with and affective responses to school. It is socially constructed and therefore subject to change (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Studies have examined the influence of parents' social groups on parental involvement and decision-making. In a study on parents' social networks and beliefs as predictors of parent involvement, Sheldon (2002) surveyed 195 mothers of elementary students. He found that "over and above parents' individual beliefs, parents' social networks are significantly associated with levels of parent involvement" (p. 314). Another study on parental motivation, attitudes, support, and commitment for a two-way immersion program by Giacchino-Baker and Piller (2006) confirmed that parents' social networks impacted the schooling decisions parents made for their children. In this study, Spanish-speaking parents reported that mostly other parents influenced their decision-making whereas English-speaking parents were mostly influenced by teachers and/or administrators. The child's school as an important social group to parents was also identified by Anderson and Minke (2007). In their study of

elementary school parents, invitations for involvement specifically from teachers had a strong relationship with parental involvement

Identified as another construct affecting parents' involvement decisions is their *sense of efficacy* defined as "the belief that personal actions will help their child learn" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Self-efficacy theory suggests that parents think about their involvement, their capabilities to help, as well as the results their involvement may have (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Thus, parents with high self-efficacy "will tend to make positive decisions about active engagement in the child's education … and are likely to persist in the face of challenges" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 109). Parents with weak self-efficacy, on the other hand, expect little of their efforts to help their child succeed in school and have low persistence when faced with challenges. Parental efficacy is also socially constructed and based on personal experiences (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In her study on parents' aspirations for their children's educational attainments, Wentzel (1998) surveyed 363 parents of elementary school students and found that parental self-efficacy as well as other parent attributes such as parental beliefs or theories of intelligence about children "were positive predictors of parents' aspirations for their children's educational success" (p. 31). This indicates that parental efficacy is connected to parents' educational goal-setting and confidence in their child. Yamamoto, Holloway, and Suzuki (2006) examined both self-efficacy and role construction in Japanese mothers of preschool children. They found that mothers reported more involvement in their preschooler's education when they felt efficacious and perceived their role to be an active supporter of their child's intellectual development.

This sample of the literature underlines the influence of motivational beliefs in parents' involvement decisions and behaviors. To illustrate the educational impact of parents, the next segment will highlight some of the research on parent involvement and the reported benefits of such engagement to children's academic achievements as well as to schools and programs.

Parental Involvement Benefits Students

Parental involvement has been a topic of interest in educational research for many years. Even though its benefits to a child's education have always been clearly assumed, current research has focused on providing scientific evidence to shed more light on the various dimensions of parent involvement and its specific attributes to areas of academic achievement, students' motivation and well-being. Since the literature on parental involvement is extensive, this section will only review some of the more recent studies.

Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a quantitative meta-analysis of twenty-five studies on parental involvement and students' achievement since they found empirical studies to be rather scarce. Their overall findings "make a good case for the positive influence of parental involvement on students' academic achievement" (p. 17). Particularly the expectations and values parents have regarding education are strongly related to a child's academic achievement. Parental involvement at home – such as monitoring time doing homework or time spent watching TV – were found to only have a weak relationship with their children's performance at school.

Hung and Marjoribanks (2005) found similar results in their study of Taiwanese sixth graders. The perception these middle school students had of their parents' educational aspirations for them had significant associations with their achievement. However, these results need to be seen in the Taiwanese context of this study, where family life and status play a different role than in many western countries. Another meta-analysis conducted by Jeynes (2005) focusing on particularly urban elementary students found a strong relationship between academic achievement and parents' involvement and concluded that "any group can experience the advantages of parental involvement" (p. 260).

Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002) investigated parental involvement in the area of children's literacy development – probably the most influenced subject by parent involvement. Their five-year longitudinal study examined early home literacy activities

of parents and their kindergarten and first grade children. Literacy experiences at home included activities such as reading a bedtime story (informal activity) or teaching reading and writing (formal activity). Their findings suggested "clear links from home experiences, through early literacy skills, to fluent reading" (p. 455).

Parental involvement tends to decline as students get older (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Mo and Singh (2008) therefore examined the ongoing involvement of parents and its effects on students' school engagement and performance. Data from seventh and eighth grade students was employed to study their behavioral (e.g. getting along with other students), emotional (e.g. feeling part of the school), and cognitive engagement (e.g. wanting to go to college). The study "confirmed the importance and significance of parents' involvement in middle school students' school engagement and performance" (p.1). Once again parental aspirations stood out as having a direct effect on students' cognitive and emotional engagement.

In a report on family involvement at the secondary level (Catsambis, 1998) data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 was analyzed. The report found evidence that parental involvement still influenced students' educational outcomes at the high school level, however to a lesser degree than in earlier grades. Parental expectations and encouragement were seen as the most important involvement practices. Particularly educational expectations of parents were shown to have long-term effects.

As can be seen in this sample of the literature, parent involvement plays a vital role in many aspects and at all levels of a child's education. The studies reviewed show that parental expectations and aspirations in particular have an impact on students' educational outcomes. Yet parental involvement also shapes students' motivations and sense of efficacy. Gonzalez-DeHass et al. (2005) found in their review of the literature on the relationship between parental influence and student motivation that positive relationships exist between the two constructs. They concluded,

> When parents show an interest in their child's education by getting involved, students adopt a mastery goal orientation to learning where they are more likely to seek challenging tasks, persist through academic challenges, and experience satisfaction in their schoolwork (p. 117-118).

Second language learning is particularly influenced by attitudes and motivation. Donato et al. (1994) studied a Japanese FLES program over the course of a number of years and observed a "strong, positive correlation between the children's awareness of parental encouragement for language study and their attainment in Japanese" (p. 376). In a study of American fourth to twelfth graders learning an Asian language (Japanese, Chinese, or Korean), Sung and Padilla (1998) found that parent involvement was important for student motivation. Especially the participation of ethnic heritage parents had an influence on students' language learning motivation.

This review of current research highlights the influence parental involvement has on students' educational outcomes. Parents also shape the motivations of their children through their own views and expectations. This underscores the need to learn more about what parents want for their children and the thought-processes behind their actions. With the next section, the focus will shift from the importance of parental involvement to students' education to the significance of parents as supporters of and partners to schools.

Parental Involvement Benefits Schools and Programs

Parents' attitudes and involvement not only influence their own children's education but also the programs and schools in which these children are enrolled. As pointed to earlier, the St. Lambert experiment in Canada would not have taken shape and continued if it had not been for the efforts and perseverance of some involved parents who wanted to improve their children's education (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). A lack of parental support, on the other hand, can result in a program's disappearance – as happened with a number of FLES programs during the 1970s (Heining-Boynton, 1990). As Heining-Boynton and Haitema (2007) put it succinctly, "A positive attitude can

translate into increased support for the program, whereas a negative attitude may often lead to the program's termination" (p. 149).

Alternative education programs such as immersion or FLES are particularly dependent on parents' support and involvement to justify their worth and to continue serving their communities. Often founders and supporters of immersion programs are faced with resistance from school authorities on the grounds that resources need to be reallocated or that these programs tend to not serve all students (Cloud et al., 2000). Parents are therefore asked to step to the fore and "contribute to the success of their schools in a variety of ways" (García et al., 1995, p. 61). Parents serve as advertisers and communicators of a school's success and the quality of education it provides; they are willing to provide funds when schools are financially stressed; and they promote their school within the community and among other parents (García et al., 1995). Also, the impact parental recommendations have on other parents cannot be underestimated (see Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Sheldon, 2002). In a qualitative study on parents' involvement and decision-making in immersion programs, 19% of survey respondents reported being influenced in their decision to enroll their child by personal experience or their social networks (Wesely & Baig, 2011). In Maslowski's (2008) case study of immersion teachers, participants observed parents "as huge supporters because of their exuberance displayed when talking with others about immersion. Many encouraged their friends to find out more about it" (p. 99). Moreover, parental involvement not only impacts other parents but also administrators – as had also been seen in the St. Lambert experiment. In a study conducted by Baranick and Markham (1986), elementary school principals in the state of Maryland were surveyed about their attitudes toward foreign language instruction. The study found that "where principals perceived parental interest as high, their attitudes were more positive" (p. 483).

Researchers and practitioners agree that parents' support is essential for the success of foreign language education programs (e.g., Cloud et al., 2000; Curtain &

Dahlberg, 2004; Heining-Boynton, 1990). No one has a greater interest in the quality of a child's education than his/her parents. For that reason, it behooves foreign language educators to not ignore parental opinions and motivations. Consequently, their thoughts and decision-making processes need to be further explored.

<u>Summary</u>

Within this first part of the literature review, I highlighted some of the extensive research on parental involvement and gave evidence of the impact it has on students' academic achievements and motivations. Additionally, I discussed how parents function as partners to schools and their staff, and thus shape educational policies and decisions.

It is the parents who make early educational choices for their children. They can ignite an enthusiasm for life-long language learning, for example, by sending their child to an immersion program. Thus, it is not surprising that many of these alternative forms of education were started by groups of parents and heavily depend on them for continuation. Current educational research, therefore, must include the voice of parents, why they do what they do, and what they want for their children. In the next segment, I will review literature related to research on parental beliefs and attitudes, its educational impact and consequences.

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<u>The Importance of Parental Attitudes and Beliefs in</u>

<u>Education</u>

</div>

As highlighted in the previous section, parents' involvement greatly influences their children's educational outcomes and they often function as invested partners to schools. Like all human beings, parents rely on their experiences, perceptions, values and emotions to understand situations and make decisions. Goodnow (1988) notes "to focus only on parents' overt behaviors is to treat parents as unthinking creatures, ignoring the fact that they interpret events, with these interpretations probably influencing their actions and feelings." (p. 287). It is therefore warranted to examine how and to what

extent parental cognitions such as attitudes and beliefs influence parents' educational actions and the choices they make. The conceptual framework of this study (see Chapter I) is particularly beneficial as it allows for a psychological exploration of parents involvement. As previously presented, the model suggests that parents are motivated by beliefs that they should be involved and that they have the skills and the knowledge to make a positive impact (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker et al., 2005).

In a study on predictors of parental involvement (Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski, & Apostoleris, 1997), a diverse sample of mothers of urban elementary school students was interviewed. The study found that mothers who believed they are efficacious and felt they can be a teacher to their child were more likely to be involved in exposing their children to intellectually stimulating activities. Sheldon (2002) also examined predictors of parental involvement focusing on parents' social networks and beliefs. He could confirm positive links between parental beliefs and parent involvement. Sheldon (2002) found that "the more parents believe that *all* parents should be involved in their children's education, the more likely they are to be involved themselves" (emphasis in the original, p. 312). Since beliefs are seen as the driving force behind actual involvement practices, Drummond and Stipek (2004) examined low-income parents' beliefs about their role in their children's academic learning. They could find evidence that this particular parent group also believed it was their responsibility to be involved and strongly valued parental involvement in their children's education. Interestingly, in open-ended interviews in his study, six of eleven parents admitted to not helping their child with math due to their own inadequate knowledge. This underscores the linkage between involvement and parents' sense of efficacy and their beliefs of being able to help their child (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Efficacy beliefs have also been explored in other contexts. In a study of Japanese mothers and determinants of parental involvement in early schooling, Holloway, Yamamoto, Suzuki, and Mindnich (2008) found that "the construct of parenting self-efficacy is as powerful a predictor of parental involvement in Japan as it is

in Western countries" (Implications for Practice, para. 2). Interestingly, some of these Japanese mothers who felt less efficacious to support their child's education were more likely to choose extra lessons and activities. Thus, in this particular context where education is highly competitive a low sense of efficacy did not necessarily result in non-involvement.

Parental attitudes and beliefs do not only influence parents and the ways in which they act and make decisions. They also have an impact on children and their choices, actions, and values. Research conducted by Jacobs and Bleeker (2004) studied the relationship between parents' attitudes, activity involvement, purchases, and children's later math and science interests and activities. The study found that parental attitudes were linked to children's later achievement beliefs and behaviors in math and science. Mothers in this study, for example, were reported to be more likely to buy math- and science-related toys for sons than for daughters regardless of the child's school grade; thereby conveying the attitude that boys have a higher math and science aptitude. In a different study focused on attitudes towards science, Tenenbaum and Leaper (2003) examined parent-child conversations about science. The study provided evidence that associations could be drawn between parents' and children's science-related attitudes. Parents were found to believe that their daughters were less interested in science than sons and that they would find science difficult. In addition, parental attitudes were reported to significantly predict children's interest and self-efficacy in science.

Parents are guided in their educational decisions and behaviors by attitudes and beliefs. They convey these consciously and subconsciously to their children, thereby influencing their values, choices, and actions. I now want to focus on research that has aimed at exploring particularly parental attitudes and beliefs in language learning contexts.

Parental Attitudes and Beliefs in Language Learning

Contexts

Similar to the exploration of parental attitudes and beliefs in math and sciences, for example, educational researchers have made attempts to examine these constructs in the learning of languages. In this section, I will review relevant literature that has reported on the influences of parents' attitudes and beliefs in language learning contexts. While also discussing parental attitudes and beliefs in language learning in general, due to the nature of this study, I will mainly focus on three particular contexts: (a) two-way immersion settings; (b) one-way immersion programs; and (c) FLES programs.

Bartram (2006) conducted a qualitative study of parental influences on attitudes toward language learning. He surveyed 411 European high school students learning English, French, or German as a foreign language. His study found that positive language learning attitudes in parents were reflected in their children's attitudes. Parents were seen as positive influences if they provided help and encouragement or served as language learner role models. The findings also suggested that parents help their children shape an understanding of the importance of language, its usefulness and status by successfully communicating "educational regrets" or the "utilitarian value of language learning" (Bartram, 2006, p. 218).

Henkel (2009) studied Hungarian minority students in Ukraine and their motivations for studying Ukrainian. Participants were 211 students aged between sixteen and eighteen who had been studying Ukrainian from six to eleven years. The researcher hypothesized that parents played an influential role in their children's motivation to master the second language. Using students' questionnaire responses, the study could provide evidence that parents actively shaped and advanced these students' language learning motivation through their encouragement of and attitude toward language learning.

In an ethnographic inquiry on Chinese immigrant families in Québec, Curdt-Christiansen (2009) examined parental ideologies and family language policies. The researcher wanted to learn more about how parents perceived and valued multilingualism and studied ten families whose children learned Chinese, English, and French. The study found that participants had high educational expectations for their children and also positive beliefs regarding multilingualism. Curdt-Christiansen (2009) concluded that "these strong beliefs, attitudes, expectations and aspirations about the importance of multilingual education and high academic standards can be translated into active involvement and investment in the children's school and educational lives" (p.371). These Chinese parents were guided by their strong beliefs in education and language learning; their values and beliefs influenced aspects such as their parenting goals or the educational support provided.

Two-Way Immersion Programs

Two-way immersion programs are also often referred to as dual-language or bilingual programs (Genesee & Gándara, 1999; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006). In the United States, most two-way immersion programs use English and Spanish to teach their curriculum (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006). Consequentially, their student population generally consists of language majority speakers (usually English) and language minority speakers (usually Spanish) in almost equal numbers. Two-way immersion programs follow four central goals for their students to achieve: (a) functional L1 proficiency and literacy; (b) functional L2 proficiency and literacy; (c) same high academic achievements as English-only students; and (d) positive cross-cultural attitudes and behaviors (Howard, Sugarman, & Christian, 2003).

Due to the demographic changes in this country, two-way immersion schools have seen a dramatic growth over the last 15 years, which has promoted an increased interest in these programs and their educational outcomes (Howard et al., 2003). Since

"bilingual education is not, and never has been, a neutral process" (Stritikus & Garcia, 2005, p. 729) much attention has been given to this educational approach, not only by researchers and practitioners but also by politicians and the general public alike. Because bilingual education is embedded in the divisive and contested issue of immigration, various states in recent years have seen antibilingual initiatives come to pass. As a result, many promoters and researchers in the field of bilingual education have turned to parents and their attitudes and perspectives to attest to the benefits of two-way immersion schooling (e.g., Boone, 2007; Cava, 1998; Flynn, 2006; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Rhodes, Christian, & Barfield, 1997; Shannon & Milian, 2002; Stritikus & Garcia, 2005). Parents' involvement is vital not only to students' academic achievement but also for maintaining schools and programs – especially those offering an alternative form of education like immersion. Parents are important constituents in education, "[their] choice and voice … are fundamental to the implementation of quality educational programs" (Shannon & Milian, 2002, pp. 693-694). In order for language teachers and administrators to gain the support of parents and assist them in making informed educational decisions, they need to be regarded as allies. Administrators and teachers but also policy makers must continue to consider parents' viewpoints, their motivations, and the factors that drive their decision-making.

So as to learn more about parents' perspectives as well as to restrain antibilingual initiatives and sentiments in the public, researchers in the field of bilingualism have carried out survey studies with parents whose children attended two-way immersion programs. Shannon and Milian (2002), for example, conducted a study in Colorado and found strong evidence that parents were enthusiastic about and committed to the two-way immersion programs their children attended. In regards to parents' attitudes about such programs, they determined that

> Parents view these programs to be academically sound, an
> innovative vehicle for promoting communication and respect
> among children from different cultures, and effective in teaching a

> second language. Indeed, parents view these programs as an excellent educational opportunity for their children and expressed their desire for these programs to expand in Colorado (p. 693).

In a different study, Stritikus and Garcia (2005) employed data from a statewide survey of randomly sampled parents in Arizona (a state that ended bilingual education in 2000), to delve deeper into parents' perspectives on matters of bilingualism in schools. They found most parents to favor English and Spanish as the languages of instruction for English-language learners, which suggested that, "educational policies, at least in this state, may be seriously out of sync with majority perspectives of parents" (p. 741).

Two-way immersion programs lend themselves especially well to research on differences in motivations between the diverse groups of parents represented at many of these schools. Cava (1998), for example, studied the attitudes, involvement, and satisfaction of parents at three different two-way immersion elementary schools. He compared parents of Hispanic heritage to parents of Euro-American heritage. When asked about their primary enrollment reason, Euro-American parents stressed the educational or career advantage a two-way immersion program could provide their children. Hispanic parents on the other hand pointed to integrative motivations for enrolling their children such as keeping a bicultural identity or being able to integrate with other Spanish speakers. These results are not surprising, keeping in mind the background of these two parent groups.

Giacchino-Baker and Piller (2006) reported on English-first and Spanish-first speaking parents in their survey study of a two-way immersion elementary school in southern California. English-first parents' motivations for enrolling their children were instrumental in nature, similar to the reasons of parents with Euro-American heritage in Cava's (1998) study. English-first parents argued that the two-way immersion program "would allow their children to function in a bilingual society and multilingual world" (p. 24). Their Spanish-speaking counterparts stressed "economic, academic, and linguistic integration, AND preservation of home language" (emphasis in the original, p. 24).

According to Giacchino-Baker and Piller's (2006) survey, aside from expected integrative motivations, today's Spanish-speaking parents see the need for their children to be "completely bilingual with excellent literacy skills in both languages" (p. 20).

Other recent studies have focused solely on minorities in two-way immersion programs. Flynn (2006) surveyed Hispanic and African-American parents in a two-way immersion program in the Los Angeles area. These predominantly low-income and working class families gave the following top three reasons for enrolling their children at a two-way immersion school:

(a) Academic advantage
(b) Stronger identity as bilingual-bicultural/multicultural individual
(c) Ability to communicate with family, friends or other Spanish-speaking people (p. 79)

Boone (2007) found similar instrumental and integrative motivations in her research study on successful African American students in a two-way immersion program in Texas. Parents of these students provided a range of motives for enrolling their child in a two-way immersion school, "from the desire to be bilingual to economic reasons to educational to living alongside other ethnicities" (p. 111).

In a study of 724 families whose children attended Spanish two-way or one-way immersion programs in the Southwest, Parkes (2008) examined why parents chose these programs for their children. He found that 93.6% of all survey respondents desired true bilingualism for their children, i.e. being able to read, write, and speak in English and Spanish. The second most frequently selected response by participants was for their child to be successful in a global society (63.1%). Even though Parkes (2008) found that enrollment motivations varied among parents, he could establish that their primary goals were the eventual benefits of bilingualism and greater cultural awareness.

The research studies reviewed in this section provide an insight into the beliefs of diverse parent groups and their motivations for choosing to send their children to two-way immersion programs. These studies cover a period of close to ten years of

educational research in bilingualism and parental attitudes and perspectives, yet results have only slightly changed. Parents strongly support well-implemented bilingual education programs. They see these programs as academically sound, as effective in maintaining the L1, teaching the L2 and cultural sensitivity, and as valuable and advantageous in today's society. Some of these parental motivations likely also apply to one-way immersion and FLES programs, which the next section will explore.

One-Way Immersion/FLES Programs

One-way immersion and FLES programs are two types of early language program models. They are not the same as they have different goals and expected student outcomes. However, since research on parents and one-way immersion programs is rather limited, I drew on both program models for this literature review. FLES programs are non-immersion language programs at the elementary school level that have less contact hours with the target language and serve as language enrichment opportunities for predominantly language majority English speakers. The goal of FLES programs is "for students to acquire listening and speaking skills, gain an understanding of and appreciation for other cultures, and acquire limited amounts of reading and writing skills" (Rosenbusch, 2002, p. 517). One-way foreign language immersion programs in the United States are typically modeled after Canadian French immersion schools (Fortune & Tedick, 2008). In the U.S. context, the student population in these programs is usually composed of English native speakers who are "in the process of acquiring the same second language" (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p. 5). The goals of one-way immersion programs are similar to those of two-way immersion programs. In addition to aiming for academic achievement and literacy in at least two languages, these programs want to produce bi- or multilingual speakers who have a great awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity (Fortune & Tedick, 2008).

Research involving one-way immersion or FLES programs has explored aspects such as student language learning attitudes and motivation (e.g., Heining-Boynton & Haitema, 2007; Wesely, 2009a; Wesely, 2009b), student achievements (e.g., Donato, Tucker, Wudthayagorn, & Igarashi, 2000; Turnbull, Lapkin, & Hart, 2003) or the language practitioner's view (e.g., Maslowski, 2008; Parrouty, 2009; Walker & Tedick, 2000). Parental attitudes and perspectives have mainly been investigated in two-way immersion settings. However, a number of researchers in the field have undertaken the task of investigating why language majority parents choose to have their child learn a second language in either a FLES or one-way immersion setting (e.g., Choy, 1993; Donato, Antonek, & Tucker, 1994; Donato, Antonek, & Tucker, 1996; McLendon Cansler, 2008; Wesely & Baig, 2011).

Research studies have found that parents support language learning opportunities, such as one-way immersion and FLES, for their children and that they do not consider the study of a foreign language to interfere with other subjects (Donato et al., 1996; Donato, et al., 2000; McLendon Cansler, 2008). In addition, parents often choose to send their child to a language program based on the excellent reputation of such schools and their teaching staff (Donato et al., 1996; Donato et al., 2000; Wesely & Baig, 2011).

Choy's (1993) participatory research study had six parents critically reflect on a Japanese language program their children attended in California [note: even though this program is called a 'bilingual' program, I include it in this section of the literature review because "it is not considered a language immersion program" (Choy, 1993, p. 3) and the majority of its students speak English as their first language]. For this group of parents,

> The collective impression was that learning another language is an effective way to begin learning about that culture. Parents felt that skills acquired while learning about a specific language and culture could be applied to other situations and that children who possessed these skills would be better able to live successfully in a diverse society (Choy, 1993, pp. 95-96).

These six parents had mainly integrative motivations for enrolling their children in this particular language program. Language learning to them was clearly more an enrichment experience for their children. This was also supported by "the repeated number of times 'fun' and 'enjoyment' surfaced in the [parent] dialogues" (p. 98). Parents sent their children to this program in hopes that they would have a fun, motivating, and enriching experience. Another interesting finding was the concern that parents expressed about the lack of continuity for their children's language learning in their specific district and throughout the United States. Language learning continuity and choice has been a reported worry of many parents regardless of the language program they choose (Boone, 2007; Donato et al., 1994; Donato et al., 1996; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Shannon & Milian, 2002).

An additional noteworthy result of Choy's (1993) research was that five of the six parents interviewed in this study did not expect their children to become fluent in Japanese as a result of attending the program. Donato et al. (1996) and Donato et al. (2000) found similar results in a longitudinal study of a different Japanese FLES program. In a report on the third year of this program, not a single parent "reported that they hoped their children became fluent in Japanese, nor did they rank fluency as a program priority" (Donato et al., 1996, p. 507). These parents desired an enjoyable language learning experience for their children, facilitated by a talented and enthusiastic teacher, as well as for the students to gain cultural knowledge. The same results were again reported in the sixth year of this Japanese FLES program (Donato et al., 2000). These findings stand in contrast to the motivations of many one-way and two-way immersion parents who voiced their desire or the need for their child to attain fluency in both languages (Boone, 2007; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Parkes, 2008; Shannon & Milian, 2002; Wesely & Baig, 2011). In Wesely and Baig's (2011) qualitative study, parents' reasons for enrolling their children in French or Spanish one-way immersion programs were explored. The research team found that the majority of parents (40%)

chose an immersion program because they wanted their child to learn a second language and become bilingual.

Finally, parents in several studies voiced another interesting finding: parents who send their child to a one-way immersion or FLES program have acknowledged a certain level of anxiety about their decision. Because these programs are rather unique and provide an alternative form of education, many parents have "a heightened desire for information about curricular content, student progress and, above all, a need for reassurance about achievement" (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 22). Donato et al. (1996) also found this to be true about parents they surveyed in a Japanese FLES program. In addition, some immersion teachers have shared their perceptions of parents' anxiety about their child's immersion experience. Mandy Fleming (2007), a former immersion teacher, said:

> I wish I had known that parents would be excited and nervous about educating their children through a language they may or may not know. They do not necessarily know what to expect, what is normal and what is not; communication with them about what immersion is, what learning through a second language looks like, and about individual student progress is essential. It can make both the student's education and your life easier!

Maslowski (2008) observed in his case study of immersion teachers that parental anxiety can be a cause of additional stress for teachers, something regular school teachers do not have to deal with. It reiterates immersion parents' need for increased and continuous information in order to have a successful home-school relationship. Even one of the parents of the St. Lambert experiment, the first immersion program in North America, admitted "it took a certain amount of courage for parents to put their children in the program" (Melikoff in Lambert & Tucker, 1972, p. 227). This anxiety appears to persist today. Since parents in these programs are predominantly native English speakers, they are at times unable to help their children with schoolwork. This worries many parents as their children are most often in elementary school where parents' help is still needed and

expected. Yet, this is not a challenge of one-way immersion or FLES programs alone; English-first parents in two-way immersion programs face similar dilemmas (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006).

Motivations and anxieties have a marked influence on parents' decision to send their children to an immersion school underscoring the complex relationship that takes place between parents and these schools in particular. In order to have an effective partnership between schools and parents, it is worth exploring what parents think in regards to these programs, what factors influence their decisions to send their child to a language program, and what factors encourage and discourage them from continuing with such programs.

Summary

In this last segment of the literature review, I highlighted current research on parents' motivations for enrolling their child in two-way immersion, one-way immersion, or FLES programs. I have found that the majority of recent studies has centered on two-way immersion programs, due to their large numbers and heightened public attention. The studies I have reviewed show that there is some degree of overlap in the motivations immersion parents have for their decision-making such as a desire for their children to gain functional proficiency in two languages and an increased cultural sensitivity. Nonetheless, there are also program-specific motivations. Parents who choose two-way immersion programs are often influenced by their family language backgrounds since these programs usually serve English speaking as well as Spanish speaking students. There are, however, also two-way immersion programs which do not target the traditional English/Spanish speaking population usually associated with these programs. In this study, I hope to shed some light on particularly those families.

Chapter Summary

The immersion concept of teaching a language is not a new phenomenon in North America as many might assume (Genesee & Gándara, 1999; Ovando, 2003). Today immersion schools in various languages continue to open across the U.S. For all schools but especially programs like these, parents are vital as advertisers, helpers, and sometimes even financiers. Parents also impact their children's academic performances by being involved and they influence their children with their educational decisions. As some of the studies in the first part of this chapter illustrated, students are motivated to learn a language and about other cultures especially if their parents show interest and thereby foster the children's enthusiasm.

Parents' motivations for sending their child to an immersion program naturally vary from family to family. However, as the second part of this literature review indicated, parents want their children to maintain their home language and culture as is the case for especially bilingual families, become fluent in two languages for better educational and job prospects, or have an enriching learning experience that regular schools do not provide. Much of the current research on parental perspectives and attitudes focuses on families in two-way immersion programs that use English and Spanish as the immersion languages. Most studies have used survey data to investigate why parents today choose a type of immersion program for their child; few open-ended and qualitative inquiries have been undertaken – particularly in a seemingly less-popular immersion language such as German. With this study, I intend to let a group of parents speak for themselves and provide insights into their decision-making processes about their school choice, the factors that influence them, and the expectations they have of the immersion experience. It is the parents who make these early educational decisions for their children and therefore it is the parents who can supply the profession with crucial information on how we can improve language learning and teaching and continue to see programs grow.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature reveals that parents have a tremendous impact on a child's education and that their decision-making is often influenced by attitudes and beliefs. Parents who enroll their children in immersion programs have various reasons for doing so. Families who choose bilingual schools (i.e. usually Spanish/English) most often desire for their children to maintain their home language and culture or to have better educational and job prospects by being fluent in two languages (e.g., Amaral, 2001; Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Shannon & Milian, 2002). Even though not many studies have examined the motivations parents have for choosing one-way immersion programs, the few studies that have delved into this topic found reasons such as acquiring a second language, increased cultural awareness and educational enrichment as well as future benefits (e.g., Choy, 1993; Parkes, 2008; Wesely & Baig, 2011). The present study was designed to explore in more detail why parents selected a newly established German immersion program as the school of their choice for their child. By learning more about the motivations and thought-processes behind such decision-making and understanding the factors that influence these decisions, I will add to the knowledge base of particularly parents and immersion schooling which in turn can assist the profession in program development and improved language learning and teaching. In this chapter, I describe the research design used in this study. I will provide a detailed description of the context, the participating schools and parents, and I will offer a rationale for my data collection and analysis procedures.

Research Design

This study was designed to explore the motivations of sixteen parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools focusing on why

they chose immersion education for their child and what influenced these decisions. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the stated motivations for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language program?

    1.1 What educational goals do immersion parents have for their child?

    1.2 What perceptions and expectations do parents have of their child's immersion program?

    1.3 Do beliefs about the German language influence immersion parents' decision?

2. What are the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making?

    2.1 Does an immersion parent's own school experience influence his/her decisions?

    2.2 Does an immersion parent's role perception influence his/her decision?

A qualitative research design suits the nature of this study as it focuses on "discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied" (Merriam, 1998, p. 1). Qualitative researchers accept "the value of context and setting" and search "for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon under study" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 55). For this project, I was particularly interested in learning how parents think and feel about their child's school experience as well as what they believe and value. Characteristics of qualitative research according to Merriam (1998) are: (a) taking an emic, i.e. insider's, perspective to the phenomenon under study; (b) having the researcher in charge of collecting and analyzing data; (c) conducting fieldwork; (d) employing inductive reasoning; and (e) producing thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study.

I chose a descriptive case study design for this research project as it allowed me to gain a "holistic, comprehensive and contextualized" (Lewis, 2003, p. 52) understanding of each of the two participating schools. My goal was to illustrate in detail and in participants' own words what motivates them in their educational decision-making and to

fully illuminate the various factors that come to play in such decision-making. Innovative programs and practices in education are frequently examined using descriptive case studies (Merriam, 1998).

Context of the Study

The settings for the current study were two newly established German immersion schools. For purposes of anonymity, the two schools will be referred to in this study by fictitious names: *Thomas Mann German School* located in a large Midwestern city, and *Schiller International Charter School* located in a large metropolitan area in California. I had come across these two programs in job announcements that were distributed via the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) listserv in the spring of 2009. Both these schools fit the criteria that I had established as new German immersion programs opening in the fall of 2009. I decided to include both of these schools in my study because the schools' contexts varied greatly and it would allow me to have a larger subject pool instead of only recruiting participants at one school.

Thomas Mann German School

Thomas Mann German School (TMGS) is an independent, not-for-profit, English/German dual-language school, which opened in September of 2009. A group of parents and business people in the area got together in 2007 with the idea of establishing the city's first German dual-language day school. Thus far, parents who were interested in their children learning German had the option of sending them to a Saturday school or other private language programs available in the city. TMGS opened with one combined preschool/kindergarten class and at the time of my visit in March 2010 fourteen students between the ages of three and five were enrolled. One head teacher and one assistant – all native speakers of German taught the multi-age class. According to the school's principal, the enrolled families represented very diverse backgrounds; however, the

majority of children came from homes where at least one parent spoke some German. The children of the four TMGS participants had English as their L1.

TMGS is located in a middle-class neighborhood and rents several rooms in a vacant building, which belonged to a charter school that outgrew the facility and moved out. Those in charge anticipated adding primary school through high school grades in subsequent years starting with first grade in September 2011. According to the school's program overview, the preschool/kindergarten curriculum is based on Montessori materials and a whole-child approach. It encourages self-motivation and independence, develops self-confidence and promotes self-discovery. Teachers interact with the students and teach the curriculum exclusively in German. TMGS offers a half-day (9 a.m. – 1 p.m.) and a full-day (9 a.m. – 3 p.m.) program five days a week. In its first year, annual tuition for the half day program was $6000; parents paid $9200 annually to send their child full time.

At the time of my visit, TMGS had been operating for about seven months. The fact that it was a brand new program and in its first year was clearly visible, to the researcher. The school only consisted of a few rented rooms in the building it was housed in but had a spacious gym and an enclosed outdoor playground. In some areas of the building I could see that repair and maintenance work was still undergoing; nonetheless, the classroom looked very appealing and well-equipped. The administrative tasks of the school mainly took place in a large room, which made up the office. It was furnished with a couple of long tables and chairs, a few bookshelves, and school advertisement on the wall. The room also had a desk/computer area that was set up by a window facing the school's entrance. Visitors could enter the building but had to be buzzed in to be able to get into the TMGS facility.

Schiller International Charter School

Schiller International Charter School (SICS) opened in the fall of 2009 as a tuition-free, English/German dual-language public school. SICS had adopted an immersion model that planned for 50% of the instruction to be in the minority language (German) and 50% to be in the majority language (English) alternating every other week for Kindergarten through second grade. The upper grades had "varying percentages of German language instruction depending on the language levels and curricular content demands" (Language Immersion Model 2009-2010). Similar to TMGS, SICS too began as a parent initiative: "The vision for this school emerged out of the dream of a group of tenacious parents who envisioned a better education for their own children" (Parent Handbook, 2009, p. 1). SICS was established as a charter school which are commonly defined as

> Publicly funded, nonsectarian public schools that operate free of the many regulations, restrictions, and mandates of traditional public schools. These schools are chartered or contracted as separate legal entities. As defined in the contract, they are accountable for their results at the end of the contract period – usually 3-5 years (Fulford, 1997, What are Charter Schools, para. 1)

At the time of my visit in April 2010, SICS enrolled 168 students in Kindergarten through fourth grade and had plans to add a middle and a high school in the future. The mission of SICS is to "prepare children for the global society of today and tomorrow. The school will encourage its students to become knowledgeable, self-motivated and critically-thinking people with respect and understanding for all cultures" (About Us, 2009). SICS opened with a commitment to becoming a fully accredited International Baccalaureate (IB) school by 2012 implementing the IB Primary Years Programme into its curriculum. According to the IB Organization, "the IB Primary Years Programme, for students aged 3 to 12, focuses on the development of the whole child as an inquirer, both in the classroom and in the world outside" (IBO, 2011a) and revolves around six transdisciplinary themes such as 'Who we are' or 'Where we are in place and time'.

According to SICS' principal, the student population during the first year was composed of about 15% minority children and 85% children of Caucasian/Anglo background. However, the community in which SICS was originally situated had a significant proportion of families who speak Spanish at home. Among participants' children, the majority had English as their L1; however, a few parents listed German as their child's L1 or that their child was bilingual in English and German.

Similar to TMGS, the fact that SICS was a start-up school was clearly visible. When I visited in April of 2010 the school had been operating for about eight months. As many charter schools, SICS was assigned a location by its school district and was housed on the grounds of a large middle school. The area SICS utilized was fenced off from the rest of the middle school's playground. Several cargo containers made up SICS' facilities housing classrooms and administrative offices. The principal's office could be found in a small shed and since there was no running water students had to use port-a-potties which were arranged in one corner of SICS' outdoor area. This outdoor space was very inviting and beautifully landscaped by parent volunteers who had planted flowers, plants, and set up several small picnic tables where I saw students having lunch when I visited. At the time of my visit, parents knew that SICS was going to move to another location at the end of the school year. They did not know yet where the new location was going to be but parents were aware that a move was imminent.

<div align="center">Participants</div>

The participants involved in this study were parents who had enrolled their child/children either at TMGS or SICS for the 2009/2010 school year. In addition, they needed to have at least one child still attending the respective immersion program at the time of the interviews and be willing to share their experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. In total, sixteen parents volunteered to participate in the study; four parents at TMGS and twelve parents at SICS (see Table 1).

Table 1 Participants

Parent	School	Gender	Grade of Child	Connection to German
P1	TMGS	F	Pre-K	Heritage
P2	TMGS	F	Pre-K	Lived Abroad
P3	TMGS	F	Pre-K	Spouse
P4	TMGS	F	Pre-K	Heritage
P5	SICS	F	K	Native Speaker
P6	SICS	M	K	None
P7	SICS	F	K	Native Speaker
P8	SICS	F	K, 2	Native Speaker
P9	SICS	F	K	Native Speaker
P10	SICS	F	1, 4	Native Speaker
P11	SICS	M	1	Spouse
P12	SICS	F	K	Native Speaker
P13	SICS	F	1	Spouse
P14	SICS	M	K	Heritage
P15	SICS	F	K	None
P16	SICS	F	1	None

In order to obtain participants for this study, I employed non-probability sampling as my focus was not to "be statistically representative" (Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003, p. 78) but to "bring about understanding that in turn can affect and perhaps even improve practice" (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). At both schools, the participant selection process heavily depended on the principals since they were my initial contacts with the schools. After corresponding with the administrators and providing them with information on my study (Appendix A), they chose to identify parents who they thought might be interested in participating. This form of non-probability sampling is called convenience sampling where "people are selected on the basis of their availability and willingness to respond" (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009, p. 141). Both schools sent me the contact information of several parents and helped me establish correspondence with them. In some instances, snowball sampling also came into play as some parents contacted other parents they knew and encouraged them to participate in the study. It needs to be stressed that the participants who volunteered for this study were likely the kinds of parents who were more involved, had more optimistic attitudes and more positive things to say about the school than other parents who did not choose to participate in the interviews. Researchers who have examined parental involvement have suggested that parents who participated in research studies were often also more involved in their child's education. Anderson and Minke (2007) viewed completing their research survey as a form of parent involvement and concluded, "Perhaps parents who do not get involved in their children's education also do not complete research surveys about parent involvement" (p. 320). In his study on parents' social networks and beliefs, Sheldon (2002) assumed that "the parents who completed and returned the surveys were more involved than were the nonrespondents" (p. 313).

Demographics

Prior to the interviews, I asked all sixteen participants to fill out a basic demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). They were asked to provide voluntary information about their ethnic and language background, as well as their level of education and income (see Table 2).

Table 2 Participants' demographic information

Gender	• 3 Male
	• 13 Female
Ethnic Background	• 15 Caucasian/Anglo
	• 1 Hispanic/Latino
Level of Education (completed)	• 1 high school or equivalent
	• 13 four-year college/university degree
	• 2 professional degree/graduate school
Yearly Income	• 1 under $25,000
	• 1 $50,000-$75,000
	• 2 $75,000-$100,000
	• 8 $100,000 and above
	• 4 not answered
First Language	• 9 English
	• 5 German
	• 2 not answered

Data Sources

Marshall and Rossman (2006) list four methods qualitative researchers typically rely on for gathering information: (a) participating, (b) observing, (c) interviewing, and (d) analyzing documents. For this study, I chose to conduct in-depth interviews, observe the setting, as well as analyze demographic questionnaires and reflective notes. Each data source employed is described in detail below.

Demographic Questionnaire

In order to gather basic background information, I invited participants to fill out a ten-item demographic questionnaire (Appendix B). According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "researchers administer questionnaires … to learn about the distribution of characteristics, attitudes, or beliefs" (p. 125). Parents were asked about their ethnic, linguistic, and educational background as well as their socio-economic status. These questions were designed to help me, first of all, learn more about each participant prior to the interview such as which grade their child/children attended. Additionally, the questionnaire provided some basis for understanding the population I was working with and allowed me to compare the respondents to each other during my analysis of the interview data. In most cases, the demographic questionnaire was administered prior to scheduling the interviews. Participants received the questionnaire and a stamped envelope from the principal and sent it back to me after it was completed. A few participants, however, filled out the questionnaire right before the interview. All parents filled out a questionnaire; though, some questions were left blank (see Table 2). It appeared to take participants approximately five minutes to complete all questions.

Semi-structured Interviews

The central source of data for my study derived from interviews conducted with parents who volunteered to participate and whose children attended either TMGS or SICS. Yin (1994) considers interviews to be "one of the most important sources of case study information" (p. 84). Interviewing was the most beneficial form of data collection for this study as parents' motivations for choosing such a program could not merely be observed (Merriam, 1998). Interviews allowed me to see the phenomenon of interest through the participants' eyes – not as others or I might view it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Among the various types of interviewing, I chose semi-structured interviews because

> They are flexible, allowing the conversation a certain amount of freedom in terms of the direction it takes, and respondents are also encouraged to talk in an open-ended manner about the topics under discussion or any other matters they feel are relevant (Borg, 2006, p. 203).

Presented in Chapter I as the conceptual framework of this study, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) revised parental involvement model (Walker et al., 2005) provided an orienting perspective for compiling interview questions (see Appendix C for interview protocol). Several of the questions were also adapted from Choy's (1993) study of a Japanese bilingual bicultural program. Interview items aimed to elicit information on parents' motivations for enrollment, their educational goals for their children, their views and expectations of the program, and their experiences with and beliefs about the target language, German. Additionally, I was led by "how the participant frames and structures the responses" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 101). Merriam (1998) points out that "this format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic" (p. 74).

I scheduled all interviews by E-mail after receiving the demographic questionnaires from participants. In cases where I did not receive the questionnaire, I used the contact information I received from the school principal. Of the sixteen participants, I could meet eleven in person. Due to scheduling conflicts, five parents agreed to be interviewed by phone (see Table 3). Interviews were audio-taped and lasted from approximately twenty-six minutes to one hour and thirteen minutes. The phone interviews were also recorded using the loud speaker setting on the telephone. The sixteen interviews generated 133 pages of transcribed research data (single-spaced, 12-pt). In addition to the parent interviews, I also interviewed the principals at TMGS and SICS.

Table 3 Interview locations

TMGS	
	• 2 school
	• 1 Whole Foods food court
	• 1 parent's workplace
SICS	• 5 hotel lobby
	• 1 school
	• 1 Starbucks
	• 5 phone

School Visits and Reflective Journaling

To add to the questionnaire and interview data, I chose to informally visit both schools to gain a better understanding of the context under study. Since some interviewees asked me to meet them at school, I had a chance to visit TMGS and SICS several times. In addition to gathering information about the schools' general climate, its building and location, and observing various interactions at school, I also realized that having been to the school allowed for conversation pointers in some of the interviews. Yin (1984) considers such casual yet direct observations "another source of evidence in a case study … providing additional information about the topic being studied" (p. 86/87). By visiting both schools, I was able to first and foremost get a sense of what a start-up school looked like and the physical challenges they face. Merely hearing about it did not suffice. There were various interactions I could observe by being on-site such as parents interacting with each other at pick-up time, parent volunteers interacting with the children during lunch break, parents interacting with the staff, or the principal interacting with students. Observing these behaviors "in its natural setting" (Merriam, 1998, p.7) allowed me to add another layer to my understanding of the context under investigation.

While being on-site visiting the participating schools and conducting interviews, I also kept a reflective journal. I mainly wrote about my "ideas, fears, mistakes, confusion,

and reactions to the experience" (Merriam, 1998, p. 110) but I also included thoughts on

the methodology itself and preliminary interpretations of interviews. Additionally, I

wrote reflective notes immediately after each interview, following Merriam's (1998)

suggestion of recording and evaluating interview data:

> These reflections might contain insights suggested by the
> interview, descriptive notes on the behavior, verbal and nonverbal,
> of the informant, parenthetical thoughts of the researcher, and so
> on. Postinterview notes allow the investigator to monitor the
> process of data collection as well as begin to analyze the
> information itself (p. 88).

Data Collection Procedures

Spring 2009

As mentioned previously, I came across both TMGS and SICS via job

announcements on the AATG listserv. I began by visiting the schools' websites to gather

more information about each program and to find a contact person in regards to my study.

In both cases, the E-mail address of each school's principal was listed. I wrote to both

principals, introducing myself and my research project. Since neither TMGS nor SICS

had yet opened at the time of my initial E-mail, both principals asked me to contact them

again in the fall – nevertheless already expressed their willingness to work with me.

Fall 2009

In September, I contacted the schools' principals again obtaining their official

confirmation of participation in my study. Correspondence with the principals spanned

over several months due to their busy schedules and the demands placed on them

navigating through the schools' first few months. Since both principals suggested

identifying parents who may be interested in participating, I mailed them the

demographic questionnaires, return envelopes, as well as consent information (Appendix

E) to distribute to interested parents. Towards the end of 2009, I received several

completed questionnaires and began to contact parents. The principals additionally sent

E-mail addresses of potential participants for me to contact. While building rapport with TMGS and SICS over several months in the fall, I also submitted and received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study and conducted a pilot study (more information presented below).

Winter/Spring 2010

In mid-January after the schools' winter break, I resumed correspondence with both principals and followed up on parents whose demographic questionnaire I had not yet received. Most correspondence with the principals and parents occurred via E-mail. This appeared to be the most convenient means of communication for all involved. It was agreed for me to visit TMGS from March 15 to March 19, 2010 and SICS from April 26 to April 30, 2010. During my week-long visit at each school, I primarily met and conducted interviews with parents and the principal as well as visited the school site (see Table 3). Prior to each interview, parents were informed that personal information would not be disclosed and that I would assign pseudonyms in the study to assure confidentiality. Since scheduling conflicts did not allow me to meet several of SICS' participants during my on-site visit, I arranged to interview five parents by phone. These phone interviews took place between May 5, 2010 and May 11, 2010.

Summer 2010

Subsequent to completing data collection, I followed up with all participants in writing to thank them for their help and involvement in the study. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "being respectful of people and relationships is essential for being an ethical researcher. One does not grab the data and run" (p. 91). I spent July and August transcribing the sixteen parent and two principal interviews as well as reviewing my journal and observation notes. Due to the qualitative nature of the study, tentative data analysis already began while conducting interviews and continued during the transcription stage.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

The process of data analysis started instantaneously with the first parent interview following Merriam's (1998) recommendation that "the right way to analyze data in a qualitative study is to do it *simultaneously* with data collection" (emphasis in the original, p. 162). Presented in Chapter I as the conceptual framework of this study, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) revised parental involvement model (Walker et al., 2005) provided tentative working hypotheses before starting the interview process. In addition, as a former immersion school teacher I brought my "own *prior, expert knowledge*" (emphasis in the original, Yin, 1994, p. 124) to this study which also offered initial concepts. Tentatively analyzing data during the collection process also had the benefit of allowing me to direct and focus subsequent interviews. However, my interview protocol never changed; I occasionally used a follow-up question if I felt the interviewee had more to say, for example.

After collecting all data, I continued the analysis stage by transcribing the sixteen parent and two principal interviews. To transcribe I played each interview's digital file stored on my computer and typed participants' as well as my words into a Word document. On occasion, I inserted personal comments into a transcript using the 'Comments' function in Word. Due to personal preference and to completely immerse myself in the data, I chose not to use any transcription software. I also assigned pseudonyms to each parent. I randomly gave participants a letter/number code; P for parent and a number between 1 and 16 (e.g. P1, P2, P3,…, P16). After completing the transcription process, I printed out all 133 pages of the parent interviews and 20 pages of the principal interviews since I preferred to work with actual hard copies. I then immersed myself in the data by reading and rereading the interview transcripts multiple times as my aim was to become intimately familiar with my data (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). In this initial reading stage, I underlined key words or sentences and highlighted passages I considered important. I also used the margins to write brief thoughts and to list

prominent descriptive themes that emerged such as 'strong parent community' or 'alternative form of education'. The next step involved sorting and grouping the responses by research question (Appendix F). I read through all the responses for each research question and again searched for emerging categories. This time, I compiled a list of themes per research question in a Word document and assigned codes such as 'LL = love for languages' or 'higher ed. = desiring for child to pursue a college degree'. Since frequency counts were less relevant in this study, I did not use coding software. I examined the transcripts in this fashion multiple times attempting to adjust themes and combine categories. In addition, I constantly compared parents' responses to each other in order to evaluate the categories I established and to search for reoccurring patterns (Merriam, 1998). After focusing on individual interview questions, I took a step back and looked at the total transcript of each participant again. This allowed me to place themes and patterns in context as well as to note if references were made in another response category. Lastly, while reporting the findings, I once again read and reviewed all transcripts a number of times.

Several provisions were made to ensure the trustworthiness of this study. As a former immersion school teacher, my experience and knowledge of immersion schooling and families who choose this kind of education allowed for careful observations and an in-depth understanding of the population in this study. It can be argued that I brought a certain amount of personal bias to this study as a former immersion teacher as well as a native speaker of German. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) argue that "attention to the individual researcher is relevant to validity in qualitative research. What background and training does the researcher bring to the investigation?" (p. 329). I tried to limit this bias by frequently recording and reflecting on my own subjectivity. From the beginning of my correspondence with the schools' principals and parents, I identified myself as a former immersion school teacher (see Appendix A). I felt this was beneficial in negotiating and easing entry for this study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) as well as establishing rapport

with the schools and the study's participants. I did not, however, identify myself as a German native speaker to participants unless they directly asked me which happened only a few times. Most of the time it simply did not come up and, therefore, all correspondence and interviews were conducted in English.

I also employed multiple sources of data (i.e. interview transcripts, reflective notes, observation write-ups, and questionnaire responses) throughout the course of the study, which allowed for a holistic understanding of the phenomenon of interest. In addition to this data triangulation, I requested a fellow doctoral candidate in Second Language Acquisition to review and comment on the categories and codes I had established after my initial review of the interview transcripts. The doctoral candidate received copies of all transcripts, which included my codes in the margins (names and other identifiers of participants were erased). I gave instructions to review codes and manually comment wherever necessary. This served to ensure accuracy and relevance of the categories I had established as well as to rule out any oversight of themes on my behalf. Comparing my insights and interpretations with those of the reviewer enhanced the confidence in the findings and added to the overall discussion of the data.

<u>Limitations</u>

Marshall and Rossman (2006) point out that "for qualitative studies, context matters" (p. 53). As illustrated previously, the context in which the two participating schools, TMGS and SICS, were found varied greatly and was very specific to each school. While many characteristics may be shared with other new immersion programs, the contexts may not be comparable. Public schools operate differently than private schools; different school districts employ different policies and procedures; families display other demographics. This study did not attempt to generalize to new immersion programs or families choosing immersion schooling for their child.

Since investigators in qualitative research are the main instrument of data collection and analysis the research is shaped by their natural subjectivity. In my case, I not only entered the field as an educational researcher but also as a former immersion teacher and a native German speaker. To limit researcher bias, I frequently reviewed and reflected on my role and my social identities throughout the various phases of data collection, analysis, and final narrative (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Additionally, I employed peer examination strategies to include a second perspective and thereby enhance the reliability and confidence in my findings.

Lastly, this study is limited to what participants were willing to share with me and to the details they provided and their truthfulness. I made sure the kinds of questions I used to guide along the interviews would result in fruitful conversations, yet at the same time would not cause any harm, invasion of privacy, or embarrassment to anyone involved in the study. I ensured parents of their privacy rights and that they did not have to discuss issues they felt uncomfortable about. I also made every effort to meet parents as objectively as possible. I never commented on their schooling and parenting decisions in an evaluative manner or elaborated on professional standpoints regarding immersion education.

<u>Lessons from Pilot Study</u>

Pilot studies are valuable in refining research instruments and foreshadowing problems and questions (Sampson, 2004). In the fall of 2009, I conducted a pilot study at a newly opened French immersion school in a big city in the Midwest. Two parents who had enrolled their children in this program for the 2009/2010 school year volunteered to be interviewed. Conducting a pilot study served several practical purposes. First of all, it provided me with a sense of what research in the field entailed, for example, negotiating entry or locating meeting points in unfamiliar places. It also allowed me to rehearse various phases within my study such as transcribing or in-depth interviewing. I learned

how important it was for the interviewer to "have superb listening skills and be skillful at personal interaction, question framing, and gentle probing for elaboration" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 102). Furthermore, the pilot study provided an opportunity to familiarize myself with the technology I intended to use.

Piloting the study's instruments aided in testing and refining the demographic questionnaire as well as the guiding interview questions. With the help of the two pilot participants, I could get a sense of how long it took to fill out the questionnaire and conduct the interview. I also saw if there were questions participants did not feel comfortable answering on the questionnaire or in the interview. Based on the pilot study, I made some layout changes to the demographic questionnaire and added three questions (grade of child; income; abroad experience). As for the parent interviews, I realized that I needed to be lead more by what participants said in order for their perspectives to unfold. After the pilot study, I therefore rephrased some of the interview questions but mainly added several more to obtain additional information and insights from parents.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research design I used to carry out this study. I detailed the study's context, participants, and data sources. I explained the procedures I followed as well as the collection and analysis techniques employed. As a final point, I presented the study's limitations and lessons from the pilot study. In the following chapter, I describe in detail the results as they relate to each of the research questions.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This study investigated the motivations of sixteen parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools. The majority of participants' children had English as their L1; however, a few children had German as their L1 or were bilingual. The study stems from a need to shed light on parental interests in immersion programs; why they choose immersion education for their child and what influences these decisions. The analysis of the findings serves to answer the following research questions that frame the study:

1. What are the stated motivations for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language program?

    1.1 What educational goals do immersion parents have for their child?

    1.2 What perceptions and expectations do parents have of their child's immersion program?

    1.3 Do beliefs about the German language influence immersion parents' decision?

2. What are the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making?

    2.1 Does an immersion parent's own school experience influence his/her decisions?

    2.2 Does an immersion parent's role perception influence his/her decision?

This chapter is organized around the above research questions and data pertaining to each research question is presented in its own section. The results are presented using Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) revised model of the parental involvement process (Walker et al., 2005) as a conceptual framework to illustrate the psychological factors that are involved in parents' decisions for their children.

<u>Research Question One: What are the stated motivations</u>

<u>for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language</u>

<u>program?</u>

Parents' Educational Goals

This section explores research question 1.1, which concerns the kinds of educational goals parents have for their children. Research question 1.1 was answered through parents' responses to the following interview questions: *What made you decide to enroll your child in this program?* and *What educational goals do you have for your child?* (The complete list of guiding interview questions can be found in Appendix C). Note: 'Parents', 'interviewees', 'participants' and 'families' will be used interchangeably throughout this chapter. All direct quotes from participants are presented verbatim, including pauses and hesitations.

<u>Pursue Higher Education</u>

Studies have shown that "parents of all ethnic and educational levels have high educational aspirations for their children" (Spera, Wentzel, & Matto, 2009, p. 1150). Parents both at SICS and TMGS immersion schools are no different. Slightly more than half of the participants pointed to the fact that they expected to see their child go on to college because to them "it seems this level of specialization is just really useful" (P11) and their child is "just better off that way" (P7). Some parents saw obtaining a college degree as a job guarantor, as one mother of a first and fourth grader explained: "The biggest nightmare I have is that they are without a job. So I think university is a good option" (P10). Some children were expected to pursue a similar level of education as their parents simply because they came from "a post high school family" (P2). One mother, for example, shared with me her early attempts to lead her preschooler towards college:

> Well, we've already, I think when he was one-and-a-half, I started talking to him about college and how it's great to do whatever you want to do but that college will happen, you will go to college. I'm sort of brainwashing him and I'm ok with that (P3).

Solid Educational Foundation

Most participants demonstrated high educational aspirations for their children and explained in their conversations with me that they wanted to make sure their children had choices later on in life. In parents' eyes, a solid early educational foundation was a stepping-stone towards this goal. One mother explained, "Everyone wants their child to have a good education, or excellent education, because their child is everything and so the education has to be everything" (P4). Parents expressed that they wanted to see their children "be able to choose a job and be happy with what they're doing" (P10) and "have a life that they enjoy. I don't want them to go to work because they have to work; I want them to go to work because they wanna go to work" (P6). Parents saw it as their responsibility to provide their child with an excellent educational basis as a solid start to a successful life, as a mother at SICS explained:

> If she doesn't have the basis then she might not be able to do afterwards what she wants; so I would wanna make sure and I think it's my husband's and my responsibility to give her the basis for making afterwards her own choices (P9).

While seeking an excellent education for their children, several of the parents made it clear, however, that a good education should not cost a lot, as one mother of a Kindergartener explained: "I just want my kid to have a really great education without paying $26,000 a year" (P7). A father at SICS remarked that he did not "believe that education should really cost a lot and … shouldn't be a place for people who have it versus those who don't" (P6). One of the mothers compared the private school she works at to SICS and came to the conclusion that private schools "have a lot more resources. But still I think my daughter gets just as much out of her education" (P5).

<u>Happiness</u>

Regardless of the high aspirations most parents had, in their conversations with me they all affirmed immediately how important their child's happiness was to them and that they desired nothing more but for their children to "have a life that they enjoy" (P6). Eight of the sixteen participants brought up happiness while discussing their educational goals for their children. A parent at TMGS remarked that finding a preschool where her son would be happy "was the number one thing that we were really looking for" (P3). This sentiment was shared by many parents who simply wanted a "happy learning environment" (P13) for their child and saw him/her being "happy in school [as] the main thing" (P16). One mother of a Kindergartener at SICS described her parenting approach with her daughter as follows: "If after high school she decides that she doesn't wanna go to university and that she wants to become an artist or whatever if that makes her happy she can do that" (P9). Participants showed concern about "pushing [their children] too hard" (P3) by having high expectations and the desire to offer the best education possible. They wanted what was best for their children "but without pushing [them] too much because we don't want [them] to loose interest in the learning process" (P9). One of the parents at SICS reflected: "I think sometimes I should give more homework but I also think I have to be careful because I don't want him to hate school" (P13). A mother of a preschooler felt "it's easy to overwhelm them, I think, with extra-curricular, with wanting him to experience all these different things but I don't wanna burn him out" (P2). Parents described their struggle as "on the one hand I wanna make sure he's got lots of opportunities but on the other hand I don't wanna overwhelm him" (P2). Families acknowledged that in the near future once their children get a little older there "will have to be a careful balance" (P2) and they will have "to be finding that happy medium" (P2).

Positive Schooling Experience

Another educational goal participants had was for their children to "have fun in learning" (P9) and to have a "positive first experience with school" (P3). Providing children with "a good start" (P7) to their school experience was important to parents as it would help their children become "excited about education" (P6) and not be "turned off by it" (P6). A mother of a first grader felt it was important for her daughter "to be happy about school" (P16). She went on to explain her belief that

> If you make it frustrating for them and they start internalizing that
> and becoming negative about their own learning…I don't want her
> to have these feelings (P16).

International Environment

Many of the immersion parents interviewed in this study hoped that by sending their child to an internationally minded school s/he would "meet people from around the world and, you know, really get that perspective" (P15). Families wanted for their children "to be conscious of what's around them, you know, and how we're all different but still the same" (P6). A second-generation German hoped for her daughter to become "more open to people that look different or that eat something different because she knows she does" (P4). One parent of a first grader liked that her child's immersion school would offer "more world view which we as Americans lack, I think, it's really important to have that cultural perspective that there are other cultures out there and that it's not just a mono-cultural world" (P16). A German mother of two explained her particular desire of wanting "to have a school where my kids could learn the culture, my culture, but the American culture as well" (P10). Several of the parents I spoke to had traveled extensively and/or lived abroad and their personal experiences aspired them "to want that" (P12) for their children as well.

<u>Alternative Education</u>

In their interviews, many participants expressed a desire for an alternative form of education for their child; away from conventional teaching as many of the parents had experienced themselves and towards "a more progressive model" (P15) which should be "a little bit different than the traditional teaching" (P7). Reasons for this were that families described themselves as "drawn to a more alternative way of teaching children" (P16) or "not that pleased with the regular curriculum that our school district has adopted" (P13). One father explained his choice for alternative schooling because "I just want my son to be able to learn in a different way. I don't believe in drill and repeat-after-me and that kind of stuff" (P6). Another parent appreciated the fact that at her children's school "kids are not gonna be put in a box, they're being challenged, they can express themselves" (P8). Several parents brought up the hope that through an alternative approach to teaching and learning "grade level skills can be met in a more fun, meaningful way" (P13). Participants simply wanted a school that had more to offer. In some cases, parents themselves went through non-traditional schooling such as Montessori programs and wanted to continue this kind of education with their child:

> And the great thing about the German school is that it's
> Montessori-based, which is one of the things we were looking for
> (P2).

> It was suddenly perfect because it combined a sort of loose
> Montessori-based method with the language, which had been
> really our goal from birth (P3).

<u>German Heritage</u>

Of the sixteen parents I interviewed, twelve were either German native speakers, second generation Germans or married to a German (see Table 1). For these parents it was an important educational goal to have their children either start or continue learning the family language and culture. A second generation German explained,

> What really made us go out of our way and become attracted to
> this school was because of the German, that's what really got us

> excited…I have this natural affinity with the German language.
> More specifically, I have a longstanding disappointment with my
> parents to not work harder to make me fluent in German (P14).

Another parent, whose spouse is German, shared that she wanted to give her children "the opportunity to be able to go travel and communicate with their relatives" (P13). The native German speakers in particular wanted their children "not only speaking the language" (P9) but to receive formal instruction in reading and writing which they felt they could not adequately provide at home. One German mother described her children as speaking German "very well by speaking to me but I wanted them to write and read and they wouldn't have learned that" (P9). Another family of German origin felt similarly:

> One of our primary concerns, obviously, was to preserve the
> language capacity for our child which is not so much an issue on
> the speaking end because as long as you speak the language at
> home they can maintain this through a conversational level but
> what about the written language, what about reading (P12)?

Several German parents also mentioned the fact that to them a German school was "a big comfort factor" (P12). Compared to a typical American elementary school their children's immersion school could provide "a little bit more of what we have experienced as children" (P12) such as some teachers trained in Germany who parents believed would "teach a bit more in the realm of how we were taught" (P12). Some German parents who only recently moved to the United States admitted to still feeling "very formed by the German system" (P9) and to "trust the system more" (P10).

<u>Learn a Second Language</u>

All parents in this study, regardless of their heritage language background, could be identified as "very passionate about learning languages" (P15) and they expressed their love for languages throughout the interviews. In addition, the majority of participants had extensive study abroad experiences or had lived abroad, which had instilled interests in other languages and cultures. All parents were very aware of the

benefits of knowing another language and culture – one father, for example, shared his

attitude about languages in this way:

> I have always thought that learning more than one language from
> birth was a wonderful gift that parents, some parents, can give their
> children…I don't know why, from a very early age, and I didn't
> learn any languages as a kid (P11).

Participants attributed many developmental and educational benefits to the learning of a

second language. Several parents described "the brain develops differently if they learn

languages" (P9), that it "expands their minds" (P2) and furthers "critical thinking" (P1)

skills. Additionally, learning a second language "enforces the knowledge of English

because they can compare two languages to each other" (P13), while learning the

language at a young age is "the best age to start them" (P8) because "it's easier to learn

and adapt to these new sounds and language systems while their brains are so young an

pliable" (P13).

To many it seemed "like a no-brainer for [their children] to be in a language

immersion school" (P15). Some parents made clear that they would have chosen any

immersion language school simply "because we believe in the immersion program, we

believe in languages being very important for children and we believe in the

developmental advantage for a child by being in an immersion program" (P9). What

language their child learned, to many "really didn't matter" (P6).

Study/Live Abroad

Participants, especially those who had emigrated from a German-speaking

country or who had family there, talked about the option of having their child study or

even complete all higher education "at home" (P12). This was particularly interesting to

families whose children held dual citizenship and where parents "really want [their child]

to have the choice" (P3). One German mother admitted "I hope my kids have there their

future" (P10). Parents felt that "it's good […] to have the two languages" (P7) and that

already speaking German "makes it a little easier to move there" (P7). Many of the

American immersion participants wished and even "fully expect" (P2) that their child would "have that desire" (P2) to study/live abroad and "make that part of [their] education" (P15). This was often based on parents own extensive study/living abroad experiences. Yet again these families recognized that they could not force their children but could only "hope that the desire is there" (P12) and "they want to go" (P13); that it was "certainly something that needs to come from the child himself" (P12).

Summary

The results of this section indicate that the immersion parents I interviewed both at SICS and TMGS have a strong desire to ensure their children have an excellent educational foundation. They want their children to receive a well-rounded education that focuses on making learning fun and interesting and that inspires children to become critical thinkers, life-long learners and global citizens. Many look to their immersion school for an alternative form of education where their children can receive extra stimulus and are taught in a different way than in most traditional schools in their area. A long-term educational goal of many parents is for their children to pursue a college education that will ensure possibilities later on in life.

Most of the participating parents are either German native speakers, second generation Germans, or have a German spouse. For their children to learn the German language and culture as well as receive formal instruction especially in reading and writing is important. During the interviews, all parents shared about their love for languages and all are language learners themselves. These parents strongly desire for their children to study or live abroad at some point in their lives and make this part of their education. The next portion of this chapter will focus on the parents' perceptions and their expectations of the immersion schools at which their children are currently enrolled.

Parents' Perceptions and Expectations

This section explores research question 1.2, which focuses on the kinds of perceptions and expectations parents have of their child's immersion school. Research question 1.2 was answered through parents' responses to the following interview questions: *Please use three words to describe your child's school experience*; *What are your expectations of the school and the program?* and *What would you tell an interested parent about this school?* In this section the results will be presented separately by school since the context of the two participating schools differs from each other. A detailed description of the school contexts, germane to the findings in this section, can be found in Chapter III.

Thomas Mann German School (TMGS)

Thomas Mann German School is located in a large midwestern city. It is important to note that at the time of my interviews, TMGS consisted of only one preschool class with fourteen students ranging in ages from three to five. Four parents participated in one-on-one interviews (see Table 1).

Perceptions

Table 4 Most frequently mentioned TMGS program descriptors

1) fun	2) enriching	3) exposure

The majority of participants thought it to be very hard to describe their child's school experience in three words. Only three of the four TMGS mothers interviewed answered this question and the descriptor that came up most often was: *fun*. After all, these were parents whose children attended preschool where the academic focus was not

yet strong. Other descriptors that came up were: *enriching* and *exposure*. All four parents

highlighted the fact that in the last seven months since the school opened their children

had "learned a ton" (P3) and "progressed incredibly" (P4). One mother acknowledged the

positive influence TMGS has had on her preschooler as she felt "he's learned much more

than I even really expected" (P2). Parents felt not only the educational benefit of sending

their children to TMGS but also that children were "very happy there" (P3). One mother

described her daughter's feelings about school and how they had changed due to her now

understanding more:

> I mean when she came in she really didn't understand what they
> were saying and our joke kind of at home was 'Yeah, I go to
> school and it's a lot of bla bla bla' […] But, you know, so that was
> in September and now just like three weeks ago she said, 'yeah,
> it's not bla bla bla anymore' (P1).

Expectations

All four mothers interviewed at TMGS had a German language background either

through family, a spouse, or having lived in Germany for a longer period of time.

Therefore, for their children to learn the German language and culture was an expectation

of the program they all shared. A second-generation German felt that it was only

"natural" (P4) for her daughter to attend a German immersion school because "she can

speak with her grandparents, then she can go to Germany and visit our relatives" (P4).

This mother felt that "it's important to have the international connection, so that she sees

what her heritage is" (P4). Another mother whose son held dual citizenship thought that

in their family situation "the second language, or dual language, had to be German

because it doesn't seem right with him being a dual citizen" (P3). Sending her son to a

German immersion school would have the benefit that "he'd be using the language and

there would be other kids using the language (P3). A third family after having lived in

Germany for some time expected their child "to have some familiarity and things with

German culture" (P2) and to learn the language because they "didn't want him to go

through what we had gone through as far as struggling, really struggling, with the language" (P2).

Since their children were only preschoolers, the parents considered their expectations of the immersion program as "very simple" (P1). In essence, they wanted to ensure their child had a "positive first experience with school" (P3) where they could be, first and foremost, "happy" (P3), "have fun" (P1) and "continue to learn" (P2). As one interviewee put it, "We sort of figured for preschool, you know, I mean really, how messed up could they get" (P2)? Aside from educational expectations, some participants spoke specifically about the necessity for the school to provide a safe environment for their child, to be "in good repair" (P3), and as a preschool in a big city to have "an enclosed playground" (P3). It was important for participants that

> The children feel comfortable, you know, where the staff are very
> aware of children's needs, you know, the physical space, you
> know, it's good to know that somebody can't just walk in here or
> that they can't just walk out (P1).

During the interviews, all four mothers alluded to the fact that they were not sure at that point, seven months into the school's first year, whether they would continue with the program past preschool. For some, there was a need to move in the near future due to job reasons, but for others, despite their heritage language background, their further commitment depended on the plans of the school which at that point were still a bit uncertain. One mother explained that it depended on whether "we have other options later in a different grade, we may change that but as long as I can see exactly what the plans of the school are and I'm very informed I'm comfortable with that choice" (P4). Yet another mother attributed her child maybe changing schools to her familiarity with the American versus German educational system. She made clear that "the experience that I have with the other, you know, American schooling, I have more of an idea of what happens next" (P1). A third interviewee felt that "as long as, I think, it's a program that continues to challenge him and that he seems to do okay in, you know, then hopefully we'll stick with

it. We'll see" (P3).These mothers saw preschool as a time where switching schools and searching for the right educational fit was not going to be as difficult as it would be once children were older and in higher grades. As one mother put it,

> For preschool it's easier. It's not as much of a big deal. If they didn't start preschool until four or did Kindergarten at 5, it wouldn't have been a huge issue…so, it wasn't as much of a risk as 1st grade, you know, they have to be enrolled and there's nothing else (P4).

Participants saw TMGS as "a great option" (P2) and educational foundation for their children; as said by one parent: "This is something that they'll always have" (P4). Parents emphasized again how much their children had learned and progressed in that one year alone. In addition, one interviewee felt "just to be exposed to another culture, um, is really a great idea" (P2) and another bonus of the school as said by parents. When asked what they would want interested families to know about the program, participants brought up "the idea that learning a second language very early is a fabulous gift that you can give to your child" (P2) , that "it expands their minds" (P2) and they develop "critical thinking" (P1) skills. They also stressed the fact that "even if you don't speak German, or even if your child hasn't had a lot of exposure to German, it's still a very suitable place" (P1). Some mothers also talked about the close-knit community among families that had developed within the school and that some felt "is important for the parents" (P4). According to them, the school had "a lot of very committed families" (P2) and that everyone was "involved for the same purpose" (P4). TMGS had become "truly a community project" (P4) where "parents volunteer" (P4) and developed "a very, um, close group" (P4).

While visiting TMGS, I also interviewed the school's principal and asked her what she thought the school's parents would tell interested families about the program. She imagined that "probably the first thing they'll say is about the language; the language and the culture". She felt that "that's the most significant aspect of this school" and worth advertising to interested families. The principal also hoped that "at some point they

would mention community; that they feel part of a community". However, she didn't "think that's there yet" but "the other significant thing about the school that we are trying to build up".

<u>Summary</u>

The parents interviewed perceive TMGS to be a very positive first educational experience for their child. They describe how their children have fun going to preschool, visibly learn and progress, as well as how they are exposed to another culture, different age groups (due to the Montessori approach), learning styles and activities. Parents feel the school has accomplished quite a bit in its first year and truly impacted their children thus far. Participants said that they are "so pleased that we've found an immersion program" (P3), that "it's been really really wonderful" (P3) and that their children have "done fabulously, I mean, really fabulously" (P2).

All four mothers consider the close-knit school community, which has evolved, another asset of the school. However, many of the parents interviewed are unsure at this point during TMGS' first year whether or not they will stay with the program. For some families it is simply the necessity of having to move for job reasons; others acknowledge the school's indefinite plans for the future trigger these considerations. Since it is only preschool parents feel there is still time to find the perfect educational fit for their child. The next portion will focus on perceptions and expectations of parents at SICS.

<u>Schiller International Charter School (SICS)</u>

Schiller International Charter School is located in a large metropolitan area in California. At the time of my visit, SICS consisted of K to 4th grade with a total of 168 students enrolled. Twelve parents participated in either phone or one-on-one interviews (see Table 1).

Perceptions

Table 5 Most frequently mentioned SICS program descriptors

1) challenging	2) exciting/joyful	3) social/inspirational

Similarly to participants at TMGS, parents at SICS also considered it hard to describe their children's school experience in three words. When asked, the descriptor that came up the most was *challenging*; followed by the words *exciting/joyful* and the words *social/inspirational*. Parents chose positive descriptors; even *challenging* was to be seen in a positive way as one parent stated: "*Challenge* doesn't have to have a negative connotation" (P13). Parents who described the school experience as *challenging* referred to the transition their child had gone through during that year. For many it meant that they "had to start something that was new" (P13). For many children there was suddenly "less play because school is just less play" (P7). Some came from half-day programs to SICS being a full-day program and "really got thrown in full-throttle. You know, having to learn quite a few things and trying to catch up quickly" (P16). A mother of a first grader experienced that "in 1st grade there's a lot more expected from them; in Kindergarten they still have that extra recess and a lot of rest time" (P16). Another challenge for some children was the fact that they "had to learn now a new language, German, and it's become more rigorous with […] English" (P16). This created "a lot of anxiety" (P13) for some at first but parents realized that their children got "a lot of pride from conquering all those challenges" (P13). A few parents also mentioned that their children had "blossomed" (P16) socially and were "making really really wonderful friends" (P15). A father whose daughter attended Kindergarten commented, her "developing good friends, you know, that part has been wonderful" (P14).

Expectations

Many parents at SICS expressed a desire to see that the school "continuous to grow" (P7). In its first year, sharing a campus with a middle school and having very limited resources (e.g., no running water, makeshift administrative offices etc.), parents were generally looking forward to the upcoming change in location. A number of them talked about their wish to "get this whole school going through 8th or even 12th grade" (P9). Parents were "hopeful…and believe in that" (P12) SICS could expand into a middle school; to them "it'd be thrilling if this could actually go up to high school" (P15). A father of a Kindergartener admitted "if they'd be able to go K-12, I'd be happy" (P6). As part of the growth process, many parents made clear that they wanted SICS "to develop into an IB [International Baccalaureate] school" (P13) as soon as possible. To some families "now it's not so much the language anymore but the IB program" (P10) which attracts them to SICS and "the opportunities they will have with this IB program" (P10). Parents saw the implementation of IB into the immersion program as "very good, very challenging and very developing for the child" (P9) and as something "we knew that we wanted" (P12) with "its inquiry-based model and its open-mindedness for creativity and input from the children" (P12).

The parents I spoke to at SICS were very vocal about wanting their children to learn and progress; to essentially attend a school that is "at least as good as any other public school in giving the basic education in all the subjects" (P14) and where students are "at grade level in reading, math, and English" (P13). Parents expected their child's school to be committed to "teaching the state standards in an interesting way" (P11). Most participants, however, also wanted "a school that had more to offer" (P6) and where their child "is getting a well-rounded education and is excited about learning" (P16). According to parents, their school of choice should enable its students "to learn in a different way" (P6) and "to take charge of their own education" (P16). Some families "were also very interested in a more progressive model in terms of education not so much

traditional" (P15). When I asked one participating father about the kind of education he would like his son to receive he explained, "I don't believe in drill and repeat-after-me and that kind of stuff. I want him to question things and learn through questions. I want him to realize that everything is involved and everything is interconnected" (P6). Several parents told me that their area "public schools tend to be not so good" (P11) and that they were "not that pleased with the regular curriculum that our school district has adopted" (P13). Many families were therefore said to be "looking for an alternative to their public school that's cheaper than a private school" (P11). One parent explained to me that SICS was exactly "filling this gap" (P11) as a charter school where "they have more freedom" (P13). Parents listed "extra training in becoming culturally aware and then also learning another language" (P14) as an expectation they had of SICS "because of the way it is designed as an immersion program but also an IB program" (P14). Participants also anticipated for SICS to continue implementing alternative and progressive learning approaches where their children could be spared "sitting in a classroom and doing the same story for two weeks straight with a teacher who expects them all to sit quietly" (P16). One mother of a Kindergartener expressed her expectations of the school to "really honor and respect each child in terms of where they're at developmentally, socially and academically" (P15).

Of the twelve participants I interviewed at SICS, nine were either German native speakers, second generation Germans, or had a German spouse (see Table 1). As already pointed out under research question 1.1, all participating immersion parents could be identified as language learners and as having a strong appreciation for languages. Parents at SICS wanted their children to either receive formal instruction in their native/heritage language or learn a second language and achieve high levels of proficiency. One participating father explained "I really want my kids to be totally native-level fluent. Maybe with some accent that isn't quite right, maybe with vocabulary that isn't as full" (P11). An American mother whose son attended Kindergarten at SICS shared that she

"would love for him to speak German fluently. And really be excited. He's just starting to get how cool it is to learn another language" (P15). A mother of a first grader hoped for the immersion program to "encourage and support that kind of risk-taking, that my child will feel comfortable enough and get proficient enough to start to speak German and hopefully at his grade level would be optimal" (P13). Another parent described the ease of early language learning for his daughter and felt that in "three, four years from now she's gonna be fluent. At that age they don't know, for them it's just 'my teacher talks to me in German, so what'" (P14). Parents also expected that by sending their children to SICS they would be "exposed to a global world environment" (P16) and would learn to "open their minds to the different cultures that are out there" (P16). Parents hoped for the school to be a place that "brings international awareness" (P13) and thereby developing a "broader cultural understanding" (P11) in its entire community.

Interviewees spoke very highly of their school during the interviews. One father, when asked what he believed he needed to do to make his child's education better, answered:

> To make it better. I guess the question assumes that I wanna make it better. I don't wanna make it better; I think it's great the way it is; I don't need to do anything […] I'm gonna cry because I'm so happy about this school (P11).

Everyone was full of praise about the school's accomplishments and the positive educational impact it has had on its students. A mother of a Kindergartener felt that "once you're in there, you won't wanna get out. It's an experience and people need to get that experience; it's very hard to describe it but it's a very good experience" (P9). "I love it" (P6), yet another parent said. One mother commented, "I think they've already gone over and beyond anything that I had expected" (P5). Another parent said, "And for SICS, it's just been our first year but I've been so impressed, I think we've done an amazing job" (P16). Getting SICS to this point required a lot of personal investment, dedication, and "a lot of sweat and tears" (P6) from parents. Many had given up a lot to be involved as one

father, for example, who had "purposely taken a year off work to help the school" (P6).

One parent, who was involved in the founding process of the school, shared that

> I never worked so hard and I never learned so much, I would say.
> Because to work with these different people with different work
> styles and personalities and everybody at some point had moments
> were they wanted to quit, everybody. But we always kept going on
> (P10).

The families I interviewed at SICS all shared a common believe that "you do what you

gotta do and we all wanna make it work; we all want our children to have that education"

(P9). In their conversations with me, most parents addressed the community spirit at

school as well as the dedication and high level of parental involvement already in

existence. One father compared parents' engagement between SICS and other

neighborhood schools and found that "there're so many more people actively

volunteering than in a typical school; that alone gets me excited" (P14). Strong parental

involvement is "what makes the school happen and that's what's going to make it great"

(P15). One mother described that "it's catching, the parent involvement, not in a bad way,

it's just, it's contagious" (P5). "There's some overall benefit to community", another

parent felt and went on to explain that

> When parents of the kids are all friends and they all have this same
> value not only in education but in a more detailed-sense
> pedagogical approach then the kids are immersed in it…during
> their play dates, on the weekends, and that is just a great
> educational benefit to them (P11).

When I asked participants what they would want interested families to know about SICS'

community, several of them shared a word of caution because new families to "a charter

school environment absolutely need to be aware that they have to put themselves into the

game" (P12); parents "need to be prepared to be involved. And if that's just not what you

want to do in your child's education then the school is really not right for you" (P15).

One mother said she would emphasize to interested parents that

> You have to be the parent with the mind-set that any spare-time
> that you have you're willing to devote to your child's school
> whether it's for fundraising or helping with activities at school

itself even things that you can bring home; it's a lot more work, it's like having a second job. That's a huge commitment for a parent to make, so you strongly have to think about that before you make that leap (P16).

Such an involved parent community, however, at times also created challenges in that "there're some parents that are over-motivated and want to have things done that are impossible and parents that think they have a vote on everything" (P12). At the time of my visit, SICS already had "a waiting list that's four times what we have space for" (P11) for the upcoming school year with about 150 students waitlisted. Interviewees therefore also faced situations where they had to tell interested families, "I hope that you get the chance because not everybody gets in" (P9) or as simple as "look, sign up or don't" (P11).

SICS' families I spoke to also attributed a lot of the school's success to their "inspiring" (P13) and "wonderful" (P13) principal who was greatly respected and appreciated in the school's community. Parents saw her as someone "on the same level" (P5) who "can empathize with so many things […] always has the right answers [...] and goes above and beyond" (P5). She had been extremely dedicated and involved in the school's creation and development from the beginning. As one parent shared, "she makes the commute from […], that to me shows her dedication" (P6).

Parents saw SICS as "an exciting place to be" (P15) where "you gotta see it to believe it" (P8); a program that offered "so much more than a traditional school" (P13) and where children were "getting a world class education at a public school price" (P6). Many saw early language learning as "a gift" (P11). A father of a first grader felt immersion "brings a child down the road for easier language acquisition; but more important than that creates more neural activity and that has obvious benefits beyond language. And also gives children a better ability to understand language and therefore thought" (P11). Another parent of a first grader believed that immersion education would enable children to "be creating way more synopsis in their brain and introducing another language only enforces the knowledge of English because they can compare two

languages to each other" (P13). A few participants, where German was not present in the home, found themselves in the situation of "not really knowing that language and have [my child] speak it and me really not speak it" (P15). Nonetheless they felt there was "nothing more exciting" (P15) than to hear "your child speaking another language" (P15). Many of the participants saw it as relevant not to "be turned off by the school because it's German to begin with" (P6). They were aware that "for somebody who's not from Germany, the German component as the language is not nearly that important" (P12) and to some prospective families "maybe German wouldn't be useful" (P15). Therefore, they felt the general benefits of early language learning and culture exposure should be promoted.

Parents, regardless of their enthusiasm for the school and its achievements, were also very honest in describing the struggles of SICS to me. When comparing SICS to other schools that were "all established" (P10), one mother admitted to feeling "a little bit worried" (P10) sometimes. Several participants shared that "there have been some rocky times and we're not completely out of the woods in terms of being established yet" (P15). The school had "a lot of things going against us right now" (P6). Parents were reminded every day that "it's a start-up school" (P9) and that at first glance "the school might kind of disappoint you" (P9). In her conversation with me, one mother described what a first time visitor to SICS would see:

> We are sharing a campus, so we have a very small campus; part of a big huge middle school that we have kind of fenced off. The classrooms inside look great but outside it looks like a military complex. The office is a container like you find on a construction site. The principal's office is a tool shed converted to an office. So for you to walk in there you would probably think 'oh my God what is this'? We have port-a-potties not even real toilets for this first year (P9).

Due the fact that "the facilities are not the best facilities, we don't have all the stuff that we need and that other schools have" (P6), SICS' parents realized they needed to have a kind of "pioneer spirit" (P7; P15) about the school and simply "take the incredibly

exciting things that come with it and then ride the bumps and just get through them"

(P15). According to one father, "it's the education in the classroom that we really want to

focus on" (P6) and he went on to explain:

> When you see that they're learning, the quality of education
> they're getting; it's just, you know, you really can't ask for more.
> That's what I tell parents. Yes, we're not in the best place; yes, we
> have port-a-potties for bathrooms; they need to overlook these
> things, these things can change (P6).

While visiting SICS, I also interviewed the school's principal and I asked her

what she thought the school's parents would tell interested families about the program.

Overall, she thought that "the majority of them will have a positive spin on it […] that

they're delighted and honored that their children are here […] that they're pleased at how

far we have come in a short time", while not wanting to "paint the picture that every

single parent is fully content". SICS' principal expected that parents "understand that

there's something very important about a second language and that we're working very

hard at making that happen". She felt that parents were "really excited that their children

are learning a language that they may not know themselves". The principal perceived

parents to be "even more excited about the eventual development of IB; they're kind of

holding on to that 'cause that starts this next year". She also expected participants in my

study to "speak positively of the general sense of community", to "be respectful of the

incredible effort of my teachers" and "to honor me in terms of my commitment to the

dream and helping them seek the dream". Lastly, she, too, brought up the challenges

faced by SICS and the personal investment required from everyone:

> I think that they know that we're not a mature school yet…I think
> that there's a certain level of frustration that we're not further
> along than we are as a young school but I also think that they're
> accepting of that; they understand it can't all happen at one
> time…I think that they will also tell you that it's taken some
> patience; it's not been easy, it's required a great deal of them
> personally to make this school happen.

Summary

Parents at SICS are very involved and dedicated to providing their children with the very best education possible. The families who participated in my interviews are very invested in the school and have made personal sacrifices to help and support its growth – a growth that in parents' eyes is going to continue into the development of a middle school and hopefully even a high school. They feel one of the many assets of the school is its community of involved families but at the same time want interested families to know that parental engagement is a must.

The interviewees see SICS as a wonderful place for their children to learn and attest that students have visibly progressed throughout the school year. According to the parents, SICS offers a small setting, a great administration and staff, early language learning (German), a challenging non-traditional learning approach (IB), an international mindset, and the flexibility and freedom that come with a charter school.

As described under research question 1.1, all of the participants share a love for languages and are language learners themselves. They feel well informed of the benefits of early language learning and consider it a great gift they can give their children – a gift some wished they had received as children. When talking to interested parents, participants feel they need to stress the fact that a German background is not necessary to enroll at SICS, that simply learning any language early is beneficial in so many ways. These parents prescribe to immersion language education and hope their children will be able to reach high levels of fluency in the second language as well as become more internationally minded. For the German families at SICS, the school allows their children to receive formal instruction in especially reading and writing – something many of them would not have gotten at home. The vast majority of parents I interviewed wish for their children to gain some study/living abroad experience; some of the German families even consider Europe as a place for their children to return to in order to complete their higher education.

SICS' parents are very up-front about the challenges they face daily as a start-up school, yet they are not discouraged by these problems. The parents are flexible about the imperfections that are, for example, port-a-potties for students, no playground space, no running water; they focus on the larger picture and have a goal in mind of providing their children with an excellent education. One parent, when describing the growth and second language abilities of his child, became teary-eyed during the interview because he was so amazed and moved by what his child was now able to do and what providing this kind of education has done for him.

SICS' parents have very high expectations of themselves as well as the school's administration and staff. The principal of SICS knows what parents expect and how they perceive the program, what they consider important to share with others and what they regard as the school's advantages and disadvantages. She understands how invested the parents are and feels parents honor her involvement and dedication as well. The next portion of this chapter will focus on whether beliefs about the German language influence parents' decision.

<div align="center">Parents' Beliefs about the German Language</div>

This section explores research question 1.3, which focuses on the kinds of contacts and experiences parents have had with and their feelings about German. Research question 1.3 was answered through parents' responses to the following interview questions: *Why did you choose a school that teaches German instead of another language?; What contacts/experiences have you had with German prior to enrolling your child?* and *What were your feelings towards the German language?* In this section the results will be presented separately by school since the context of the two participating schools differs from each other. A detailed description of the schools' contexts, germane to the findings in this section, can be found in Chapter III.

Thomas Mann German School

All four parents who participated in my interviews had exposed their children to German prior to enrolling at TMGS. For some families it was simply that German was spoken at home, others used early language learning opportunities offered in the city such as a German Saturday school program. Some of the mothers had looked at other language programs while in the process of finding a preschool but most considered early language learning "like a bonus" (P2) and did not think that they "would have necessarily pursued another language […] had the German school opportunity not come along" (P2).

However, when asked about the language, these families were particularly interested in German and many saw it as "natural" (P4) for their child to attend a German immersion school to keep up the home/heritage language. Some argued that they wanted their children to learn a language they themselves were familiar with and were therefore able to help:

> First of all, I couldn't help them at all [*with other languages*]. I mean, it would be silly if I got CDs, if I got music, whatever, I have no idea what they're saying. You know, at least with the German ones I can say 'well, this is appropriate' (P1).

When I asked some of the mothers about their personal experiences with and feelings towards the language, commonly held beliefs and concerns came up. German was still considered a "really difficult language" (P1) to learn but "obviously very useful and certainly the foundation for a lot of other things" (P1). One parent when traveling to the Netherlands experienced that "it's, like, amazing how much you can understand knowing English and German" (P1). Another participant who spoke German shared that she "didn't put it on" (P3) her resume when applying to jobs but that recently she has "started putting it on" (P3) because

> I'm like, well, that I can butcher this language in the way I do is a part of who I am now and it's part of who my family is and I'm not ashamed and I'm not anti-Semitic and lots of people in Germany are wonderful people. Maybe it was my own little thing (P3).

Another parent shared how her parents had influenced her language choice:

> Well, my mom took German in school and when I was deciding which school or which language to take in high school, she really pushed me to take German…So, she just thought it would be fun for us to be able to practice and talk and, you know, I was more into Spanish. So, at that time I thought Mexico is very cool; I was sort of enamored of the Spanish language and culture, so I just wasn't that interested in German…But it wasn't like I had a negative idea about it or anything like that (P2).

Regardless of their personal views of and feelings towards German, these families saw it as a useful language to know; participants in this study were connected to the language and culture in various ways and therefore whished for their children to learn it. For some mothers sending their child to TMGS was even a reason to get them "back into picking up the German again" (P2).

Summary

Among some of the TMGS' parents I spoke to, certain widely held beliefs about the German language are still present. Since these families are connected to the German language and culture – some through their family's background, some by living abroad – they want to ensure their children learn the language. This desire is illustrated by the families pursuing other German learning opportunities for their children prior to enrolling at TMGS. For some parents knowing German is important because it allows them to help their child with school. Lastly, enrolling their children in a language program has created a desire in a few parents to improve their own language skills. The next portion will focus on the German language views of parents at SICS.

Schiller International Charter School

As previously mentioned, SICS is located in a large metropolitan area in California where a multitude of languages are spoken representing a variety of ethnicities and cultures. As a result, there are a number of language immersion schools available to families. All SICS' parents I interviewed felt that "languages are very important" (P9); they were language learners themselves and very aware of the benefits of early language learning. The majority of them had "thought about other immersion schools" (P9) and

would have enrolled their children in "any kind of other language" (P6) program had SICS not opened. Which language their children learned "really didn't matter" (P6); SICS' parents simply wanted a form of early language education for their children. A father of a first grader shared that "once I did this research about the advantage of early immersion obviously I was sold on it" (P11).

According to the interviewees, German was a good option for them since the majority was personally connected to the language (i.e. native speaker, German spouse, second generation German). Yet again, they indicated that any language would have been fine for them. One mother shared her initial doubts and said, "The German, I don't know, in some ways I would have preferred Japanese, I think because Japanese is maybe more useful eventually but then I'm thinking the German is closer to home, to us" (P5). A number of parents, just like this mother, wondered if choosing a different language over German might have been more useful and valuable. One parent shared that "I would have thought that German would be of absolutely no value were I not married to a German" (P11). An American mother admitted that "at first I was like 'is German really gonna be useful for him' but, you know, it's really grown on me" (P15).

Since SICS had plans to implement Spanish as a foreign language in third grade parents felt assured that their children would "have the Spanish anyways with that" (P9) and that "they'll have a lot of language exposure throughout life" (P9). Some participants, however, wanted their children to learn a language they themselves had some familiarity with. If their child learned a language they did not speak, parents felt they "would've not been able to help them" (P9) and "support [them] in homework and such" (P5). Others did not "find it daunting" (P16) and did not "see it right now as a big problem" (P6) not knowing German. These parents felt that despite their lack of German language skills they could still help their child. They were aware that things would most likely get harder "when we'll start getting into sentences, forms, and reading" (P6); however, they were "not worried about it" (P15) and felt confident that they "can always

manage the way we do now" (P6). These parents had found ways to help themselves such as "through the Internet" (P6), "through computers" (P6) or "German picture dictionary" (P16). One parent acknowledged that

> It was a concern of mine for maybe one second until I realized a
> few things. Immersion schools have been around for a long time;
> they must have figured something out and also then just digging a
> little deeper, there're networks set up where you can call other
> people and the teachers give very very good directions in class, so
> they know. But I know that's a huge fear for parents (P11).

Several parents saw their children attending a German immersion school as an incentive to "keep up with German classes" (P13) offered through SICS. Those who "didn't speak a word of German" (P15) felt these classes had "really been a great opportunity" (P15).

When I asked SICS' parents specifically about their experiences with and feelings towards the German language, common held views of the language and the people speaking it came to light because in some cases they "had no real knowledge of it" (P6) and "hadn't interacted with the language before" (P6). Participants commented that they thought, "it was kind of an ugly language" (P13) and "a hard language to learn" (P6). When I asked interviewees about stereotypes they had come across prior to their SICS experience, some shared that they had heard "Germans are rude, they're loud" (P6) and that "we're taught in this country from an early age to think of the German language and Germans as the evil people" (P11). A mother of a first grader shared that "if you had asked me a few years ago if I could imagine sending my daughter to a German school, I would say no, I never thought that" (P16). After personal encounters, however, these stereotypes faded away and participants realized that "you become more sensitive when you're connected to it, then you see it and you're just like 'oh my God'" (P11). Another parent shared: "When I met my in-laws, their German doesn't even sound like that. It has a lot less guttural sounds than was my stereotype in my mind about German" (P13). Parents who had no prior connection to the language acknowledged that they had "grown more and more enthusiastic and excited about the fact that it's German" (P15) after

enrolling their children at SICS and getting "to know a lot of the Germans in the community" (P15). To some it also stirred up an interest "in learning some German because my daughter is at the school and I know German people now. I never knew German people before" (P16). One of the fathers I interviewed shared how his children attending a German immersion school had changed his perceptions of the language and its people:

> I've gotten to know them and their culture and it's not that bad. It's nothing like it. I've grown fond of it. I've grown to understand how these people might be perceived in certain stereotypes but it's because that's how they are, kind of their upbringing, too. It's the same with what people say about Mexicans or the Mexican culture. If you're not in it, it's hard to understand (P6).

<u>Summary</u>

As said by parents, when it comes to German speakers and the German language unfavorable and stereotypical perceptions are still prevalent. Yet, participants without any direct connection to German/Germans are ready to admit that the school program has sparked an interest in them to learn the language alongside their child and has adjusted their views of the language, its people and culture simply by meeting and interacting with Germans and German speakers in the school.

Parents at SICS are very keen on providing their children an early language learning opportunity. Many of the parents state that they would have chosen another language immersion program for their child had SICS not opened – a few language immersion schools are in fact located in the surrounding areas. German as the immersion language matters to some parents with knowledge of the language as it allows them to help their child with school and will enable those children with a heritage language background to communicate with family. Other parents with less German language skills or family ties do not seem too concerned about aspects such as schoolwork; they have found ways to help themselves, be it through resources offered at school, using their skills as language learners, or utilizing the World Wide Web. A number of parents

mention that they questioned at first whether or not German is a useful and worthwhile language for their child to learn but they have all grown fond of it and see it from a wider perspective now – that "immersion is good no matter what language "(P12). The next portion of this chapter will focus on the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making.

Research Question Two: What are the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making?

Parents' Own School Experience

This section explores research question 2.1, which concerns the kinds of schooling experiences parents had been subjected to and how these experiences have influenced schooling decisions for their child. Research question 2.1 was answered through parents' responses to the following interview questions: *What was your own schooling experience like?* and *Do you think your own school experience has influenced your schooling decisions for your child?*

In their study on parental involvement framing this dissertation, Walker et al. (2005) included "questions about parents' personal history with and feelings about school" (p. 100) as it allowed the research team to gain a better understanding of the parental role construction, their beliefs and involvement choices. Based on this framework and the assumption that parents' own school experience influences their involvement and attitudes towards school (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler & Brissie, 1992) I wanted to discuss this aspect with the immersion parents participating in my study to learn more about their decision-making.

Parents thought their own school experience "certainly does influence you" (P8) and the schooling decisions made for your child. The majority of participants at SICS and TMGS acknowledged that it "hugely influences" (P16) them. Through parents' narratives, I learned that their schooling experiences varied greatly. Several parents,

being immigrants to this country, went to school in Europe; among the American-born

parents some went to private or parochial, others to public schools. Most participants

explained that they "liked going to elementary school 'cause it was exciting and you

don't even think about it, you just go" (P9). Participants "appreciated the initial base and

background" (P16) their elementary schooling had provided them with. However, when it

came to the middle and high school years a number of parents, both Europeans and

Americans, shared that they "hated" (P7, P15, P16) their schooling experience.

Interviewees described, "not learning as much" (P16) during those years and having

teachers who gave "the impression they didn't prepare for their lessons or they did

something that they had done for twenty years" (P9).

As already presented under research question 1.1, quite a few of the parents I

interviewed desired an alternative form of education for their children. Several of the

parents themselves went to non-traditional schools, enjoyed this kind of experience and

wanted something similar for their child. A mother of a preschooler at TMGS shared her

early schooling experience with me and how it had influenced her decisions for her son:

> When I was in elementary school, I was in what they call the
> informal classroom, which I think was sort of like a precursor to
> Montessori…it was very much individualized learning and that
> worked really well for me and so when I read about the Montessori
> program…I thought that that was a really great idea for our son
> (P2).

A SICS father described how his positive early schooling experience had influenced the

kind of program he wanted for his children:

> I went to a school called […] Elementary School which is, ah, kind
> of like a test school for […] University. And what they do, they
> would try out, back in the 80s when I went to school, they would
> try new programs…So to me it was really interesting and it helped
> me out in my life a lot…So I wanted that for my kids (P6).

A mother of a first grader at SICS attributed her early French exposure while in

elementary school to her love for languages and pursuing this also for her child:

> From first to fourth grade I attended a parochial school and it was
> taught mainly by nuns. And I did enjoy and I think that's where my

love for languages comes from…Our school didn't offer us but the nuns taught us French the first few years that I was there. It wasn't an immersion program but they were teaching us and exposing us to French (P16).

Others went through more traditional schooling and based on their own experience wanted something different for their child. A mother whose children attended Kindergarten and second grade at SICS shared that she "never got a chance to actually grow up bilingual, so and for my kids to actually be able to grow up bilingual is a dream come true" (P8). A mother of a first grader had the experience where her "teachers were very boring, I would say, very old and a lot of worksheets like 'read this, answer that'; it was ignoring fun and that always guides my choices" (P13).

Parents brought up other aspects of their educational experience they considered important and valuable and which they desired to see in their children's school as well. A mother of a Kindergartener liked SICS "because it's small […] it definitely reminds me of my experience when I grew up" (P5). Another SICS parent "was in a music focused school and that's what I loved" (P10). This had strongly influenced her and consequently "it is the music focus which I would like to have for my children" (P10). This mother knew that "because we're a charter school budget-wise we're not that good" (P10), but she was hopeful that for SICS "the next step will be a music teacher" (P10). At TMGS, one of the participants "really felt the one-on-one was going to be there with this program and from my own experience that was something I valued as a child in private schools" (P3).

A few parents even discussed how they wanted to be involved in their children's education differently than their parents had been. One mother shared that she "wasn't really a fan of school because I didn't also really have the support at home" (P8). So now "wherever I can I help" (P8), this mother said, in order for her children to feel supported. Another mother described her parents' involvement as "they just accepted the authority and never questioned anything we were doing in school and weren't obviously as involved as we today as parents 'cause there wasn't the need for parental involvement as

today" (P16). She finds it "extremely important" (P16) to be "in the school" (P16), to be "observing [the] teachers" (P16), to "know what the curriculum is" (P16) and to "see the school environment" (P16).

Some European parents acknowledged "as an immigrant, I think, you always base your want for your child based on what you had" (P12). Some parents still felt "very formed by the German system" (P9) and trusting "the system more" (P10). To them "the German is a comfort factor" (P12) in that, for example, there were "gonna be German teachers; they're gonna teach a bit more in the realm of how we were taught" (P12). By attending SICS, these parents hoped their children would experience "a little bit more of what we have experienced as children" (P12).

Summary

A number of parents both at SICS and TMGS acknowledge that their own educational experiences have impacted the schooling decisions they make for their children. Parents' own experiences have helped them to think about what they want or not want for their children. Quite a few families seek an alternative form of education for their children because this is the way parents themselves have been educated and have benefited from it. Other parents want a different kind of schooling experience than the conventional education they had been subjected to. In addition, parents mention aspects of their education such as a small setting, a nurturing environment, and a curriculum that includes arts and music they would like to see included in their children's school. A small number of parents also allude to the subject of parenting and how they desire to be involved in their children's education differently than their parents had been. Lastly, some parents who had gone to school in German-speaking countries report that a German immersion school conveys a certain level of comfort to them as it, to a certain extent, follows an educational system that is familiar to them. The next portion of this chapter

will focus on parents' role perception and how it influences immersion parents' decision-making.

<div align="center">Parents' Role Perception</div>

This section explores research question 2.2, which focuses on the role perceptions parents have and how these perception influence schooling decisions they make for their children. Research question 2.2 was answered through parents' responses to the following interview questions: *How do you help your child to be successful in school?; What do you believe you need to do to make your child's education better?; What do you believe is your responsibility in educating your child?; As far as homework is concerned, do you feel you can help your child?; What do you believe is the school's responsibility in educating your child?; Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child academic skills?;* and *Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child social skills?*

Within their model of parental involvement, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995, 1997) suggest that parents' basic involvement decisions are influenced by how parents construct their role and their sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school. In the revised parental involvement model framing this study, Walker et al. (2005) organize these two constructs under one conceptual umbrella: parents' motivational beliefs. Parental role construction is defined as "a sense of personal or shared responsibility for the child's educational outcomes and concurrent beliefs about whether one should be engaged in supporting the child's learning and school success" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Parental sense of efficacy includes "the belief that personal actions will help the child learn" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107).

<u>Educational Support</u>

Parents tried "to do all the things the teachers recommend" (P9) in order to help and support their children be successful in school. For many "it all starts at home" (P3). Educational support to participants meant to "always expose [them] to literature" (P16)

and to "read a lot" (P13); where possible "in both languages" (P12). Interviewees felt "the whole literacy aspect is really important" (P3) and described having "a lot of books around our house and so the kids are definitely very much exposed to that" (P1). Parents also considered sitting "down with [them]" (P5) and "working with homework" (P2) an important activity to help their children be successful in school. Most parents pointed out, however, that homework was not yet a major focus point for them since nearly all participants had children in grade one or lower and the amount of homework students had to do at that point was very little. A mother whose son attended Kindergarten shared that "when he does his homework I'm always right there with him and it's actually our special time together; it's something that I enjoy and I think he enjoys, too" (P15).

Several parents also stated that in order for their children to be successful in school it was their responsibility to provide "a basic schedule" (P3), "regular routines and rituals at home" (P13). Some of the parents commented that they had a child "that responds well to structure" (P12). Many participants also defined their parental role as "making sure [their child] is well-rested, eating a healthy diet, getting plenty of exercise" (P16). Interviewees saw it as crucial and wanted to "really really make an effort to make sure that [their child] gets plenty of sleep and eats the right food, you know, proper nutrition" (P15). A father of a Kindergartener encouraged his daughter by going "with her to school almost every day and just at least show support and take her there to help her transition and make sure she has a good day" (P14). Aside from reading or doing homework together, interviewees also pointed to activities such as going to the "library" (P15), "park" (P3) or "museum" (P6), playing "board games" (P5), and doing "arts and crafts" (P1) with their children as beneficial to their overall educational success. Parents hoped that through these experiences their children would learn "that there's more than just 'Dancing with the Stars' out there and 'American Idol'" (P11).

Lastly, a number of parents both at SICS and TMGS identified frequently communicating with their children, asking them about their school day and being "very

clear in our expectations" (P3) as yet another way to help their children be successful at school. A mother whose son attended TMGS shared that "I ask him every day when I pick him up 'what did you learn?'" (P2). Another TMGS mother realized, however, that "at this age level you have to be very patient and just create different questions" (P4) because for their preschoolers "it's very hard because if you say 'what did you do in school?'" (P4), they most often will only respond saying "'nothing'" (P4). A father at SICS shared about his views on communicating with his children that

> This is something that we do really consciously, we really converse with both kids quite a lot and I sort of made a personal commitment as sort of a joke that whenever my kids ask me 'why', I would always answer it; even if it became absurd and it always becomes absurd. But I think that spirit sort of is there's always an answer, there's always something to talk about. We go on trips and talk about everything we see. So, it's just a lot of talking (P11).

Educational Responsibilities

As described before, according to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model, parents' involvement is influenced by their role construction as well as their self-efficacy. Parents' sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school includes the belief that "personal actions will help the child learn" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 107). Self-efficacy theory suggests that parents think about their involvement, their capabilities to help, as well as the results their involvement may have (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Thus, parents with high self-efficacy "will tend to make positive decisions about active engagement in the child's education…and are likely to persist in the face of challenges" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 109). Parents with weak self-efficacy, on the other hand, expect little of their efforts to help their child succeed in school and have low persistence when faced with challenges.

Many parents both at SICS and TMGS saw themselves as "100% responsible" (P16) for their children's education because "especially at a young age, I think, children don't do anything or at least not much from their own will" (P9). Parents felt being

involved in their child's education is "one of my biggest jobs 'cause this is his entry into the rest of the world for him to figure out what it is he wants to do and be and accomplish with his time. So, it's really super important" (P3). Participants saw themselves responsible for basically getting children "into a situation where the professionals can do their job" (P11). In addition to making sure their children eat well, get enough sleep and exercise, this also included providing "a calm home environment" (P13) and "a good balance in life so that [s/he] is not only learning but that [s/he] has at [his/her] age child-time" (P9). Participants also felt their children needed to know their parents are a support system for them "because if you're not a support system they won't succeed" (P8). Parents needed to be "able to listen and know if there's something that [their children] are having a problem with, so that you can help them if you need to or help guide them get through it" (P1). Furthermore, interviewees wanted to be "an active participant in [their child's] education at home" (P15). Participants felt that "every parent should play a role in the academic, um, you know, transition between the two [home and school] and try and further that at home because the more you do the more they're going to learn" (P4). A father at SICS summed up his parental role "as making sure the kid has a home life, an attitude and the support she needs so that she's enthusiastic about going to school, ready to go to school and ready to learn. (P14).

Many of the interviewees I spoke to felt it was their responsibility to "teach [their] kids that it is worth to learn" (P10) by finding "ways to make learning interesting" (P2) and "a fun process, not so much a tedious process" (P6). Some participants even discovered in this process that they "really enjoy trying to make things interesting for [their] kids" (P11). In addition, expressing their expectations and letting their child "know that we want [him/her] to do well and that school is important" (P14) was another important aspect of parenting to the immersion families I interviewed. Parents believed that if their child "is not understanding the value from both sides, both at school and at

home, it's not gonna do anything to [him/her]" (P3). A mother of a Kindergartener

believed that

> You have to not push them but you have to guide them, so you
> have to tell them what makes sense, why you do it, like 'look at
> mommy or look at daddy, that's why we do what we do' or 'that's
> why we can go on vacation because we studied well, because we
> can earn the money. If you don't study well, if you don't have a
> job like this you won't be able to do what we're doing in life', so
> things like that is my responsibility (P9).

As much as parents wanted to stimulate their children's interests and encourage them to

learn, they also did not "wanna overwhelm" (P2) them. Some at times had "to take a step

back, too, and think 'am I pushing him too hard?'" (P3). A mother of a first grader shared

that "I have to be careful because I don't want him to hate school. So, that's, I guess, how

I support my child most, knowing what I can push and what I can't and just trying to

encourage learning" (P13). In order for their children to value education, parents felt they

needed to "provide a role model in both of us [parents] to give [him/her] the desire to

keep learning, to stay in school" (P14). They attempted this by continuing to learn

themselves such as taking German or parenting classes, for example. One parent at SICS

felt that "if they consistently see that I'm keeping up-to-date, that I keep going to school,

they see that it's not just K-12, it's a life-long process. We're always trying to learn new

things; myself trying to learn German" (P6). Another participant had attended parent

education class offered at SICS and thought they provided "so much great support and

ideas" (P13). In order to keep their children motivated and interested in learning, parents

also tried finding "teachable moments at home" (P4) where they could follow up with

whatever children learned at school. Parents felt they could teach their children "in a

natural way in everyday daily routine" (P4) and thereby being "an extension to" (P6) the

school. A mother of a first grader shared that

> If they're learning about money, I will provide opportunities to use
> money in the real world but I don't have to teach, you know, do a
> lesson, that's already done, I just have to practice and enforce
> what's going on in school (P13).

"Being in contact with the teachers" (P1) was seen as essential in being able to follow up at home. A mother whose son attended Kindergarten felt her "job is when he comes home to check my communication with the teacher and see what needs to be done" (P12). Another parent at SICS remarked that "if I know my child is struggling with something, I want to help him as much as I can and if the teacher doesn't communicate that to me then it's bad for the kid" (P6).

Parents saw it as another of their responsibilities – especially as parents of young children – to help them discover their interests, strengths, and "just to expose [them] to more things" (P5). Because, as one parent put it, "if she doesn't know there're all these different options, she'll never know there's things to pick from" (P4). A father at SICS saw his responsibility in making "sure that they [his children] do it for the right reasons, that they love it. And that they really take it seriously but from a place of passion" (P11). A mother who discussed with me her views on her parental responsibilities said that

> I'm hoping for her [daughter] that I can help her find what her true interest is and what her passion is; and if it's science or art or even math, I hope that I can help her realize her full potential that way (P16).

Another mother who commented shared this view

> If [my daughter] is more of an academic person I would help her go in that direction; if she's more of an arts person then I would help her there; if she's a total sports freak then she can do more that (P9).

To participants in this study finding "environments that work with [their child's] talents, um, and that make [him/her] excited to go to school" (P2) was yet another responsibility as parents. Families looked for a school that was "the right fit" (P15) for the child and that provided a solid educational foundation. As already described under research question 1.1, parents at SICS and TMGS viewed a good educational start as significant because it would enable their children to have choices and to make informed decisions later on in their lives as a mother of a Kindergartener explained:

> My responsibility is only to send her to a good school … if she
> doesn't have the basis then she might not be able to do afterwards
> what she wants, so I would wanna make sure and I think it's my
> husband's and my responsibility to give her the basis for making
> afterwards her own choices (P9).

Lastly, in order to advance their children's education, parents considered it crucial to know "what's going on in the school" (P1) as well as "to stay involved" (P3). Parents believed it was helpful to get "to know the other kids" (P1) or to find out "what are they working on, how can I support that" (P3). Many of them spent time "volunteering" (P13; P14) in the classrooms. They also knew they needed to promote the program and "financially […] trying to help the school make sure it's doing well" (P14). Parents were keenly aware that they had "a lot of work to do" (P3) but they were "actually grateful" (P15) to be given opportunities to be involved "because a lot of schools would just say 'no'" (P15). A mother at SICS summed up her responsibilities:

> I need to stay involved. I need to clearly stay involved and need to
> help the school who clearly has disadvantages over a public
> school; I need to help the school with my man power, with the
> money I can afford to give and I need to stay involved and to stay
> on top of it without being too involved in the teaching itself (P12).

Another participant at SICS commented:

> It's a public school but if you want to make a change I have to be
> involved. You know, talk is cheap, action is better. I'm just that
> kind of person; if you want something to be done you have to do it.
> There's two ways to do it; you can support the school with getting
> involved or you give money (P7).

Responsibilities of the School

What parents expected from their child's school was in essence to teach and educate students by providing "the structure and the academics that [they] cannot provide at home" (P12). Parents saw it as the school's responsibility to teach "the nuts and bolts of the subject matter" (P14) and especially as a preschool (TMGS) or elementary (SICS) program to build "the basic foundation for reading or things like that, or math" (P2). The authority to teach "the real academics" (P9) was seen as lying with the school and its

teachers because "they were educated to do that" (P12). A mother of a first grader shared

her thoughts on the requirements and obligations a school carries:

> Well, I think it's the school's responsibility to know what's
> developmentally appropriate and expected by the state and to make
> sure their pacing and planning hits those important markers
> through the course of the year. However they wanna do it, in
> whatever order they think fits in with their themes or whatever, it
> doesn't matter to me as long as it's taught in a meaningful way and
> accessible to my child (P13).

On top of this, participants cared a great deal about the way in which the subject matter

was taught to their children. They expected their child's school to adopt a "varied and

interesting curriculum" (P16) aligned with state standards that tried "to make learning fun

and interesting and encouraging the kids in areas where they are very interested in things"

(P2). One parent I interviewed admitted to having "very high standards for the school's

responsibility" (P11). He went on to describe his ideas of a school's responsibility in that

"I think they have to inspire and the school has to create an opportunity for a child's

curiosity to flourish (P11). It was also imperative to parents both at SICS and TMGS that

the school provided "a safe" (P3) and "happy learning environment" (P13) and "instill

discipline as part of the learning process" (P11). Interviewees also hoped for good

classroom management as it would give their children "enough calm and quiet to practice

whatever the material or subject may be and that there's just enough boundaries that they

know how to behave and have fun" (P13). Finally, parents also wanted to ensure that

their school "always strives to be more and better" (P15) and "pick really ambitious

teachers" (P7) who are "well-trained" (P16), and "qualified" (P3). Families expected

their children's teachers to

> Be able to communicate and inform me, if he needs support in any
> areas and how he's performing, is he at grade level, is he below
> grade level, those kinds of things to keep me informed, so I can
> support my child better (P13).

Summary

To ensure their children can be successful in school SICS and TMGS parents are involved with them at home. As said by participants, the most common way for them to help their children at this age is by reading together and helping with homework. Furthermore, parents provide structure and support as well as a healthy and balanced home life. Activities such as going to the library or museums, talking to their children and expressing expectations are other ways parents feel they can contribute to their child having a positive educational experience.

Parents both at SICS and TMGS see it as their responsibility to support and provide for their children physically as well as emotionally. In parents' eyes, this includes a calm home environment as well as healthy nutrition, structure, and a balanced but active lifestyle. As parents of especially young students, participants feel they need to excite their children about learning and instill an appreciation for education. They believe they best achieve this by being positive role models for learning and by helping their children discover their interests and strengths. Choosing a school, which presents a good educational fit for the child, is an important undertaking for parents. Lastly, staying involved at home and at school, communicating with teachers, as well as volunteering, fundraising, and promoting the school are additional responsibilities parents feel they have.

As far as the school's responsibilities are concerned, participants in essence want their child's school to teach in an engaging way keeping in line with state standards, yet at the same time inspire and make learning fun. Choosing motivated and well-trained teachers is another of the school's obligations. Moreover, interviewees expect their school to provide a safe and disciplined environment, which fosters students' development and learning. Lastly, continuous efforts and improvement as well as allowing strong parental involvement are what some parents expect of their child's school.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described in detail the findings as they relate to each research question. I presented the stated motivations for parents to enroll their children in an immersion language program as well as the stated factors that influence such decision-making. In the following chapter, I will summarize the results and offer interpretations of my findings.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

This final chapter of the dissertation offers a summary of the results and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in the previous chapter. A brief overview of the study, the research questions and methodology are provided before presenting the results and implications organized around each research question. This chapter closes with recommendations for future research in the field of language immersion education.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and decision-making processes of parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools: one participating school is located in the Midwest and the other in California. The primary research questions are "What are the stated motivations for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language program?" and "What are the stated factors that influence immersion parents' decision-making?". Parents are recognized as primary stakeholders in their children's education and a key feature in making a school program effective and successful. Therefore, it is necessary to understand what motivates parents to choose a particular school, what perceptions and expectations they have of the program and the factors that impact their decision-making.

Based on Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) revised model of the parental involvement process (Walker et al., 2005), semi-structured interview questions were developed to learn how parents' educational goals, language beliefs, program perceptions and expectations impacted the educational decisions they make. Using content analysis, this study examined sixteen parent interviews, reflective notes and school observation write-ups to answer the above-mentioned research questions.

<u>Summary of the Findings and Implications</u>

Research Question One: What are the stated motivations

for parents to enroll their child in an immersion language

program?

<u>Parents' Educational Goals</u>

Findings

Immersion parents in this study seemed to have very high expectations of themselves, their children and the school their children attended including its administration and staff. As described in Chapter III, the overwhelming majority of participants had completed college/university with some attending graduate school as well (see Table 2). During the interviews, participants appeared well versed and highly reflective of their children as well as their parental actions. Research has shown that parents with higher levels of educational attainment are more likely to have high educational expectations for their children (Cunningham, Erisman, & Looney, 2007; Dubow, Boxer, & Huesmann, 2009; Lee & Bowen, 2006). This phenomenon is also reflected in Choy's (1993) study on an elementary Japanese bilingual, bicultural public school program where "all of the parents who participated in this study spoke of their children's future in tones that communicated high expectations and hope" (p. 96). Several of the parents I interviewed expected "that college will happen" (P3); that their child would pursue college or even graduate school and some went as far as already having conversations with their young children about college. These parents were keenly aware of the benefits of a good and well-rounded education. They felt it was important for their child's elementary program to make learning fun and interesting as well as to inspire children so that they are not put off by school. During the interviews, many brought up their wish for an excellent educational foundation for their child, yet at the same time

parents made clear that they were not able or willing to pay the hefty tuition fees some private schools charged in their areas.

Numerous participants in this study seemed very reflective of their actions as parents. They knew that they demanded a lot from their children and some expressed concerns about pushing their child too much. One mother's comment appropriately described the dilemma today's parents face: "On the one hand, I wanna make sure he's got lots of opportunities but on the other hand I don't wanna overwhelm him" (P2). As some parents shared in the interviews their child's happiness meant more to them than academic achievements or a college degree. Parents made it clear that they simply wanted a wide range of experiences for their children in order for them to find their passion and have choices later on in their lives.

A surprisingly large number of parents chose to enroll their children in these immersion programs because they wanted an alternative form of education than what was offered in their neighborhood schools and/or local school district. In the interviews it became apparent that parents' desire for an alternative program was strongly guided by their "personal history with and feelings about school" (Walker et al., 2005, p. 100). Some parents themselves went through non-traditional schooling and wanted something similar for their child, others wanted progressive teaching approaches and for schools to move away from the "drill and repeat-after-me" (P6) participants had experienced while in school. Interestingly, some European immigrant families saw it as a "comfort factor" (P12) that their child attended a school where parents felt familiar with the educational approach and the way some of the teachers had been trained.

Twelve of the sixteen participants in this study were either German native speakers, second generation Germans, or married to a German (see Table 1). For them, maintaining the heritage/family language was important, so that their children could "travel and communicate with their relatives" (P13). Heritage/family language maintenance and development has been found to be one of the main reasons for choosing

dual language programs by families connected to the language (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Lao, 2004; Shannon & Milian, 2002). Several native speakers felt they could support their child's oral language skills at home. However, parents were aware that in order for their children to become proficient in reading and writing, they needed more than what parents could provide at home. Teaching and furthering their native language, which often falls on mothers, is a complex, challenging and time-intensive endeavor (Iqbal, 2005). Parents who took this on also had to make efforts to keep up with the language themselves. As research has shown, already among second-generation immigrants there is a rapid language loss (Portes & Hao, 1998), yet "a strong command of their HL [*Heritage Language*] leads to a deeper knowledge of cultural values, ethics, and manners" (DeCapua & Wintergerst, 2009, p.14).

All sixteen participants in this study could be identified as language learners and as having a love for languages and other cultures. They appeared knowledgeable of the benefits of early language learning and cultural exposure. The majority had extensive study abroad experiences or had lived abroad which many strongly wished their children would "have that desire" (P2) and "make that part of [their] education" (P15). For many it was "a no-brainer" (P15) that their child learned a second language highlighted by the fact that many parents had enrolled their children in Saturday language schools or other immersion programs prior to starting at either TMGS or SICS. Whether they were aware of it or not, these parents conveyed attitudes about second language learning to their children. As found by Bartram (2006), "an association is clearly demonstrated … between parental and learner attitudes. Where parental attitudes are perceived as positive, these appear broadly mirrored in their children's orientations" (p. 220). In addition, parents' knowledge of and experience with a foreign language also appeared to influence learner attitudes in their "understandings of language importance, utility and status" (Bartram, 2006, p. 220).

In sum, I found that participants of this study who chose to enroll their child in newly established German immersion schools had high expectations of themselves as parents, their children, and the school their children attended. The majority of families expected their children to pursue a college/university degree because parents felt it may ensure more opportunities and less struggles in their children's future. Since all of the families were passionate about languages and many were first- or second-generation immigrants, language-learning opportunities for their children – be it as a second or heritage language – were very important to these parents. Equally important was the exposure to other cultures and the ability to become more internationally minded; many of the participants had a very open worldview and, based on personal experiences, strongly desired for their children to study or live abroad. Parents felt it was crucial for their children to receive a solid and well-rounded elementary education where they could be inspired and become excited about learning.

Implications

Administrators and teachers in immersion programs need to be aware and prepared for parents' high educational expectations. As one participant succinctly put it: "Everyone wants their child to have a good education, or excellent education, because their child is everything and so the education has to be everything" (P4). Parents expect especially elementary schools to provide a solid and well-rounded educational experience where students are inspired by passionate, caring teachers and innovative methods to become life-long learners. Participants in this study are very vocal about their wish to have a school philosophy and teaching approaches that are "a little bit different than the traditional teaching" (P7) found in their neighborhood schools. Thus, immersion programs need to show well-articulated and high yet attainable goals. Cloud et al. (2000) list high standards as a feature of effective dual language programs. They further explain:

> It is not enough that standards be clearly defined and challenging, they must also be (a) understood, (b) accepted, and (c)

implemented in a coherent fashion by all educational and support personnel in the program. This means that the school principal, *all* teachers, other educational professionals, and even support staff working in the school must understand and share the same standards. They must all work together to insure that the standards are implemented in a systematic fashion across grade levels (emphasis in the original, p. 10-11).

This study found that many parents who make up the initial parent base at new immersion programs have a personal connection to the language taught. Some are native or heritage speakers who desire for their children to develop the home language and preserve their heritage. All families are passionate language advocates who want their children to acquire a second language because of its multiple benefits such as intercultural sensitivity, high levels of functional language proficiency, and literacy in at least two languages. A dedicated and well-trained teaching staff, multi-cultural exposure, various support systems, as well as providing language continuity need to be in place for a strong, sustained immersion program. I suggest that new immersion programs learn from established and successful programs. Administrators and founding parents of new immersion programs should actively communicate with their counterparts at established programs across the country and seek their guidance and advice. Even though school contexts may differ, there are common pitfalls new programs can avoid and lessons to be learned from the experiences of programs that have operated for several years. This in turn requires well-established immersion programs to be open to sharing their experiences and to have a willingness to assist and exchange. Ging (1992) reported on her experiences on the founding of two immersion schools while working as a foreign language supervisor in a large school district. Learning from and exchanging with other immersion programs were essential and she commented, "we benefited greatly from the experiences of others who were more than generous in spirit and in fact" (Ging, 1992, p. 137). In addition, immersion programs should be careful not to isolate themselves from their school district and other programs within the district. According to Cloud et al. (2000), "programs that function in isolation can be vulnerable because decisions can be

made that do not take them into consideration or, worse, that are contrary to their best interests" (p. 20). Despite the enormous demands and challenges placed on the administration and founders of new programs especially in the first year, plans also need to be in place to pursue long-term goals such as immersion options that surpass elementary school. In her report, Ging (1992) also described finding options for language continuity to be a crucial matter and commented: "My personal concern for this city's immersion programs lies most heavily within the topic of well-articulated follow-up programs" (p. 152). As many parents in this study attested, families want to see long-term plans and they want to know that their children can continue in a particular educational setting. Since parents want to see their children's school grow and expand, their language advocacy and enthusiasm for immersion schooling should be utilized. At SICS, for example, parents, under the guidance of their principal, worked already in the first year on a middle school immersion charter.

<u>Parents' Perceptions and Expectations</u>

Findings

At TMGS, parents described their children's immersion experience as *fun*, *enriching*, and providing *exposure*. Again, it is important to note here that TMGS at the time of the interviews only consisted of one Pre-K class that most students only attended for a few hours per day. As Preschool is not a formal academic requirement, its focus is more on socializing children and teaching very basic skills, i.e. getting them prepared for Kindergarten. Parents admitted to having "very simple" (P1) expectations such as for their young children to be in a safe environment, to have a fun early educational experience and to be exposed to the learning of basic skills.

This particular age of the children also appeared to be a time where parents felt it was not "much of a risk" (P4) to try out different academic experiences. As one mother remarked: "We sort of figured for preschool, you know, I mean really, how messed up

could they get" (P2). Also, despite their excitement for the school and appreciation for early language exposure, at the time of the interviews all four mothers alluded to the fact that they were unsure whether or not they would continue with the immersion program. Their reasons varied, but it seemed that for several of them the school's uncertain future at that time contributed to their hesitations; as one mother at TMGS pointed to: "As long as I can see exactly what the plans of the school are and I'm very informed I'm comfortable with that choice" (P4).

At SICS, I interviewed parents of mostly Kindergarteners and first graders. There, parents described their children's school experience as *challenging*, *exciting/joyful* and *social/inspirational*. Compared to Preschool, Kindergarten and first grade were more rigorous and had a stronger emphasis on academics. Parents whose children attended other programs prior to SICS described the transition phase within the first year to be challenging for their children. They added, however, that this challenge has been a positive experience for their families and had benefited their children in that they developed "a lot of pride from conquering all those challenges" (P13). Previous studies on parents and their views on immersion education reflect these findings and have shown that seeking an educational challenge is a reason for some parents to choose immersion education for their child (Parkes, 2008; Wesely & Baig, 2011).

Again, it is noteworthy that parents listed descriptors such as *fun*, *joyful*, and *inspiring*. Participants desired programs to be exciting and inspirational and they looked at their children's experiences and asked themselves if these goals were met. Since one of the responsibilities parents felt they had was to ensure their children's happiness, it is not surprising to learn that they sought programs where learning was a fun, joyful and inspiring experience. Interestingly, in Choy's (1993) study the words *fun* and *enjoyment* were also most frequently used by parents to describe their children's school experience. Choy concluded:

> The repeated number of times 'fun' and 'enjoyment' surfaced in the dialogues implied that parents liked to see their children enjoy coming to school. These parents' perspectives support the idea that students do best in school when they are able to discover the joy of learning (p. 98).

Even though SICS was only in its first year, parents were already looking ahead and were very vocal about their expectation for the school to grow into a middle school and hopefully even a high school. They seemed absolutely positive that they would achieve this goal and that their school would grow into a very successful immersion middle school and perhaps even high school. Parents believed so strongly in immersion education and felt it simply had to surpass the elementary school level. Families wanted to ensure continuity in their children's language learning as this was the best way to guarantee the levels of fluency parents hoped for. This echoes findings in Giacchino-Baker and Piller's (2006) study of a two-way immersion program where the researchers found that parents "want assurances that the TWI program will continue at this school" (p. 25).

Parents at SICS faced a similar situation as so many families in this country in that they "are just looking for an alternative to their public school" (P11) because they "tend to be not so good" (P11). In the interviews, it became clear that parents wanted a school that "had more to offer" (P6). Families had therefore actively sought out a progressive, stimulating, and non-traditional educational environment for their child. Many had particularly high hopes for the steady implementation of the International Baccalaureate (IB) Primary Years Programme. Suddenly for some it was "not so much the language anymore but the IB program which attracts me and the opportunities they will have with this IB program" (P10). SICS was thereby taking on an increasingly popular education model which has "recently shot up" (Cech, 2007, p. 23) from 88 schools in 1997 to 800 in 2007 (Cech, 2007). At present 1,239 schools in the United States offer one or more of the three IB programmes (IBOb, 2011). In some school districts in this country it even appears that immersion programs and IB programs are in

direct competition (Wesely & Baig, 2011). SICS worked towards combining the two. With its inquiry-based and thematic education model, parents hoped for their children to be "allowed to take charge of their own education" (P16) in addition to acquiring a second language proficiently and receiving "extra training in becoming culturally aware" (P14).

TMGS and SICS are both very demanding undertakings and all participants attested to this during the interviews. Nonetheless, parents were incredibly driven and motivated to make this kind of an education happen for their children. This was echoed by a remark of one of TMGS' mothers who said: "Everyone wants their child to have a good education, or excellent education, because their child is everything and so the education has to be everything" (P4). All parents I spoke to were very involved and supported their child's school in various ways. The schools' communities, which had developed, were very important to parents and played a huge part in both programs moving forward. Based on his study on parents' social networks and beliefs as predictors of parent involvement, Sheldon (2002) concluded that "having a network of other parents and adults with whom to discuss their children's education may reinforce parents' feeling that they should be involved in their children's education" (p. 312) – as one mother at SICS who described the parent involvement as "contagious" (P5). Many parents were very clear and blunt in their demands of new families to immediately get on board and become part of the community and "if that's just not what you want to do in your child's education then the school is really not right for you" (P15). Sheldon's (2002) findings also suggest "a sense of social pressure from other parents may influence some individuals to spend more time at their child's school" (p. 312). None of the participants reported on feeling pressured to be involved; yet again it needs to be pointed out that interviewees in this study were most likely parents who were more involved in their child's school than others who did not participate in the interviews.

Implications

There is no doubt that parents are important partners to schools. Immersion programs in particular have always relied heavily on parents' involvement and financial support to become established and highly reputable programs. In many cases, it is an interested group of parents who initiate the foundation of an immersion program (Cloud et al., 2000). This was the case for SCIS and TMGS; even the first immersion program in Canada, the St. Lambert experiment, was created because of parental demands (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Participants feel that parental involvement is "what makes the school happen and that's what's going to make it great" (P15). Therefore, school districts, administrators, and immersion teachers need to be keenly aware that they work with parents who are very involved. These parents hold themselves, their children and everyone involved in their child's education to very high standards.

Both schools in this study have only been operating for a couple of months and are clearly far from being established programs. Parents are confronted with many uncertainties and have to be flexible and patient. However, in our conversations they not only communicated their spirit and excitement for their schools, I could actually feel it. Interviewees truly believe in their program, which allows them to look past port-a-potties, as has been the case at SICS, for example. SICS has already started work on a middle school charter and parents feel assured that the school is moving forward. At TMGS, parents seem a bit unsure about the school's future plans. Regardless of their satisfaction with the current program, participants want to know where it is going and how this will impact their children's education. As one mother at TMGS pointed to: "As long as I can see exactly what the plans of the school are and I'm very informed I'm comfortable with that choice" (P4). Administrators need to be aware that for some parents "the immersion experience can be one of a careful balance between enthusiasm and anxiety" (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 22). To many it is a kind of risk taking to send their children to such a school and there is a heightened need for information and reassurance. A precise vision

and concrete goals are important for a newly-established school in order to attract and keep families and develop sustaining, long-term programs. This, in addition, requires a strong and very committed principal leadership who is visibly and actively involved in bringing the school forward (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). A dedicated and knowledgeable administrator is as essential as involved parents to a successful immersion program echoing Ging's (1992) claim, "The leadership for such specialized schools can make or break a program" (p. 152). In SICS' case, the school's great advantage was a principal who had several years of leadership experience in immersion settings. SICS principal knew first hand what it meant to establish an immersion school, how to maneuver the intricacies of school districts' policies and procedures, as well as how to successfully deal with different educational cultures and delegate the available man power. Ging (1992) demands of successful immersion administrators to "be conversant on the various models and program goals and expectations and be able to speak to reasons for implementing and maintaining immersion" (p. 151).

Almost all parents in this study speak fondly and enthusiastically about their schools' parent communities and how much this has added to the positive development of the schools. The community spirit is imperative to participants; to the extent that new families "need to be prepared to be involved" (P15). It is crucial for new schools to foster their community building as it is not only impacting children's education positively but also parents' satisfaction with the program. Wanat (2010) interviewed 20 parents in one K-12 public school district and found that "compared to 12 of 13 satisfied parents who talked about relationships with other parents, only 2 of 7 dissatisfied parents talked about other parents" (p. 180). This suggests that parents are more satisfied with their child's school if they can network with other parents at the school and can rely on them as a resource. Getting parents involved offers them opportunities to meet and interact with other parents. Schools need to make sure they offer these possibilities by letting parents volunteer, organize events entire families can attend, or provide classes where parents can

meet other parents from the same school. Since both programs have very close-knit communities and families who bonded over the first year experience, it is important that the schools as well as the parents encourage new families to enter their community and bring new ideas and expectations to the table.

<u>Parents' Beliefs about the German Language</u>

Findings

Of the sixteen participants in this study, twelve were native speakers of German, second generation Germans, or had a German spouse. One family had lived in Germany for five years and three families had no connection to the German language (see Table 1). This reflects the immersion schools' demographics as the principal of SICS pointed out when I asked her about the school's population: "85% of [students] are Euro-White which is exactly what you'd expect of a German school the first year because no one else is interested". Often parents enroll their children in immersion schools because of their excellent reputation (Giacchino-Baker & Pillar, 2006). Newly established programs do not have this advantage and it therefore appears that the first groups of parents who consider immersion programs are mostly those who have some kind of a relationship with the language – as native/heritage speakers or as having personal ties through family or an extended living abroad experience. The principal of TMGS confirmed "people are more interested in actually considering this school if they have some type of connection". This was not surprising as in many cases the founders of immersion programs have a personal interest in and connection to a certain language, which initiates the development of the school. One of the SICS parents I interviewed was also a founding member and she described that not having the possibility of a German school for her children "was disappointing. And I always had this idea and then I met the right people with the same idea as I did and so we started to build up the school" (P10).

Widely held beliefs about the German language existed among the families in this study. German was considered a "really difficult" (P1) and "ugly" (P13) language to learn. Even some of the German native speakers admitted to asking themselves if German was useful to have as a second language. One American parent was comfortable enough to share that in the past she had concerns about letting others know she speaks German because of possibly being seen as "anti-Semitic" (P3). This leads me to believe that still today some refer to Nazi Germany and its atrocities when thinking of Germans and the German language.

I was able to identify all sixteen participants in this study as language learners and strong supporters of early language learning. All parents spoke or had learned at least one other language and several participants had extended living abroad experiences. These beliefs and personal experiences, of course, greatly influenced them in their decision to send their child to an immersion school. Many parents "thought about other immersion schools" (P9) but some where specifically interested in a German immersion program because of their ties to the language. Families who took the "leap of faith" (P3; P4) and enrolled in new immersion programs were shaped by personal experiences and greatly valued the learning of a foreign language. This echoes findings in a study on immersion parents' enrollment decisions, where 19% of interviewed parents described being impacted in their decision-making by personal experiences or their social networks (Wesely & Baig, 2011). Similar to participants in Wesely and Baig's (2011) study, parents at TMGS and SICS considered themselves very knowledgeable of the intricacies and benefits of early language learning and culture exposure.

I was particularly interested in asking participants at SICS which is located in California if they preferred their children to learn Spanish instead of German because of the large Spanish speaking population in that state. I found that for many "the language doesn't really matter" (P6); on top of that SICS had addressed the issue by implementing Spanish as a foreign language into their curriculum starting in grade 3. This assured many

SICS parents that their children would "have the Spanish anyways with that" (P9). Those parents who had no German knowledge at all seemed very resourceful and hardly worried about not being able to help their child. They knew it would get harder the more their children learned; however, they felt they could rely on their skills as language learners and the various resources offered through school. These participants fit Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995) description of parents with a personal sense of efficacy for helping their child succeed in school:

> A parent believes that he or she has the skills and knowledge
> necessary to help his or her children, that the children can learn
> what he or she has to share and teach, and that he or she can find
> alternative sources of skill or knowledge if and when they become
> necessary (p. 314).

Some participants remarked, however, that they wanted their child to learn a language they themselves were familiar with in order to help their child with aspects such as homework.

A great side effect of immersion schooling is that these programs allow families of different cultures to meet and learn more about each other. Immersion programs not only expand the horizons of its students but also its parents and thereby help weaken stereotypes. Families who had no prior exposure to the German language and the people speaking it readily acknowledged that sending their child to a German immersion school has allowed them to meet people from that particular culture and has even stirred up an interest in some to learn the language as the following exchange with a parent from SICS shows:

> P16: But now I'd definitely be interested in learning some German.
> Because my daughter is at the school and I know German people
> now. I never knew German people before.
> F: So, could I say the school created an interest in you to learn the
> language and explore the culture more?
> P16: Yes, absolutely.

Implications

Despite sending their children to German immersion schools, parents both at TMGS and SICS tell interested families "less about the German because again, for somebody who's not from Germany, the German component as the language is not nearly that important" (P12). Many want prospective parents to know that a German background is not necessary to enroll and it appears these immersion parents often have to make this clarification. Administrators and parents alike know that in the near future they "must diversify" (SICS principal) thoughtfully and respectfully in order to move from a predominantly Caucasian/Anglo student population to a more mixed population representing the schools' neighborhoods and attracting a larger customer base. Immersion programs simply by design can be a great place to foster cultural exchanges and celebrate multiculturalism for children as well as their parents. Making an effort to have events not only about the target culture but about cultures represented at school and the community at large can truly enrich and impact families and connect a school to its surrounding neighborhood. Actually meeting people from another culture and making that personal connection helps minimize stereotypes and develop tolerance.

As thrilling as cultural pluralism can be, however, having more than one dominant educational culture in a school creates an enormous challenge especially for administrators of immersion programs and has to be carefully and respectfully addressed in order for no one to feel disenfranchised. SICS principal commented on this issue:

> So, you have your American trained teachers who have a very
> specific frame of how education looks like and feels like, 80% of
> your parents have that same frame, that's what they think a school
> looks like, that's how it was when they went to school, that's how
> it's supposed to be, right? That's the only frame that they know.
> Then you bring European teachers over who have the European
> frame, the German frame, so these teachers have a whole different
> idea what education looks like. The parents that are German have
> the same frame. Although they're in the minority. And so if you're
> not very careful what you have is conflict.

Also at TMGS the initial challenges for the administration were based on the different educational cultures present at school: "Overall most of the challenges really had to do with, at the beginning, um, perhaps, um, cultural difficulties with the way the school was run, teachers and some of the parents, what they anticipated or expected from the school" (TMGS principal).

Helping their children with schoolwork "was a prime concern of parents when we were founding this school. That always came up" (P11). To those parents I spoke to, however, this was only a small concern and they did not worry a great deal as they either knew enough German to help or had been able to use other resources such as the Internet or help provided at school to assist their child. Yet, parents thought about this issue and immersion schools need to address it and have a plan. It is imperative for these programs to have various tools in place that parents can use to help their child. SICS, for example, has "networks set up where you can call other people and the teachers give very very good directions in class" (P11) and "some of the interns and some of the parents who speak German have kind of come out and they help" (P15). Other sources of assistance could be homework help provided in their after-school programs or workshops where parents learn how to correctly use various resources on the Internet to help their children. Homework and language assistance is a must for immersion programs. Surveyed parents in a study of a two-way immersion program asked that they be given "help with 'alternate' language [and be given] more assessment/notification of children's progress" (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006, p. 25). In another study where immersion teachers addressed issues these programs face,

> Teachers mentioned having to be aware of parent concerns given
> that the uniqueness of their child's elementary school context
> fosters a heightened desire for information about curricular
> content, student progress, and, above all, a need for reassurance
> about achievement (Walker & Tedick, 2000, p. 22).

Research Question Two: What are the stated factors that

influence immersion parents' decision-making?

<u>Parents' Own School Experience</u>

Findings

Räty (2002) states "parents' own education and their school experiences are important sources of their conceptions and attitudes" (p. 43). To understand more about parents' decision-making and their involvement in school, Walker et al. (2005), who revised Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1995, 1997) model on parental involvement and whose model frames this study, put forth "including questions about parents' personal history with and feelings about school" (p. 100). Based on these implications, I asked participants about their own school experience during the interviews to understand more about their decision-making processes. I had to realize, however, that some parents were not very forthcoming answering this question; they described their feelings about school in rather short sentences and few went into details. Nonetheless, the majority of participants in this study clearly agreed that their own school experiences "definitely" (P3; P6) influenced the schooling decisions they make for their children. One mother at TMGS, for example, said, "I never really thought about preschool [for her child] much because I never went" (P1).

Chapter IV describes the varying educational experiences parents have had. Some received their education in Europe; others went to school in the United States. Of those attending school in the U.S., some went to private, some to public, and others to parochial schools. Parents' opinions about their educational experiences naturally varied. The majority of interviewees spoke positively of their elementary school experiences because "it was exciting and you don't even think about it, you just go" (P9). As for the middle and high school years, to a few of the parents it was a rather unpleasant experience. Some openly commented that they "hated" (P7; P15; P16) middle and/or high school. Parents

attributed their dislike for school during those years in part to the "middle school hormones" (P16) and becoming "a teenager" (P9). But they also mentioned having poor teachers (P9; P11; P13; P16) and attending programs that left little room for fun and inspiration. It is therefore not surprising that parents searched for schools that have "more to offer" (P6) as well as "inspire and … create an opportunity for a child's curiosity to flourish" (P11). Participants in this study who had negative schooling experiences did not appear, however, to have negative feelings towards education in general or the potential for their child's school. In a study on educational attitudes and Finnish parents' own schooling experiences, Räty (2002) found that "the respondents who had a negative perception of their own school were characterized by distrust of the school and therefore criticism and pessimism as regards its prospects" (p. 57). Räty's (2002) study further showed that surveyed parents were least satisfied with their own schools in "the giving of encouragement and the ability to take individual needs into consideration" (p. 55). This echoes findings in this study where participants desired that TMGS and SICS "really honor and respect each child in terms of where they're at developmentally, socially, and academically" (P15) and that "the one-on-one was going to be there" (P4).

To some parents who grew up in Germany sending their children to a German immersion school was a "comfort factor" (P12). These immigrant parents hoped their children would experience "a little bit more of what we have experienced as children" (P12) by attending a school that embraces the German education system, for example. These parents, especially those who immigrated less than five years ago, admitted that they are "still very formed by the German system" (P9) and "trust the system more" (P10). These European parents touch on the issue of diverse educational cultures that challenge today's public schools in this country "where school personnel may not understand the culture of the students and families with whom they work" (Howland, Anderson, Smiley, & Abbott, 2006, p. 47). As one parent from Germany stated, "as an immigrant, I think, you always base your want for your child based on what you had"

(P12). Familiarity with the system was important to these parents; at a German immersion school they can expect that "there're gonna be German teachers; they're gonna teach a bit more in the realm of how we were taught" (P12). However, as SICS principal stressed in working with different educational cultures "if you're not very careful what you have is conflict" and everyone involved needs to understand that "it's not a German school but it isn't an American school either".

Implications

Parents are formed by their own school experience and it influences the decisions they make for their children. Even though some of the participants had negative experiences it did not seem to affect their attitudes toward schools or education in general. On the contrary, parents in this study all seemed very excited about education and particularly their child's school. Their experiences most likely lead parents to be more involved in their child's school – to be "in the school" (P16), to be "observing … teachers" (P16), to "know what the curriculum is" (P16), to "see the school environment" (P16). Research has shown, however, that parents who had a negative schooling experience may develop negative feelings about education (Räty, 2002). Therefore, school personnel should be attentive to parents with negative attitudes towards school. Seeing excellent teaching, caring teachers and their child having fun in school will help ensure parents that their child is receiving a positive and exceptional education.

Bringing together the educational cultures represented in a German immersion school is a particular challenge for the administration as pointed out already under research question one. Not only are there teachers, who now need to work together, trained in different systems but there are also parents who went through a different educational system and they use this experience as a frame of reference to evaluate their children's education. As both principals pointed out, this has created challenges in the schools' first year and any immersion administration needs to carefully point out and

address these different educational cultures in order to avoid conflict. As SICS' principal

stressed, "It's not a German school but it isn't an American school either". Creating an

open and accepting educational culture will also help these programs in their efforts to

diversify. In their first year, TMGS and SICS enrolled students of predominantly

Caucasian/Anglo background; for minority families to be attracted to such programs they

need to feel they can become part of the current school culture and that there is room for

their educational values and beliefs. Immersion schools should become institutions where

diverse educational cultures can come together since "in U.S. public schools, the cultural

standard continues to be set by a middle class that is typically Caucasian, even in areas

heavily populated by people from diverse backgrounds" (Howland et al., 2006, p. 50).

<u>Parents' Role Perception</u>

Findings

Based on parents' interview responses, I was able to categorize their role

constructions as either parent-focused or partnership-focused (Walker et al., 2005). A

parent-focused role construction according to Walker et al. (2005) reflects "parental

beliefs and behaviors that the parent is ultimately responsible for the child's education"

(p. 90). Participants saw their involvement in their child's education as "one of [their]

biggest jobs" (P3) and as a "big responsibility" (P9). Some felt that they "should be 100%

responsible" (P16) for their child's education as "it all starts at home" (P3). Most parents,

however, felt that "it's a partnership" (P10) with shared responsibilities between "parents

and school" (P14). A partnership-focused role construction is reflected by "beliefs and

behaviors that parents and schools together are responsible for the child's education"

(Walker et al., 2005, p. 90). One father at SICS, for example, believed that "I'm as

responsible as the teacher. I need to do my part" (P6). A mother at TMGS felt that "every

parent should play a role in the academic, um, you know, transition between the two

[school and home] and try and further that at home" (P4). Another father at SICS saw his

part of the shared responsibility in getting his children "into a situation where the professionals can do their job" (P11).

Participants at TMGS and SICS also demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy as they strongly believed that "their involvement in their children's schooling will positively affect their children's learning and school success" (Anderson & Minke, 2007, p. 312). Especially as parents of young children, interviewees felt that they had to be the driving force because at that age "children don't do anything or at least not much from their own will" (P9). It can be assumed, however, that parents' involvement will decline as their children grow older (Adams & Christenson, 2000). At the preschool or elementary school age, families felt they could help their children be successful in school by exposing them to books and reading together, offering homework help, fostering arts and crafts, or taking them to the library and museums. This is consistent with research findings, which indicate that parents with higher education levels tend to provide more stimulating home behaviors (Davis-Kean, 2005). Parents also believed that by establishing routines at home, and ensuring their child gets proper rest, exercise and nutrition they could positively influence their children's learning. Many added to their parental role frequently communicating with their children and letting them know they are there to support them. Research suggests that "the amount of schooling that parents receive influences how they structure their home environment as well as how they interact with their children in promoting academic achievement" (Davis-Kean, 2005, p. 302).

Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) describe parents high in efficacy as making "positive decisions about active engagement in the child's education" (p. 109). When asked about their educational responsibilities, parents felt they "have a lot of work to do" (P3). As described through interviewees' narratives in Chapter IV, they considered it their obligation to instill in their children an appreciation for learning and to value education, to help discover children's interests and strengths, and to find a good school that promotes these abilities. In addition, parents regarded it as important to convey their

expectations to their children; yet at the same time several mothers expressed concerns about pushing their children too much and not wanting to overwhelm them. Parents in this study appeared very reflective of their parenting behaviors and clearly thought "about the outcomes likely to follow their actions" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 109). What these families basically wanted was to provide their children with an excellent educational foundation which would allow them to be happy by having options and making choices later on in life. According to Hunt (2008), today's parents have "moved away from the authoritarian style to a more cooperative style of parenting. Parents see themselves as responsible for helping their child make better choices" (p. 10).

The majority of parents saw themselves as "an extension" (P6) to their child's school. Parents felt responsible for ensuring a good home life for their children; they held the school accountable for the academic aspect of education because "they were educated to do that" (P12). This included hiring "well-trained" (P16) and "certified teachers" (P3), providing a safe environment for the students as well as making learning fun and meaningful by adopting a curriculum that follows the "state standards in an interesting way" (P11). Finally, open communication and keeping parents informed was another expectation of their child's school participants expressed during the interviews.

Implications

Administrators and staff at immersion programs for the most part work with very knowledgeable and involved families. Many parents have a high sense of personal efficacy for helping their children succeed in school and they feel their involvement can make a real difference in their child's education. Nevertheless, schools need to be prepared to also work with parents who have relatively weak self-efficacy for involvement. These parents often have lower expectations of their efforts and low persistence in the face of challenges (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). In addition, some parents may simply lack the time to be as

involved as other parents. Letting parents know that they are important in their child's education and providing specific suggestions about how to support their child can help these parents become more involved and feel successful about their participation. A welcoming school climate and explicit invitations from school personnel to become involved may also encourage families to take part in their child's education.

As parents of particularly young children, they feel they carry great responsibility in their child's education. However, parents do not believe they are solely responsible; they see themselves as "an extension" (P6) and partners to their child's school and therefore want to be considered as such. Communication in a partnership is of utmost importance and parents stressed that they, first and foremost, need to be kept informed to be able to support their child best. Parents have high expectations not only of themselves but also of their child's school and expect that it "always strives to be more and better" (P15). Parents hold the school accountable for hiring certified teachers and adopting a curriculum that is not only engaging and meaningful but follows state standards as well.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and decision-making processes of parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools. Future research is needed to continuously learn how parents make educational decisions, what they expect from and how they perceive their child's schools. Parents are partners to schools and vital not only to children's education but to the improvement and support of immersion programs. Realistic insights into their attitudes and beliefs allow furthering the home-school relationship.

Since this study was limited to parents in German immersion programs, it would be interesting to compare parental beliefs and the decision-making of parents in new immersion schools with different target languages such as Chinese, Arabic or other European languages. Some of the relevant issues may be how their language beliefs

influenced their program choice and whether or not personal experiences and connections to the language impacted their decisions. Conducting a similar investigation but on a larger scale, such as a survey study, for example, with a larger subject pool from various immersion schools may allow for more generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, a follow-up study on these participants needs to be carried out a few years from now to learn if these families have stayed with these programs as well as to examine if/how their perceptions and expectations have changed. Some relevant issues may be how their attitudes towards immersion education have changed, how they support their children now and whether or not their expectations have become a reality. It would also be interesting to conduct a longitudinal study of these parents, especially if programs expand from Kindergarten to middle school and even further. This may provide insights into changes in parents' beliefs about immersion education and their challenges with and commitment to establishing long-running, well-implemented programs.

Lastly, this study focused on families who were fully supportive of immersion education, who could greatly involve themselves in their child's education and felt that immersion worked for their children. However, families who left these programs after their first year or realized it did not work for their children merit investigation. It may benefit programs to hear from parents who may feel disenfranchised in such schools or who had to realize that their child did not do well in an immersion environment.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the motivations and decision-making processes of parents who chose to send their children to newly established German immersion schools. It could be shown that parents are important stakeholders in their child's education and indispensable partners for new immersion programs in particular. These parents, who took the leap of faith of enrolling their children in brand new programs, felt they carry enormous responsibilities when it comes to their child's

education. The decisions they make now will impact their children for the rest of their lives. Participants were keenly aware of this and thought about their choices carefully. However, parents did not feel they were alone in this but worked in a partnership with their child's school towards the best education possible for all children. As such they not only had high expectations of themselves but also their child's school.

Parents are great supporters of and believers in immersion education. Those who made up the first group of families at these schools had been influenced in their decisions by personal beliefs or experiences about language learning. They are the best promoters these programs have and freely give of their time, ideas and money because they want these programs to continue and expand. TMGS and SICS are great examples of successful new immersion programs and the impact dedicated parents and administrators can have. As everyone involved attested, it is an enormous challenge to start such immersion schools; the rewards nonetheless far outweigh the negatives. Parents want these programs and once involved very few turn back. My perceptions of SICS and TMGS echo Ging's (1992) report of the first year of two immersion schools she helped establish: "In spite of the many problems that seemed, at times, insurmountable, the immersion schools were clearly successful in their first year. Parent support and enthusiasm were phenomenal" (p. 146). This study added to the existing body of language immersion research by highlighting the parents behind these programs – how they perceive, what they expect from and are willing to give to these programs. Parents are as crucial to immersion programs as are immersion teachers and administrators. These schools cannot survive without parental involvement, their support and patronage, and the enthusiasm they bring. Parents want these kinds of educational experiences for their children and are needed to guarantee immersion programs flourish and grow. As this study has attempted to highlight, parents can truly make or break a program.

APPENDIX A

INTRODUCTORY E-MAIL (PRINCIPALS)

Dear _____,

My name is Fatima Baig and I am a Ph.D. student in Foreign Language and ESL Education at [Midwestern University]. My dissertation research focuses on the motivation parents have for choosing language immersion education for their child. I myself have been an immersion teacher at the Milwaukee German Immersion School. For my dissertation study I plan to interview parents who recently enrolled their child in an immersion program. I am contacting you today because I was hoping to conduct interviews with parents who enrolled their child in your German immersion program for the 2009/2010 school year. I was hoping you could allow and assist me in identifying families who would be willing to talk to me about their motivation for enrolling their child at your school.
I plan on conducting interviews around the month of _____ or whatever is most convenient for everyone involved.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns you might have regarding my study. If I need to contact someone else at your school regarding this study I will gladly do so.
E-mail: email@email.edu
Phone: (XXX) XXX-XXXX

I greatly appreciate your time and do sincerely hope to hear from you.

Fatima Baig
Ph.D. candidate in FL and ESL Education
[Midwestern University]

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE (PARENTS)

Please take a moment to answer the following questions. Feel free to skip any question you prefer not to answer.
This questionnaire should be returned in the enclosed envelope.

---

1. Name: _____

2. ___ My child attends the German immersion program and is in grade _____
   ___ My children attend the German immersion program and are in grades _____

3. How may the researcher contact you to arrange for the interview?

___by e-mail (e-mail address: _____)
___by phone (phone number: _____ / best time to call: _____)

---

4. What is your ethnic background?

___ Hispanic/Latino
___ Caucasian/Anglo
___ African-American
___ Asian-American
___ American Indian/Alaskan Native

5. What is the highest level of education that you have <u>completed</u>?

___ Junior High/Middle School or below
___ High School or equivalent
___ Community College/Vocational School
___ 4-year College/University Degree
___ Professional Degree/Graduate School

Please turn page over.

6. How high is your total yearly household income?

___ under $25,000
___ $25,000 – $50,000
___ $50,000 – $75,000
___ $75,000 – $100,000
___ $100,000 and above

7. What is your native language?

8. What language is most often used in your home?

9. Have you studied / do you speak a foreign language?

10. Have you lived / studied / worked abroad? If so, where?

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (PARENTS)

1. What made you decide to enroll your child in this program?

2. What was your own school experience like?

3. Do you think your own school experience influenced your decision to send your child to this school?

4. What are your expectations of the school and the program?

5. What educational goals do you have for your child?

6. How do you help your child be successful in school?

7. What do you believe you need to do to make your child's education better?

8. What do you believe is your responsibility in education your child?

9. As far as homework is concerned, do you feel you can help your child?

    a. Do you have any concerns that you may not be able to help at some point?

10. What do you believe is the school's responsibility in educating your child?

11. Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child academic skills?

12. Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child social skills?

13. Why did you choose a school that teaches German instead of another language?

14. What contacts/experiences have you had with German prior to enrolling your child in this program?

15. What were your feelings towards Germans/the German language?

16. Please use three words to describe your child's school experience.

17. What would you tell interested parents about this school?

APPENDIX D

DISCUSSION TOPICS (PRINCIPALS)

- Total population of students and staff

- SES of enrolled families

- First year challenges

- What is important for me to know about your school?

- What do you think parents will answer when I ask them what is important to know about this program?

APPENDIX E

CONSENT INFORMATION

Dear Parent:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a research study. The purpose of the study is to identify and gain a deeper understanding of what motivates parents to send their child to a language immersion program.

I am inviting you to participate in this research because you have recently enrolled your child at a German immersion elementary school for the 2009/2010 school year. I obtained your name and address from the school's principal.

If you agree to participate, you will first be asked to fill out the enclosed demographic questionnaire and return it to me in the enclosed envelope. You are free to skip any question of the questionnaire that you prefer not to answer. It will take approximately five minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Once I have received the questionnaire, I will contact you by phone or e-mail to set up a date and time of your convenience to meet for the interview. We will meet at a mutually convenient location. During this interview, I will ask you to discuss your motivations for enrolling your child in a language immersion program, your educational goals for your child, and your expectations of the program. The interview will last about 30 to 60 minutes. You are again free to skip any interview question that you would prefer not to answer. At the end of the interview, you may request a copy of your transcribed interview. If you prefer a phone interview, I can arrange to call you at a date and time of your convenience.

One aspect of this study involves making audio recordings of you. The interview is digitally audio recorded and later transcribed for detailed analysis. The audio recording files will be stored on my password protected personal computer. All files will be destroyed after the transcription and analysis process.

To help protect your confidentiality, I will erase any real names and other identifiers from the audio recordings. I will also assign you a false name to be used to identify your study information instead of your real name to ensure that you cannot be identified by anyone else but me or my advisor. The list linking your study name and your real name will be stored separately and will only be available to me or my advisor. The list will be destroyed at the end of this study. I will store all study materials in a locked office and all study information in password protected computer files. In my reports of this study, I will not use the name or location of the school and will not include information that could be used to identify you.

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. If you agree to be in this study, please complete the enclosed questionnaire and return it to me in the stamped, addressed envelope. After I receive your questionnaire, I will contact you either by phone or e-mail (as indicated by you on the questionnaire) to schedule the interview.

If at any time you have any questions, or if you need any more information about this study, please contact me, Fatima Baig, at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or email@email.edu.

If you have questions about the rights of research subjects, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 300 College of Medicine Administration Building, [Midwestern University], (XXX) XXX-XXXX, or e-mail irb@email.edu.

Thank you very much for your consideration of this research study.

Sincerely,

Fatima Baig
Foreign Languages and ESL Education
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX F

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND CORRESPONDING INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

**WHAT ARE THE STATED MOTIVATIONS FOR PARENTS TO ENROLL
THEIR CHILD IN AN IMMERSION LANGUAGE PROGRAM?**

RQ1.1: What educational goals do immersion parents have for their child?
- ❖ What educational goals do you have for your child?
- ❖ What made you decide to enroll your child in this program?
    - Would you have enrolled your child if you had to pay tuition?

**RQ1.2: What perceptions and expectations do parents have of their child's
immersion program?**
- ❖ Please use three words to describe your child's school experience.
- ❖ What are your expectations of the school and the program?
- ❖ What would you tell an interested parent about this school?

RQ1.3: Do beliefs about the German language influence their decision?
- ❖ Why did you choose a school that teaches German instead of another language?
- ❖ What contacts/experiences have you had with German prior to enrolling your child?
- ❖ What were your feelings towards the German language?

**WHAT ARE THE STATED FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE IMMERSION
PARENTS' DECISION-MAKING?**

**RQ2.1 Does an immersion parent's own school experience influence his/her
decisions?**
- ❖ What was your own school experience like?
- ❖ Do you think your own school experiences influenced your schooling decisions for your child?

RQ2.2 Does an immersion parent's role perception influence his/her decision?
- ❖ How do you help your child to be successful in school?
- ❖ What do you believe you need to do to make your child's education better?
- ❖ What do you believe is your responsibility in educating your child?
- ❖ As far as homework is concerned, do you feel you can help your child?
    - Do you have any concerns that you may not be able to help at some point?
- ❖ What do you believe is the school's responsibility in educating your child?
- ❖ Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child academic skills?
- ❖ Where does the responsibility lie in teaching your child social skills?

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