

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
MEXICAN-IMMIGRANT MOTHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN A HIGH-
PERFORMING LOW-INCOME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

ISELA RUSSELL

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Abstract

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Isela Russell, PhD

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2013

Supervising Professor: Barbara Tobolowsky

This qualitative study explores how low-income first- and second-generation Mexican-immigrant mothers, the largest sub-group of the Latino population, support the academic success of their children who are in a low-income successful elementary school. The specific setting was Roosevelt Elementary located in North Texas. Participants were selected through purposeful sampling, with a total of 10 participants: six Mexican-descent mothers and four teachers. The intent is to provide an understanding of the mother's role in home-based and school-based involvement and why they are involved in the academic success of their children. Moreover, Bandura's theory (1989) of self-efficacy is selected to guide this study in order to understand why the mothers are involved in their child's education. Further, the mothers have a motivation and see a benefit to their involvement. Additionally, teachers' perception of the

mothers' role and their role is explored. The study's findings suggest that there is a disconnect in perception of roles between school personnel and mothers. The teachers' perceived role of the mothers was to be more academically engaged at home and be physically present at school. However, the mothers were deeply involved in the education of their children, in which most of their actions took place at home. Their role of involvement focused on developing "good" people and raising their children to value education. Finally, there was no difference in role of involvement between first- and second-generation Mexican-immigrant mothers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Historically, research has shown a large and growing achievement gap in K-12 education. The achievement gap refers to differences in academic performance (i.e. test scores and graduation rates) between minority low-income students and middle-class White students (Smith, 2005). Smith confirms, “While poverty is strongly associated with low academic achievement, the [educational] gap breaks down along both racial and ethnic lines” (p. 22). Further, minority and low-income students usually attend low-performing (often low-income) schools, which are those schools that fail to meet a state’s adequate yearly progress (AYP) goals in reading and math (Kim & Sunderman, 2004). To target these poor quality schools, the federal government enacted the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 to close the widening achievement gaps between culturally and linguistically diverse students and White students (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). Although time, energy, and money have been devoted to closing the gap, the problem persists: public schools continue to fail to prepare a large share of our low-income, minority students for admission to four-year colleges immediately after high school (Kozol, 2005).

Hispanics¹ are one of the groups that are not succeeding at the same rate as White students. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) issued a report of the findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) of the mathematics and reading achievement scores of over 26,000 students aged nine, 13, and 17. Although there was a slight improvement in reading scores for nine-year old Hispanics from 2004 to 2008 narrowing the White-Hispanic score gap to four points, by age 13 scores for White students slightly increased (i.e. a scale score of 265 in 2004 and 268 in 2008) while Hispanic students did not change (i.e. scale score of 242 in 2004 and 2008). Then, again, at age 17, the reading scores increased for White students (i.e. 289 to 295) while Hispanic students slightly improved (i.e. 267 to 269).

Furthermore, these issues persist into college. Hispanic students have the lowest SAT participation rate of all ethnic/racial groups compared to White students (i.e., 38.4 percent versus 53.6 percent, respectively) (Callinan, Thomas, & Loponi, 2011). Swail, Cabrera, and Lee (2004) report that one in four Latino students are prepared to enter a four-year college or university. Consequently, fewer Hispanics earn a degree (Callinan et al., 2011). For example, in 2005, 11 percent of Latino youth in the United States earned a college degree compared to 34 percent of their White counterparts (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006).

¹ For the purposes of this study, “Hispanic or Latino refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011, p.2). The terms “Latino” and “Hispanic” will be used interchangeably.

This K-16 achievement gap is of particular concern, because Hispanics are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population. In 2000, there were 35.3 million Hispanics (13 percent of the total population); whereas, by 2010, Hispanics numbered 50.5 million or 16.3 percent of the total population (Ennis et al., 2011). Consequently Hispanic enrollment in public schools has increased from 14.9 percent to 21.5 percent (Lee, Swinkels, & Lewis, 2011). These numbers provided by the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) reflect the changes in the diversity of this nation and suggest an oncoming crisis of epic proportions if we do not successfully address the educational gap between Latino and non-Latino students (Marschall, 2006).

Hispanics in Texas

Over half of the Hispanic population in the United States resides in three states: California, Texas, and Florida. In Texas, there are 9.5 million Hispanics, which is equivalent to 37.6 percent of the total population in Texas. This Hispanic growth has also resulted in demographic shifts in the Texas' public school enrollment. According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA) between 1998 and 2008, "White enrollment decreased from 44.1 percent to 34 percent of all students in Texas public schools" (Lee et al., 2011, p. ix). At the same time, "Hispanic enrollment increased from 38.6 percent to 47.9 percent of all students in Texas public schools" (Lee et al., 2011, p. ix). Additionally, in 2010, only 84.3 percent out of 314,079 seniors graduated. And, if you look more closely at those

numbers, you find almost all white students graduated (91.6 percent) in comparison to only 78.8 percent Hispanics. Further, the dropout rate for Hispanics far exceeds that of white students (i.e., 9.6 percent Hispanics versus 3.5 percent Whites) (TEA, 2011).

However, the academic issues did not begin in high school. Rather, they are evident in elementary school. The 2010-2011 Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores for third through fifth grades demonstrates the difference in achievement between White and Hispanic students. Hispanic students on the third-grade English TAKS test scored 88 percent in comparison to 95 percent for White students. The gap persists in fourth and fifth grade, too. Fourth-grade Hispanic students scored 81 percent compared to 93 percent for White peers; and fifth-grade Hispanic students scored 83 percent compared to 94 percent for White students (TEA, 2011). Thus, there is a difference of seven to 12 points between Hispanic and White student achievement in English.

In mathematics, Hispanic students in Texas also lagged behind their White peers. In third-grade mathematics, Hispanic students scored 86 percent compared to 93 percent for White students; fourth-grade Hispanics lagged behind their White peers by five points (87 percent versus 93 percent); and fifth-grade Hispanics students scored 83 percent compared to 92 percent for White students (TEA, 2011). This reflects a difference of six to nine points in math achievement

between Hispanics and Whites. Therefore, the national pattern is repeated in Texas.

Mexican-Descent

Reyes (2007) states that the “heterogeneity that exists within the Latino population creates various subgroups that manifest different adaptations and strategies to life in the United States” (p. 621). The largest sub-group within the Hispanic population is the Mexican-descent population. This group numbered 31.8 million in 2010, which is up from 20.6 million in 2000. Ennis et al. (2011) report that the Mexican-descent group now makes up 63 percent of the total Hispanic population in the United States.

Research shows that students of Mexican-descent have experienced “greater educational inequities and lower academic achievement or success, compared to other Hispanic populations, as well as their White peers” (Reyes, 2006, p. 622). One reason for their limited success is that many of these students struggle with acculturation. Halgunseth, Ispa, and Rudy (2006) define acculturation as “the process of adopting goals and practices due to exposure to a new culture” (p. 1282). As Mexican-descent students try to make sense of the dominant White culture, this challenge may affect their performance in school (Fiebig, Braid, Ross, Tom & Prinzo, 2010). Factors that discourage acculturation may occur from facing racism to differing social statuses, which creates feelings of alienation and distrust (Halgunseth et al., 2006). Another factor, unique to this

population, is the language challenges linked to their non-English speaking backgrounds (Reyes, 2006). Reyes states all these issues may hinder the “opportunity to acquire knowledge of what is required in effectively navigating schooling and learning the skills of effective and empowered learners” (p. 166).

An added challenge for this Mexican-descent population is that many of them are first-generation college-bound students, which for this study will be called first-in-family students² to avoid confusion. These are students whose parents have not earned a bachelor’s degree and are often first- or second-generation immigrant (Stebleton & Soria, 2011). Suffice it to say here that students who are the first in their families to attend college “exhibit different college enrollment and persistence behaviors than their counterparts whose parents have more education” (NCES, 2001, p. iii).

Generational Status

A variety of definitions have been used to describe the generational immigrant status of the Latino population. In this study, the following definitions will be utilized. First-generation immigrant individuals are those who are born outside the United States. Second-generation immigrant individuals are those who are born in the United States with at least one foreign-born parent (i.e., children of immigrants); and third-generation individuals are born in the United States to U.S. -born parents (Guarini, Marks, Patton & Garcia, 2011).

² This was done to differentiate their family history with college going from their immigrant status.

Statistically, the first-and second-generation immigrants are less likely to attend college than other Hispanic groups. For example, in 2007-2008, immigrant students (i.e. first-and second-generation) made up about 23 percent of the 223 million undergraduates in higher education (i.e., 10 percent were first-generation immigrant and 13 percent were second-generation immigrant) in which 57 percent were of Hispanic descent (NCES, 2012).

As mentioned above, another concern linked to their generational status is that many of these students are the first in their families to attend college. One critical issue first-in-family students face is successfully navigating the U.S. educational system, because their parents are unable to provide them with the guidance and mentoring they need (Ramos-Sánchez & Nichols, 2007). As a result, once these students are admitted to college, Latino first-in-family students are more than twice as likely to leave a four-year institution before their second year when compared to non-first-in-family students (Garcia, 2010) and if they do persist to their sophomore year, they are less likely to earn a degree six years after their initial enrollment (Stebbleton & Soria, 2011). Martinez (2003) affirms only one in 12 first-in-family students from low-income families with non-college educated parents earns a bachelor's degree by age 24.

There are many other factors that affect their persistence as well. Some research identified that many of these students face economic hardships because their parents can provide only limited financial support (Barriero, 2011).

Consequently, they are not financially prepared for college and must work in order to pay for their educational and personal needs (Stebbleton & Soria, 2011). The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2009) examined first-in-family immigrant Latino students, ages 18-24, and the connection of work and school and found Latino students spent a higher percentage of weeks working during the year than their white peers. As a result, Latino students spent fewer weeks going to school than white students (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009), which understandably affected their academic success. Other challenges can be but are not limited to: being older than traditional-aged college students (18-21), coming from minority backgrounds, being non-native English speakers, and single parents (Stebbleton & Soria, 2011). Consequently, first-in-family students tend to have lower graduation rates than their non-first-in-family peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

However, in spite of the multiple factors that affect student success, there are students who do continue on to a four-year university and graduate. More specifically, 51 percent of first-in-family Latino students who started the initial process of completing a bachelor's degree in 2005 graduated from a four-year institution (NCES, 2012). And although the literature has focused on students who fail or are not academically prepared to make the leap to higher education (Stebbleton & Soria, 2011; Swaril et al., 2004), some researchers have begun to examine the success stories of individual Latinos (Calaff, 2008). For example,

Olivia and Nora (2004) contend that immigrant college students are influenced positively by family support. This support may include giving advice to their children about the value of schooling, being visible at the campus of the child, and creating a network with other parents to gain knowledge of the education system (Calaff). Calaff argues it is necessary for more work to be done that examines factors that may contribute to the academic success of Latino students and then apply these strategies with unsuccessful Latino students.

The Role of Parental Involvement in Achievement

Howard and Reynolds (2008) find that parental involvement has a positive influence on student achievement and correlates with aspiring to earn a higher degree. Parental involvement has been defined as being involved in school and home activities (Davidson & Cardemil, 2009). School involvement includes but is not limited to: attending school meetings (e.g. parent-teacher conferences and PTA meetings), talking with teachers, attending open houses, and volunteering at school (Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007). Involvement at home includes such practices as assisting children with homework, creating a quiet place to study, advising students on which classes to take, helping with school projects, and talking about the school day (Pomerantz et al., 2007).

Although there is considerable research on the importance of parental involvement on student success (De Gaetano, 2007; Simon, 2001), Suizzo and Stapleton (2007) noted there is limited research on parental involvement with

students of color. Specifically, Davidson and Cardemil (2009) state, “Despite the extensive literature examining the effects of parents and children and adolescents, there have been only a few empirical studies that have focused on Latino families” (p. 102) and fewer still have looked closely at the role of home-based involvement. This is particularly significant, because research has shown that Latino parents are less likely than White parents to participate in school-based activities (e.g., parent-teacher conference, PTA, open house).

There are a number of reasons explaining their limited involvement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Klimes-Dougan, Lopez, Nelson, & Adelman, 1992). One factor is their limited English (Campos, 2008; Marschall, 2006). Often times, schools do not have translators available to ensure parents understand the conversation (Campos, 2008; Marschall, 2006). Further, parents lack confidence participating within the educational system (e.g., not attending parent conferences), because they do not understand the system or their expected role in it (Marschall, 2006). In addition, low-income parents are often juggling multiple jobs and working long hours and, consequently, are unable to attend events at their child’s school (Campos, 2008; Marschall, 2006).

More specifically, the literature does not specify the unique involvement of mothers or fathers (De Gaetano, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Ramirez, 2003). In a qualitative study, Pomerantz et al. (2007) examined the role of the mother and concluded that the children had positive school

experiences when the mothers were supportive of their education. However, their study did not provide details on the nature of this involvement or consider the context of Latino families. Therefore, this study explores the specific contributions of Mexican-descent mothers to better understand their role in their children's academic success.

Statement of the Problem

Previous research shows that Latino students are not doing well academically and the achievement gap between Latino and non-Latino students has grown (Hanushek & Raymond, 2005). This is partially due to the fact that low-income Latino students are more likely to live in poverty and attend under-performing schools than their peers (Borrero, 2011). These low-performing schools typically have limited opportunities such as lack of access to educational programs (Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006). Researchers have identified a range of other factors including limited parent education and cultural differences to explain the achievement gap (Olszewski-Kubilius), but there is limited data concerning what disadvantaged students do at home or at school when they are academically successful. In addition, very few studies have focused on specific sub-groups of students who may have unique challenges such as the largest sub-group who are of Mexican-descent. The fact that these students are often first-in-family college students and first- or second- generation immigrants only adds to their challenges. Further, very little is known of Mexican-descent immigrant mothers and their role

in supporting the academic success of their children, although previous research did find that the mother's role is particularly important in a student's success (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Therefore, this study explores the experiences of Mexican-descent immigrant mothers and their role in their children's education.

Purpose of the Study

This study will investigate the perceptions of first- and second-generation Mexican immigrant mothers of fourth-grade students who attend low-income schools to better understand their role in their children's academic success. Specifically, it investigates the role of Mexican-descent immigrants, because this is a large and growing sub-group of the Latino population. It also focuses on Latino students who are doing better academically than would be predicted based on their school demographic and home backgrounds (e.g., Mexican-descent parents, low-socioeconomic status, and low-income schools), because there is limited literature in the academic success of Latino students in public schools (Borrero, 2011). And, recent research (e.g., Olszewski-Kubilius, 2006) noted that it is valuable to explore a demographic that has exceeded expectations to be successful so that we can learn lessons that may be applied to less-successful students. Finally, the study looks at the role of the mother, because previous research (Kramer, 2008; Pomerantz et al., 2007) has acknowledged, but not explored in detail, the nature of those contributions.

Research Questions

This qualitative study will examine the role of involvement as it pertains to Mexican immigrant mothers in low-income schools who have elementary school children who are academically successful. Therefore the central research question is:

How do low-income Mexican immigrant mothers support the academic success of their fourth-grade children?

Sub-questions to be addressed in the research are:

- 1) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of their role in their child's education?
- 2) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of the role of the school in their student's education?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions of the education experience of low-income Mexican immigrant students at home?
- 4) What are the teachers' perceptions of the role of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers and the role of the school in the students' educational experience?
- 5) Is there a disconnect between the teachers' perceptions and those of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers regarding the role of the mothers and the school? If so, what is the disconnect?

Overview of the Methods

A qualitative methodology was used to capture the voices and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Through this exploration, I will study the phenomenon of Mexican-origin mothers' efforts to support the academic success of their children and learn more about how and why the mothers are involved in their children's education. The setting for this phenomenological study was Roosevelt Elementary (pseudonym name) located in North Texas. This site was selected for the study due to its demographics (i.e. 84.9 percent Hispanic and 88.7 at-risk students). The site is a Title 1 low-income campus. Title 1 campuses are often low-performing; however, this school has successful students. The campus earned an Exemplary rating for 2010-2011 and a Recognized rating for 2011-2012.

The participants included first-and second-generation immigrant Mexican-descent mothers who were nominated by fourth-grade teachers for inclusion in the study. Polkinghorne (1989) recommended a group of five to 25 participants be included in a phenomenological study. Therefore, a total six Mexican-descent mothers and four fourth-grade teachers (i.e. two fourth-grade bilingual teachers and two fourth-grade monolingual teachers) participated in interviews. Creswell (2007) argues qualitative research typically takes place within the participants' natural setting; therefore, the mothers' interviews took place in their home and the focus groups of the teachers took place at their school. In addition, data were

collected through a demographic questionnaire given to the mothers at the time of the individual interviews. The methods are discussed at length in Chapter 3.

Positioning the Researcher

Understanding the role of involvement within Mexican-descent immigrant parents has been a topic of interest to me ever since I was in elementary school. My parents are low-income, first-generation, Mexican immigrants who worked long hours, lacked transportation, and had limited English language skills. Due to these barriers, as a child, I did not understand why my parents did not physically attend school functions. It led me to believe that my parents were not involved in my education. I failed to look at the big picture of what they considered being involved. Now I understand they had their own interpretation of involvement. What mattered to them was that we had food and shelter, that we did not hang out in the streets after school, and that we made A's and B's. This kind of involvement did not seem to matter at school or in research, but made an impact in my life. Because of this, I decided to take a closer look at the role of involvement of Latino families. Therefore, the intent of this study is to better understand Mexican-descent mothers' own descriptions and interpretations about their role in their children's schooling. These interpretations of parental involvement will provide an understanding of engagement within low-income, Mexican-descent families.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of self-efficacy guides this study. Banduras' self-efficacy theory (1989) suggests that parents are more likely to be involved in the education of their children if they have the necessary skills and knowledge to help (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Based on this theory, parental involvement is not tied to ethnicity or culture, but too high or low self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Hoover-Dempsey et al. explain that parents make their decisions about involvement "by thinking about the outcomes likely to follow their actions" (p. 109). In other words, parents become involved if they believe their actions will improve learning and academic performance.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) conducted research on why parents get involved in their children's educational processes. They found that parents develop goals based on what outcomes their involvement will deliver and plan accordingly in order to achieve those goals. Parents with a higher sense of efficacy are likely to believe their involvement will make a positive difference in the schooling of their children. Parents with low-self efficacy avoid involvement in the educational process because they assume their involvement will not produce a positive outcome for their children (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Self-efficacy reinforces the need for schools to understand how Latino parents are involved and why parents get involved in their child's education. Self-efficacy theory provides a foundation for understanding parental

involvement, in general and, more specifically, helps explain why parents engage in the type of involvement that they do.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance in its contribution to research, theory, and practice. With the anticipated increase in numbers of Latino students in public schools, in particular Mexican-descent students, and the fact that these students tend to be among the least successful (i.e., less likely to earn a college degree), it is critical for educational leaders to better understand the needs of this population. This research offers an opportunity to see how low-income Mexican-immigrant mothers support the academic success of their fourth-grade children in a school that is more successful than expected. This study contributes to the body of literature in parental involvement by providing an understanding of how low-income Mexican-descent immigrant mothers endeavor to contribute to the academic success of their children.

The study also has theoretical significance. In an effort to understand the involvement of parents, Banduras' self-efficacy theory (1989) explains why parents get involved and do what they do. Parents with a higher sense of efficacy are more likely to be involved and believe their involvement will make a difference in their child's educational success. Parents who have low-self-efficacy avoid educational involvement because they believe there is no positive outcome. This study will contribute to theory by exploring how self-efficacy

helps explain the actions of low-income Mexican-descent immigrant mothers in terms of their contributions to their child's academic success.

Finally, the findings from this study may help provide strategies to assist low-income Mexican-descent immigrant mothers in their support of the academic success of their children. Further, this study may inform teachers and principals' understanding of the role of low-income Mexican-descent immigrant mothers with respect to their child's educational success. This could be particularly valuable for principals and districts working to close the academic gap between Latinos students and their counterparts. Consequently, the results of this study may provide insights into ways schools and parents can offer appropriate academic supports to help Latino students succeed.

Summary

Latino students, a growing population in the U.S., continue to fall behind their peers and are not academically prepared to make the leap to higher education; consequently, the academic gap continues to grow. Although research contends that parental involvement is critical to student success, limited research has been done on Latino home-based parental involvement, particularly Mexican-descent parental involvement. Therefore, this research investigated how low-income first- and second-generation Mexican immigrant mothers who have U.S. born elementary school children described their educational involvement. It also explored the perceptions of school personnel regarding involvement to get a more

complete portrait of the role of mothers at this surprisingly, successful school.

The primary implication of this work is to gain insights into home-based parental involvement of successful Mexican-descent second-generation children in order to identify strategies to increase home-school partnerships.

This chapter served as an introduction including a brief overview of the literature, the Statement of the Problem, Purpose of the Study, the Research Questions, an overview of the Methods of the this study, Positioning the Researcher, the Theoretical Framework, and the Significance of the Study. Chapter 2 is the review of the literature. Chapter 3 includes the design of the study. Chapter 4 explains the findings and analysis of the study. Chapter 5 includes the conclusion and implications of the study.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

With limited research focused on the academic success of students of Mexican-descent parents, this review will cover relevant work in two general areas: (a) Latino parental involvement and (b) self-efficacy theory.

Parental Involvement

Parents from different cultures demonstrate a deep interest in being involved in their children's education. It requires parents to be the first educator in the home, to function as partners with the school, and to continue to be an advocate for their children's education (Griffith, 2006; Ramirez, 2003). However, De Gaetano (2007) argued that the critical issue in our schools is actively involving Latino parents in their children's education. Considerable research has explored challenges of Latino parental involvement for the school as well as the parents. This section of the review presents studies that explored: (a) perceptions of Latino parent involvement, (b) school and home-based parental involvement, (c) factors that hinder parental involvement, and (d) best practices in parental involvement.

Perceptions

Schools have developed a range of perceptions about the participation of parents. Teachers tend to interpret parental involvement as "participation in formal activities, such as school events or meetings or volunteering at the school"

(Marschall, 2006, p. 1057). As a consequence, if teachers and school personnel do not physically see parents at school, they believe that there is a lack of interest on the part of the parents (Griffith, 1998; Ramirez, 2003).

A qualitative study by Quiocho and Daoud (2006) explored common perceptions about Latino parents' involvement in their children's education, where parents, teachers, administrators, and classified staff were interviewed. The study was conducted at two elementary school sites in southern California, in which 35 percent and 46 percent of students, respectively, were English language learners. The findings of the study revealed that teachers, administrators, and classified staff perceived there was minimal involvement by Latino parents in their children's education. Some frequent comments in the study from the participants were: "They [Latino parents] are illiterate" "They don't help their children with homework" "They don't come to school to help in the classroom. We try, but we just can't get them here" "They just don't care as much as the other parents do" (p. 260).

However, De Gaetano (2007) and others argued that there are "many ways that parents can be involved in their children's schooling without being in the schools" (p. 149). For example, Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, and Sandler (2007) examined the levels of involvement of 853 ethnically diverse parents of first- through sixth-grade students enrolled in public school in the mid-southern United States. This study revealed parents tend to support their children by

helping with homework, discussing schoolwork activities, talking about the value of education, and confirming high expectations for learning (Green et al., 2007). On a similar note, Lopez (2001) conducted a qualitative study with five immigrant/migrant families and found that the parents “perceived their role as transmitting their work ethic to their children and that this was their way of being involved in their children’s lives” (p. 427). Thus, both studies discovered unique ways parents contributed to their children’s lives that would not be captured in traditional school-based participation.

A reason for this discrepancy between the perceptions of teachers and parents regarding parental involvement may be due to cultural differences. For instance, Quijano and Daoud (2006) stated that Latino parents often “misunderstand their role in their children’s education because they do not understand the concept of involvement as defined by the school” (p. 257). School personnel and administrators believe parental involvement is defined as “participating in organized activities at school” (p. 256); however, Latino parents view their contribution much differently. In general, immigrant families see involvement as teaching their children to appreciate the value of education. Latino parents help by providing internal motivation. More specifically, Lopez et al. (2001) found that parents felt involved if they participated in “informal activities, such as providing nurturing, installing cultural values, talking with their children, sending them to school clean and rested, checking homework, and a

variety of other non-traditional activities” (p. 256). Similarly, Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) stated that Latinos see their role in education as being “responsible for providing basic needs” and cultivating “respect and proper behavior” (p. 2).

In addition, parents also see the role of the teacher as instilling knowledge (Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Parents feel the school is responsible for the external practices of involvement. Low-income Latino immigrant parents in Ramirez’s (2003) qualitative study commented “it was not their place to attend or to go to the schools for they felt the teachers were better suited to teach and educate their children” (p. 99). Further, Latino parents rely on school personnel to be the academic experts, providing students with the skills to be successful in their education.

Therefore, there seems to be a disconnect between the school’s perceptions of the parents’ role and that of Latino parents. Nevertheless, Walker et al. noted that “many parents may provide more support for their children’s schooling than school personnel perceive based on their visibility” (p. 422). And, Quiocho and Daoud (2006) argued that Latino parents can meet “an expectation of being involved in their children’s education if schools explicitly define what involvement entails” (p. 257). The next section speaks to the differences in home and school-based involvement in detail.

School-Based and Home-Based Parental Involvement

Often, researchers have characterized parental involvement into two subtypes: home-based and school-based (Auerbach, 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Pomerantz et al., 2007). Each involvement represents distinct activities. School-based involvement activities generally include activities that take place at school, such as attending a parent-teacher conference, or watching a child perform in a school activity (Green et al., 2007). Home-based involvement is generally defined as interactions that take place between the child and parents outside of school (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). These interactions generally focus on activities such as helping with homework or monitoring the child's progress (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

Walker et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative study regarding involvement activities of 147 Latino parents from a specific southeastern United States school district, who have elementary school children in first to sixth grade. The study revealed that 55 percent of the sample reported engaging in home-based interactions rather than participating in the more traditional school activities (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The study suggested that schools should reconsider their definition of involvement to include home-based efforts (Walker et al., 2007). Further, Lopez, Scriber, and Mahitivanichcha (2001) advocated that rather than being focused on getting parents into the school site, school personnel need to take the school to the homes through home visits.

In a quantitative study, Turney and Grace (2009) examined relationships between race, immigrant status, and parental involvement. The findings were based on data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten Cohort of students who graduated high school in 2011-2012 school year. The study included 1,000 schools in 100 counties and 12,954 parents of kindergarteners. In this study, the mothers were 63 percent White and six percent Hispanic; 10 percent were foreign-born Hispanics and 91 percent reported English was their primary language. Also, 45 percent of the mothers were employed full-time and 32 percent were unemployed. The study examined barriers to parental involvement to better understand the processes as to why parents are involved or not. Immigrant Hispanics were 2.5 times more likely to report feeling unwelcome at their child's school than White parents. Further, Hispanics were 5.5 times more likely than Whites to report that language was a barrier to their involvement. Overall, immigrant Hispanics were less likely to be involved in their child's schooling compared to White parents.

In addition to school or home involvement, the research spoke generally about the involvement of the parents and does not specify the unique contributions of mothers versus fathers (De Gaetano, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Ramirez, 2003). However, Kramer (2008) used data from The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health with 6, 297 students in the seventh to 12 grades, which contrasted both mother and father involvement.

The study looked at three variables: the academic achievement of the students (e.g. grades), parental behavior control towards the child (e.g. limiting child decisions about choice of friends or clothing), and parental involvement from both parents (e.g. talking to either parent about personal problems, school grades, helping in a project). The study revealed that as the father's levels of control increased the student's academic achievement declined, and if the father's control was lower then academic achievement improved. To clarify, extremely strict father control made students less successful at school. Conversely, the grades of the children improved as mothers' interactions (e.g., talking with child about child's personal issues, school grades, helping with school projects) increased. The study found that a mother's involvement had a stronger effect on academic achievement than the father's involvement.

Most would agree that home involvement is important (De Gaetano, 2007; Marschall, 2006). However, there is limited research on the specific actions that make up this involvement for Latino low-income parents. More, specifically, about the involvement of Mexican-immigrant mothers. Therefore, it is helpful to take a closer look at what this specific population does at home and in the school in order to support the academic success of their children.

Factors that Hinder Parental Involvement

Although it is clear that Latino parents have high expectations for their children's education and want to participate in their academic success, there are

multiple factors that hinder their involvement. Three of the most critical factors are (a) generational differences, (b) language barriers, and (c) work schedule (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; De Gaetano, 2007; Ramirez, 2003).

As discussed previously, first-generation immigrants are born outside the U.S., while second-generation immigrants have at least one parent born in the U.S. Few studies have investigated the affect of generational status on parents' involvement. However, Delgado-Gaitan (1993) explored in a qualitative study the principles by which first-generation immigrant and second-generation Mexican-American families raise their children. The study, based on a sample of five first-generation immigrants and five second-generation Mexican-American families in southern California, found there were differences between the two groups regarding their experiences with and understanding of the U.S. school system. Most first-generation immigrant parents spoke only Spanish, had stopped their education after elementary school in Mexico, and were employed in factories or did agricultural work. Second-generation Mexican-American parents had a more advanced educational background, studied in the U.S., spoke English as their primary language, and attained varied jobs from clerical to professional. Consequently, their children had very different experiences. The children of first-generation immigrant families grew up learning Spanish at home; whereas the children of second-generation Mexican-American families spoke primarily English at home (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). This had a major effect on the

children's school experience. Children of first-generation immigrants with Spanish as their primary language faced linguistic isolation at school and limited English vocabulary; while children of second-generation immigrants with English as their primary language were better prepared academically and had more English vocabulary (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993).

Another challenge that limits parental involvement is the parents' limited level of education. In a qualitative study, Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1995) explored the involvement activities of 14 first-generation Latino immigrant parents in a southern California school district over four-years. The findings showed that parents felt isolated "dealing with the school system in the United States" and could not "actively participate in the schools because they did not speak English and did not have schooling in this country" (p. 35). As a result, the parents organized to address these issues. They met at the school to discuss their role in helping their child be successful. These meetings were conducted by parents in the parents' home language, Spanish. Suggestions such as taking their children to the library or talking about the importance of education allowed the parents to see the value in their home involvement and re-defined its importance (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). As a result of these meetings, parents bonded with other Latino parents similar to themselves and did not feel as isolated.

As suggested by Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba (1995) limited language skills are often a barrier to school-based parental involvement. Some issues have

long histories. For instance, Gandara (1995) found Latino parents unfamiliar with the United States school system were not confident in their ability to communicate with school staff and personnel. More recently, Bohon et al. (2005) conducted a qualitative study with 68 Latinos in Georgia that looked at the barriers to Latino participation in their children's schooling. They found that the parents "were very interested in their children's educational success, but because of language difficulties, found it difficult and embarrassing to communicate with teachers and administrators" (p. 50). For example, they reported that the parents attended parent-teacher meetings, but felt "left out and embarrassed in those situations because they did not speak better English" (p. 50). Similarly, Ramirez (2003) found that parents did not understand critical issues discussed in the school board meetings, because there was no language support for Spanish speakers. Most troubling, the parents, due to lack of a translator, did not speak up about their challenges because they were afraid of consequences for their children (e.g. deportation). In addition to these specific examples, De Gaetano (2007) noted that language barriers affect the ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving which then impacts the parents' involvement and ultimately the students' success.

Moreover, an additional factor that hinders parental involvement is the parents non-flexible work schedule and long hours. Han, Miller, and Waldfogel (2010) conducted a quantitative study and used data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth-Child Supplement data with a sample of 12,686

adolescents of ages between 13 and 14 from low-income families. The study revealed that parents with nonprofessional jobs interacted less with their family. Also, parents with positive work experiences helped to be more relaxed and responsive at home; whereas, parents with negative work experience were stressed at home and less involved with the children. Additionally, Ramirez (2003) conducted a qualitative study with 29 low-income immigrant Latino mothers and 14 low-income immigrant Latino fathers in California that looked at the relationship between the parent and the child's school. The study found that the parent's work schedule was a conflict with the parent meetings offered in the evenings and if parents were not able to attend, they were viewed as uninvolved. One parent stated, "I have to work in the evening, and teachers are telling me I have to come to a gathering at the school in the evening. I can't do both." The parents felt there was an expectation from the teachers that was difficult to meet due to their job "which many felt uncomfortable" (p. 100). It is important to note that a non-flexible work schedule is a factor that may hinder involvement; however, low-income parents who work but cannot be present in school-based activities should not be generalized as uninvolved parents.

The studies revealed how generational difference, language barriers, and parental work schedule hinder parental involvement. In the qualitative study with 68 Latino parents, Bohon et al. (2005) found that "When parents fail to respond to teachers' attempts at communication, school officials often perceive them as

disinterested in their children's education" (p. 49). These misunderstandings affect the trust, communication, and potential partnership between parents, teachers, and schools.

Best Practices that Contribute to Student Success

Although there are challenges that limit parental involvement, there are factors that do contribute to student success. One contributor that may lead to student success is a strong school-parent partnership through an increased communication between schools and parents. Another effective practice is to provide parents with instructional strategies they can apply at home (De Gaetano, 2007; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; Simon, 2001). When school personnel partnered with parents, student achievement increased. This section discusses methods that lead to effective school-parent partnerships.

Several researchers (De Gaetano, 2007; Simon, 2001) have explored ways the schools can work with parents to build strong school partnerships that contribute to student success. Smith (2006) conducted a qualitative study that explored how a new, low-income public elementary school in the Pacific Northwest developed a strong partnership with low-income, minority families whose children attended the school. Prior to creating a partnership, the campus had low parent participation and students with low academic achievement. As the students and staff were moved from an aging, out-of-date structure to a new building, the goal was to consider the involvement of parents as much more than

helping in the classroom or supervisors of homework. The study considered the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual needs of the families. The findings suggested the school had to be fully aware of the strengths and needs of the parents in order to develop an effective program. Having a clear understanding of the daily challenges of parents allowed the school to build partnerships with parents and accept the level of involvement parents could offer. As a result, parents were invited to conferences and family nights and had access to the family resource center; all of which led to increased parental participation. Still, not all parents were physically present at school functions; however, the educators did not blame the parents for not participating in school activities. Rather, they understood the challenges faced by parents which led to them redefining parental involvement and, in turn, strengthening its school-parent partnership.

Another qualitative study that explored a strong school-parent partnership was conducted by Civil and Bernier (2006). They studied 12 to 15 low-income mothers who participated in Math and Parent Partnerships in Arizona (MAPPS), which was a math workshop for parents, who were trained by teachers, and held for other parents. As one parent explained, “The whole point of MAPPS was for parents to come in and teach math to other parents so that they wouldn’t feel so uncomfortable or intimidated by teachers” (p. 328). In this instance, the parents served as partners with the school and with other parents resulting in the parents becoming academic resources for their children.

Increasing communication between teachers and parents can also contribute to the establishment of school-parent partnerships which improve student success. In a qualitative study, Quiocho and Daoud (2006) found that “better or improved communication between teachers and parents” (p. 261) was a crucial element of student success. A case study conducted by Halsey (2005) included eight teachers and 20 parents in a middle school setting in a farming community in west Texas. The authors examined a program that was initiated to increase communication and parent involvement in their school because communication was an obstacle at the site. The study revealed some specific communication problems between the parents and teachers. For example, the teachers believed that sending announcements for upcoming events and meetings provided sufficient notice to parents. However, parents believed the flyer was simply an announcement and not a personal invitation. Similarly, Ramirez (2003) investigated other sources of miscommunication. He found that Latino parents revealed that in their home country they would go to school and personally discuss issues with the teachers. When asked why they had not attended their child’s school in the United States, their response was, “We haven’t been invited” (p. 103).

Additionally, Green et al. (2007) conducted a quantitative study with 853 parents of first- through sixth-grade children enrolled in a socioeconomically disadvantaged school in the mid-southern United States. The purpose of the study

was to identify motivational factors that supported parental involvement. The findings revealed that the involvement of parents was influenced by parents' perceptions of invitations for involvement from their children and teachers. As parents were invited by the teacher or child to attend a meeting or school functions, their attendance and participation increased. Therefore, invitations increased the motivation of parents to be involved. Moreover, effective communication between teachers and parents is important.

In another example, Halsey (2005) found that parents valued meeting with teachers informally after school (e.g. picking up their children after school) to follow up on how their child was doing. However, teachers felt unprepared to talk about the student because they did not have their grade book with them at that time (Halsey). After school personnel met with the parents to better understand the need for informal meetings, teachers changed their perception and opened the lines of communication. School personnel strengthened the relationship between family and school. Each of these studies showed how the importance of good communication and clear expectations can build the parent-school relationship.

Finally, giving parents instructional strategies to apply at home with their children can help increase the participation of parents in their child's education and strengthen the partnership with the school (De Gaetano, 2007). De Gaetano conducted a three-year study in a northeastern city with 35 Latino parents and 18 teachers in an elementary school. The goal of the campus was to improve the

academic outcomes of English-language learners. The study found that frequent parent workshops offered by the school fostered parental involvement. These workshops provided parents with knowledge and skills to assist their children with their homework, along with support for building parenting skills. The workshops met the needs of the parents based on a questionnaire they completed. The workshops focused on family, community, or school setting. At every workshop, parents were given activities and ideas to try at home with their children. In addition, the parents role-played to simulate how they could work better with the teacher in the classroom. These strategies increased the confidence levels of parents. As a result, more parents participated in school-based activities such as volunteering in classrooms with small groups of students. Other parents were involved in nonacademic ways by helping teachers with clerical tasks such as distributing flyers, filing papers, or creating bulletin boards. By the third year of parent participation, involvement increased to include partnering with teachers, reading to students, telling stories, or presenting mini-lessons.

In summary, Civil and Bernier (2006), De Gaetano (2007), and Halsey (2005) provided some examples of how schools can successfully partner with parents in the education of their children. Training parents how to help, whether at home or at school, may increase involvement and improve academic achievement. Through partnerships parents become aware of the critical role they

play in their children's education. Subsequently, parents may only be allies in their children's education when they perceive that what is being offered will benefit their children personally.

Self-efficacy in Parents and Student Success

The theory used to guide this study was Banduras' self-efficacy theory (1989). Self-efficacy is defined as the levels of confidence individuals have in their ability to achieve specific outcomes (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1989) argued that people develop goals for their own behavior based on the outcome they will receive from their actions; therefore, people plan their actions in order to achieve their goals. Parents who see a benefit to their involvement are said to have high self-efficacy. Individuals with low self-efficacy were people more likely to avoid the situation or stop trying altogether (Bandura, 1989). In the context of this study, this theory suggested that parents were more likely to be involved in the education of their children if they knew their involvement would make a positive difference in the schooling of their children (i.e. high-self efficacy). Parents who believed their involvement would not produce a positive outcome avoided involvement altogether (i.e. low-self efficacy).

This connection between self-efficacy and student success is supported by research. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) found that if parents believe their efforts will produce a positive educational outcome, they have a "sense of efficacy" (p. 17). In these cases, they are more likely to be involved in the school.

In a more recent qualitative study, Smith (2006) explored parental involvement among low-income families in a public elementary school and the benefits to the parents' involvement. The research found that because both teachers and parents believed the students would be more successful if the parents participated, the parents were more likely to be involved at the school. The result was higher scores on individual tests and overall grades. However, sometimes the sense of efficacy did not lead to school-based involvement. For example, in a quantitative study with 431 parents of students attending three elementary schools in a large, urban school district in the Southwest, Anderson and Minke (2007) sought to understand parents' decision-making process to become involved in their child's schooling. The study revealed a high sense of efficacy with the parent's involvement at home and a lower sense of efficacy regarding their involvement at school.

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) can be used to explain why parents choose to become involved. Parents see a motivation to be involved in their children's education if they see a positive outcome. Howard and Reynolds (2008) noted that when parents were involved, children earned better grades, attended school more regularly, had a more positive attitude about school, were more likely to graduate from high school, and enrolled in higher education more often than students with less involved parents. Parental involvement has been found to close the gap among minority and non-minority students (Goldenberg, 2001; Jeynes,

2003; 2005; Ji & Koblinsky, 2009; Ramirez, 2003). One form of involvement is home-based, which may be misunderstood by school personnel, even though parents view this type of involvement as benefiting the academic success of their children. This study helps tease out what Mexican-descent mothers do to help their children and why they do it.

Summary

This chapter discussed relevant literature on the topic of parental involvement perceptions of Latino parental involvement, school-based and home-based parental involvement, factors that hinder parental involvement, best practices in parental involvement, and how Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1989) guides understanding parent and student success. Chapter 3 explains the methods for this study. The findings and analysis are in Chapter 4. And, Chapter 5 offers the conclusion and implications of the study.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of low-income first-generation Mexican immigrant and second-generation Mexican-American mothers concerning their contributions towards the educational success of their fourth-grade children. I used Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1989) to better understand how the mothers explained their role in their students' success. This chapter includes the research questions, the description of the design for this study, the procedures, the ethical considerations, and the trustworthiness of this study.

Research Questions

The central research question is:

How do low-income Mexican immigrant mothers support the academic success of their fourth-grade children?

Sub-questions to be addressed in the research are:

- 1) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of their role in their child's education?
- 2) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of the role of the school in their student's education?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions of the education experience of low-income Mexican immigrant students at home?

- 4) What are the teachers' perceptions of the role of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers and the role of the school in the students' educational experience?
- 5) Is there a disconnect between the teachers' perceptions and those of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers regarding the role of the mothers and the school? If so, what is the disconnect?

Study Site

The study was conducted at a public elementary school, which will be referred to as Roosevelt Elementary, a pseudonym used to ensure confidentiality of the participants. The school serves approximately 775 children in kindergarten through fifth-grade in a city located in North Texas. This school was chosen because it is labeled as a low-income campus and receives Title 1 funding. Low-income campuses are public schools with at least 40 percent of the children from economically disadvantaged families, who are failing or are most at-risk of failing (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). However, in spite of these challenges, Roosevelt Elementary has overcome the stereotype of a low-performing school and earned an Exemplary rating by Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the 2010-2011 academic year and a Recognized rating for the 2011-2012 school year.

Ratings, based on TAKS scores, measure how well students master reading and math in grades three through five, writing in fourth grade, and science in fifth grade. To receive an Exemplary rating at the elementary level, 90 percent

of the students had to have met the minimum standard of the TAKS test in all subject areas (i.e., Reading/ELA, Writing, Mathematics, and Science). A Recognized rating meant that 80 percent of the students met the minimum standard in all subjects, and 15 percent commended performance (TEA, 2011).

Campus ratings and TAKS scores are public documents, so they were easily obtained to ensure the school selected met the research criterion of being a successful campus. Third-grade TAKS data were used because that was the grade level in which students undergo state standardized testing for the first time. In 2010-2011, it was also the last time TAKS was administered. By the time the study was conducted, these students were in the fourth grade, so their parents and fourth-grade teachers were selected to participate in the study. In addition, the data provided information on campus demographics, which were important in the campus selection. This campus has a high concentration of Hispanic students, Limited English Proficient, at-risk, and economically disadvantaged students. See Table 1 for the demographics of the school.

Table 1

Demographics of Roosevelt Elementary

Demographic	Percentage
Ethnicity	
Latino	84.9
African-American	6.5
White	4.9
American Indian	0.5
Asian	2.5
Two or more races	0.8
Other Characteristics	
Economically disadvantaged	93.1
Non-educationally disadvantaged	6.9
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	63.6
At-risk Students	88.7

In this school, parents fill out a home language survey when the child is enrolled to determine if another language other than English is taught at home; if so, the child is enrolled in a bilingual classroom, although a parent may opt for English-only classes. The school uses a 50-50 English/Spanish bilingual curriculum where students learn 50 percent of the material in English and 50 percent of the material in Spanish. The district designated a language calendar with A/B weeks, in which the content across all subjects is taught in the designated language for the week (i.e., Week A is English, Week B is Spanish), with full bilingualism as the set goal. Student enrollment in a bilingual/ESL (English as a Second Language) classroom is 63 percent of the total population. The other students are enrolled in a monolingual classroom where all content

across all subjects are taught in English. Approximately one third of the teachers at the campus (33.9 percent) taught bilingual/ESL education and were bilingual-certified or ESL-certified in order to meet the needs of the diverse students. Because this study focuses on the experiences of first-generation and second-generation immigrant mothers, it was important to interview teachers in both monolingual and bilingual classrooms.

Design

To explore how low-income first-generation and second-generation Mexican immigrant mothers support the academic success of their children in a low-income successful school, the participants needed to be allowed to express their own perceptions, interpretations, views, and experiences. Therefore, to empower those voices, qualitative methods were used (Miles & Huberman, 1994). According to Maxwell (2005) qualitative research methods best contribute to a greater understanding of perceptions, attitudes, and processes of people. Creswell (2008) states qualitative research is conducted when “we want to empower individuals to share their stories, and hear their voices” (p.40). Thus, the goal of qualitative data is to provide “thick rich description” [that] captures the “voices, feelings, actions, and meaning” of the participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 194).

After securing IRB approval from the University of Texas at Arlington on November 13, 2012, I contacted the research department at the school district where the study was to be conducted. Once I received approval from the district

and the school principal, the principal introduced me to a fourth-grade teacher who helped me get the other fourth-grade teacher participants. Teachers were selected to get more in-depth data of the classroom experience. Fourth-grade teachers were selected for the study, because they now had the students who successfully took the TAKS for the first time in third-grade.

I used purposeful sampling in the selection of the parents. Merriam (1998) describes purposive sampling as “the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain insight” (p. 48); therefore, “one needs to select a sample from which one can learn most” (p. 48). Furthermore, Creswell (2007) states, “that the inquirer selects individuals...because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (p. 125). After explaining the research goals to the initial fourth-grade teacher with whom I was introduced, she gave me names of monolingual and bilingual teachers as potential participants in the study. Once the teacher participants were identified, two separate focus groups were organized. Creswell (2008) considers focus groups advantageous when the participants are “similar and cooperative with each other” (p. 133). Therefore, two bilingual teachers formed one group and two teachers in the monolingual classes formed the other group. The bilingual teachers were selected for the study because they teach Latino students who are in the bilingual program. These students receive instruction in both English and Spanish. The monolingual teachers were selected

for the study because they teach Latino students who receive instruction solely in English and typically include students who are second- or third-generation Americans with mothers who are immigrants. I conducted the interviews in English with school personnel using a semi-structured protocol to capture their perceptions of the mothers' roles (see Appendix C for teacher protocol). I interviewed the bilingual teachers and monolingual teachers on two separate days at the school campus in December, 2012. All four of these teachers had between six and 10 years of teaching experience. See Table 2 for the participant teacher demographics in relation to the school teacher demographics.

Table 2

Ethnic/Racial Teacher Percentages

Teacher Participants	Ethnicity	Percentage on Campus	Language of Instruction
Ms. Jones	White	54.8	Monolingual
Ms. Jacobs	African-American	3.9	Monolingual
Ms. Rosa	Hispanic	39.3	Bilingual
Ms. Rubio	Hispanic	39.3	Bilingual

Again, using purposive sampling methods, the monolingual and the bilingual teachers each recommended three mothers (a total of six) to participate in the study. These mothers fit the following criteria: First- and second-generation Mexican-descent immigrant mothers with academically successful fourth-grade Mexican-American children in bilingual education and in a

monolingual classroom. In addition to using the criteria for the study, the teachers selected these mothers, because they had established relationships with them and thought they would be willing to participate. The study focused on mothers, in particular, because research (Pomerantz et al., 2007) found that when mothers were supportive of their children's education the children had positive school experiences, but no research looked specifically at the involvement of Mexican-origin mothers.

Once I received the names of the mothers, a bilingual fourth-grade teacher helped send the letters home. The letters were written in both English and Spanish and sent home with the children (see Appendix D). Within a week of sending the letters, four mothers (i.e., two with bilingual children and two with monolingual children) agreed to participate. A follow-up phone call was made to the mothers from whom I had not yet heard (see Appendix E). They declined, so I contacted the teachers again and asked them for more possible participants. Letters were sent again, and one more mother with a child in the bilingual program accepted. I spoke on the telephone with another mother, and she agreed to be my sixth parent participant. Polkinghorne (1989) recommends five to 25 participants in phenomenological study. Therefore, a total of six Mexican-descent mothers (e.g. four immigrant mothers born in Mexico who are first-generation, and two U.S.-born mothers who are described as second-generation Mexican-

American) were selected to participate in the interviews. Pseudonyms were given to ensure confidentiality. See Table 3 for mothers' demographics (see Appendix B).

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics

	Nancy	Maria	Sofia	Lesly	Carmen	Tania
Generation Status	First-generation	First-generation	First-generation	First-generation	Second-generation	Second-generation
Birth Place	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	U.S.	U.S.
Language of Interview	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	English	English
Years of Education	12 th	6 th	5 th	10 th	8 th	12 th
Employment	Used to Work	Currently Working	Currently Work	Never Worked	Used to Work	Currently Working
Marital Status	Married	Single	Married	Married	Married	Married
Childs' Classroom	Bilingual	Bilingual	Bilingual	Monolingual	Monolingual	Monolingual

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the six Mexican-descent mothers to capture the mothers' perceptions about their involvement in their child's educational experience. The interviews were conducted in the participants' homes at the convenience of the mothers. When possible, the

children were in another room to reduce distractions during the time of the interview; however, there were children in the room during interviews with Nancy and Sofia. For both mothers the children included the fourth-grade child along with an older sibling. Two interviews occurred on a Saturday, three after school, and one mid-day during the mother's lunch break. All the interviews with the mothers were conducted at the kitchen table. Interviews were conducted in Spanish with the parents, except with two parents who were born in the United States.

The semi-structured protocol for the mothers' interviews provided an in-depth understanding of their educational role in their children's education (see Appendix A for protocol for interview with the mothers). Further, the mothers were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any given point, choose to answer only the questions they felt comfortable with, end the interview at any time, and have anything they said omitted if they wanted. The duration of teacher and the mother interviews was between 45 to 60 minutes.

Bloomberg and Volpe (2008) report that "Surveys and questionnaires can also be used in conjunction with qualitative methods to provide corroboration and/or supportive evidence" (p. 73). Therefore, a questionnaire was distributed to the mothers after the interview in order to collect demographic information (see Appendix B). The elements of the questionnaire included: generation status, birth place, language of interview, years of education, employment, and marital status.

Because I did not know the literacy background of the mothers, I read them the questions and recorded their answers in the hope that this would make them feel more comfortable.

Interview Data Analysis

Interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. I read the transcripts multiple times, before I began to analyze data. Coding is “reducing the data into meaningful segments and assigning names for the segments” (Creswell, 2007, p. 148). These names or codes helped to develop patterns that were highlighted in the text. Creswell (2007) states data analysts identify “significant statements, sentences, or quotes” (p. 61) in order to provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. These patterns began falling into themes that were then combined into broader categories or themes (Creswell, 2007). Finally, these overarching themes were placed in a table in order to make between-group comparisons. For instance, three documents were created: one for the mothers who had their children in a bilingual classroom, another for mothers who had their children in a monolingual classroom, and then, one for the teachers. Through this process, I began to conceptualize and organize the story of the coded data. To ensure that all themes were saturated and no new themes emerged, the “constant comparative method” (p. 98) was utilized to allow “coding and categorizing to continue throughout” the analysis (Bloomerg & Volpe, 2008, p. 98). I organized these themes into the findings, which are discussed in Chapter 4.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is critical in qualitative research. Creswell (2007) defines trustworthiness as “an attempt to assess the ‘accuracy’ of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants” (p. 206-207). I myself am second-generation Mexican-American who came from a low-income family. With this in mind, I had to remind myself not to make generalizations, nor read into the data more than what the mothers actually responded. Therefore, efforts to ensure the findings were trustworthy were very important.

This study attempted to achieve credible findings through triangulation, member checking, and translation review. Triangulation is the process of “corroborating evidence from different individuals...in descriptions and themes in qualitative researcher” (Creswell, 2008, p. 266). The data consisted of two groups of mothers (first- and second-generation) and two groups of teachers (monolingual and bilingual). Therefore, the data were triangulated by gathering perceptions from both groups of teachers from bilingual and monolingual classrooms as well as both groups of Mexican-origin mothers.

Member checking can take many forms. Stake (2010) recommends that the participants receive a draft copy of the transcribed interviews in order to make corrections or comments, if necessary. After each interview was transcribed, the teachers received a copy of the transcriptions via email in order to review their comments and see if they wanted to delete or make additional changes. The

teachers were given two weeks to review the transcripts. In the email I stated that if I had not heard back from them by the end of the two weeks, I would assume there were no changes. All teachers responded within two weeks and were satisfied with their responses. The parents were contacted and we reviewed their responses over the phone. The parents were also satisfied and did not ask for additional changes.

Finally, I had the translations reviewed, because several of the mothers' interviews were held in Spanish. Even though a native-Spanish speaker and highly qualified to do the translations myself, I did recruit someone outside the study to check the translations. This outside translator, who is fluent in Spanish, was a third-grade teacher at the school at which I work. She read all Spanish transcriptions and revised the translations, in which no changes were recommended. Thus, each of these efforts helped ensure the trustworthiness of the findings.

In the event of an external audit (i.e., my dissertation advisor, the University of Texas at Arlington IRB, and the Department of Health and Human Services), the process and the product may be examined for accuracy (Creswell, 2007). The auditor may "examine whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data" (Creswell, 2007, p. 209).

Triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, and rich, thick description help

ensure the accuracy of the findings; therefore, make the study trustworthy (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. First, due to the fact that the study is qualitative, the data were limited to the views of the people who were interviewed. Other themes may have emerged if different individuals were interviewed. Second, as is true with all qualitative research, the findings of this study are not generalizable to other settings. The purpose of qualitative research is to gain a “detailed understanding” of an issue or phenomenon and not to generalize the findings to the broader population (Creswell, 2013, p. 48). Finally, the mothers who participated in this study were recommended by teachers based upon existing relationships with them. This may mean they were biased in favor of the teachers and the school. Interviews with individuals who were not recommended by the teachers may have resulted in different perceptions regarding the school and the teachers.

Summary

This chapter provides a thorough description of the design for the study, the analysis; as well as the ethical considerations of this study, and steps taken to ensure trustworthiness. Chapter 4 will describe the findings of this study.

Chapter 4

Findings and Analysis

This chapter details the findings and analysis of the study. The findings are based on data collected from individual mother interviews and focus groups with the teachers. The purpose of this chapter is to capture the voices of immigrant mothers concerning how and why they support the academic success of their child. The findings are organized into two sections: 1) Mothers' views on their role and the role of the school in their children's education, and 2) Teachers' views on the parents' roles and the school's role in the children's education. The findings are then analyzed through the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory, with special attention on the disconnect between parent and teacher interpretations of parental involvement.

Mothers' Views on Their Role and the School

The interviews provided information specific to each individual's lived experiences; yet, they also contributed to a broader understanding of parental involvement for low-income Mexican immigrant mothers in a successful low-income school. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) conducted research on why parents get involved in their children's educational processes and found that parents with a higher sense of efficacy were more likely to believe their involvement would make a positive difference in the schooling of their children. Similarly, they noted that parents with low-self efficacy avoided involvement in

the educational process because they assumed their involvement would not produce a positive outcome in their children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This section begins with the mothers' views regarding the ways in which they supported the academic success of their children and concludes with their expectations of the school's role in that pursuit.

Mothers' Perception of Their Role

Previous research concluded that Latino parents were uncaring, because they were not involved in school-based activities (Lopez, 2001; Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). In this study, the Mexican-origin mothers who participated were more likely to be engaged in home-based activities than school-based ones, yet were committed to the success of their children. Therefore, this study exposed the flaws in the earlier portrayal, suggesting that these other studies were unaware of, or discounted home-based involvement.

From the unique perspective of Mexican-immigrant mothers, three themes emerged from the data that reflect a multi-faceted parental role that goes far beyond school-based involvement. First, in contrast to how research typically defines involvement, the mothers defined their role as creating a strong home structure. Second, they shared that teaching their children values and life lessons were significant aspects of their role as mothers. Finally, the mothers trusted the school to make any academic decisions for their children because they believed it was operating in the best interest of their children.

Creating a Strong Home Structure. The mothers spoke that one of their key responsibilities within the context of the home environment was creating a strong home culture. Four sub-themes emerged from this theme: communication, teaching discipline, assuming responsibility as a mother, and having a daily routine.

Daily Communication. Pomerantz et al. (2007) stated that involvement at home included parents talking to their children about school. My findings align with this study. Communication was a common theme in creating a strong home structure. The participants in this study believed it was important to have daily communication with their children and ask them what they did at school, how they were doing, what they ate, and if they had homework. When Nancy, a first-generation immigrant mother, was asked how she participated in her child's education she responded, "*We talk a lot with him [their son], my husband and I.... We ask him when he comes from school, 'How was your day?' ...because I worry about him.*"³ Communicating is a means of staying involved and helps to alleviate that worry. Carmen, a second-generation immigrant mother, explained that her children came to expect her daily questions, because it showed them she cared about their success. As she explained:

³ The English translation will be used for any quotations from interviews that were done in Spanish by first-generation immigrant mothers. They will be put in italics. No italics will be used for second-generation immigrant mothers in the interviews conducted in English.

If there is a day they come home and they know I am not asking, you know, what went on, you know, “What happened? What did you eat?” you know, trying to get something of what happened of what they do today, what was the most hardest thing that they did at school, they feel that I don’t care or something is wrong with me. They need to know I am interested and involved in their daily work and stuff.

Therefore, communication could be seen through the lens of high self-efficacy (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), because the children viewed the daily questions as a reflection of whether the mothers cared or not about their success. Through communication with their child, parents were able to positively participate in their education. This conversation demonstrated that parents cared.

Also, Delgado-Gaitan (1993) found that differences in generational status (first- and second-generation) caused additional barriers to involvement. Parents who were first-generation immigrants were less likely to understand their role of involvement as perceived by school personnel. Regardless, there seemed to be no difference in the nature of the communication between the mothers of a first- or second-generation immigrant in this study. All of the mothers expressed their interest of their children in similar ways.

The mothers made it a norm to communicate with their children about their daily routine or what they did at school. The reason for the mother’s

communication was because they cared for their children and did not want their children to think they were not involved.

Teaching Discipline. The mothers felt that teaching their children discipline and providing structure and boundaries was another important part of their role in their children's education. The mothers selected for the study had successful children in a successful school. Maria, a first-generation immigrant mother, for instance, talked about limiting television time for her daughter, "*I don't like the cell phones or the computer because of Facebook. None of that. Sometimes I have to put limits. Sometimes I tell her, 'Turn off the TV and read a book. You can't be watching TV all day.'*" Again, there seemed to be no difference of expectation whether the mother was first- or second-generation immigrant. Tania, a second-generation immigrant mother, noted, "He especially loves video games, so if he is doing bad at school, ummm, behavior or likewise, homework, we take the video games and say 'No.'" The mothers found their role consisted of providing boundaries and limits in order to raise responsible children, which was done through consequences and strictness at home.

Assuming Responsibility. The third sub-theme in creating a strong home structure was that the mothers assumed responsibility for their children's education by being concerned and caring. Howard and Reynolds (2008) found that parental involvement had a positive influence on student success, inspiring students to earn higher grades. Similarly, the mothers in the current study saw a

positive outcome for their involvement in their child's academic success.

Regardless of generational status, the mothers understood that their children would be better students if they checked homework and took them to the library.

Carmen, a second-generation immigrant mother, explained "Taking them to the library, making sure they have books to take home...improving the reading."

Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, further commented on her role:

Being on top of his homework and his work at school. To go to school meetings. For example, if a teacher calls me for a meeting, I do everything possible to be there. Every time I have a conference, I ask the teacher how he is doing. For the teacher to know that if something is going wrong there is no problem for her to call me.

The mothers strive to support their children in any way they can. Maria, first-generation immigrant mother, stated:

Well...I think my responsibility is to take them every day to school, for starters. And...to try and help them in whatever I can. I am always supporting them and I take them to the library and sometimes I help them read. I always check they have their homework.

The mothers had similar goals: to help their children in any way, including both school-based and home-based activities.

Daily Routines. Finally, the mothers stated that setting particular routines at home ensured their children were ready for school and helped create a strong

home structure. Maria, first-generation immigrant mother, described her children's routine:

When they get home from school, they play for about 5 to 10 minutes, then eat a snack, then right away do their homework. They know that in a school night, they go to bed at 9pm. There is no negotiation, always at 9, it's our routine. And they get up at a certain hour, and they eat dinner at a certain hour. Monday through Friday we have a routine.

Both, first- and second-generation mothers believed it was important to follow daily routines, which included time for homework. These schedules helped their children be successful both in and outside of the classroom.

Values and Life Lessons. The mothers spoke of their role as instilling life lessons. Three sub-themes emerged from this theme: (a) instilling family values, (b) maintaining high expectations, and (c) making sacrifices to support education.

Instilling Family Values. The mothers saw themselves as responsible for transmitting values to their children. They reported that earning an education would help their children be productive citizens. Lesly, first-generation immigrant mother, commented: *"The benefits of having a good education, they can be better people, good people in society."* They saw these principles as the basic foundation for everything their children faced. Stressing the value of education was key for the mothers. Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, believed that an education provided unique and lasting values:

I don't have money right? But if I had it..., money can be gone, material things also, they can sell material things, but a good education will never go away and it is their only way out, it is the only thing they have in order to move forward, a good education is the best thing somebody can give them.

Mothers also shared that teaching good values included showing respect for the authority figures at the school. Nancy again commented, *“Instill positive things, instill respect. I have told him that at school you go to be respectful to the teachers and to listen.”* The habits the mothers impart in their children, such as respect and valuing a good education, contribute to academic success. In addition, the mothers saw the benefit in their children being good people and having a good education.

Maintaining High Expectations. The mothers discussed that their role in their child's education involved having high expectations for their children. Lopez (2001) described Latino home-based involvement as teaching their children to appreciate education, because academic achievements can help them break out of the cycle of poverty. The participants in this study expressed a similar view. Maria, first-generation immigrant mother, shared her expectations, explaining *“If you don't bring me good grades, you are not going to get anything. And they have been in trouble for that. And I think that is one of the most important things...”* Maria was not willing to accept less than her child's best.

The mothers pointed to specific actions they had taken to encourage and motivate their children to succeed academically. Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, stated, *“I want him to have the mentality that he is not just going to finish high school, but that he is going to continue on.”*

Further, the mothers expected their children to live a better life than what they had. Maria did not want her children to follow in her footsteps; rather she wanted them to get an education, so they could have a better future. As she explains:

I tell them: “If this chair is here [it] is because I have worked hard to earn it. If this table is here [it] is because I have worked hard so you guys can have one.... However, if you study you can have so many better things in life than these.” For them [daughters] to have a better future. For them [daughters] to have a better life than I have.

Every mother shared their goal as to why they were involved. Carmen, second-generation immigrant mother, stated, “To finish school first of all, because I and their father didn’t get to accomplish it.” The mothers understood education would give their children mobility and stability so they maintained high expectations for the children.

Sacrifices to Support Education. Finally, the mothers felt their children should understand the sacrifices being made to support their education. More specifically, the mothers made sure the children were aware of their sacrifices and

learned from that experience. Ramirez (2003) found the job schedule of working parents limited their involvement. Regardless of this factor, the mothers in this study who worked made sacrifices and continued to be involved. For example, Maria, first-generation immigrant mother, worked nights so she would be available to her children during the day:

I am always here during the day. I work at night... I go in at 10 at night and I come out at six in the morning. I have....about seven years of working at night... Precisely because I don't like others taking the girls to school and then looking for somebody to pick them up.

Although, this mother had a challenging work schedule, she chose to work at night in order to be available for her children during the day. Additionally, past literature viewed Latino parents with limited involvement due to inflexible job schedules (Patterson, Hale, & Stessman, 2008). However, the data in this study revealed otherwise. Whether the mothers worked or not, they made time to be there to support their children's education in the ways they felt mattered.

Moreover, Nancy's family was forced to move to another area so that they could pay less in rent, but this led to a difficult decision regarding the children's schooling. The new location was in another school district, so the parents had to decide whether to re-locate their children or be dishonest about the address:

The change was very difficult, but like I told you, our economic situation was not very good and we had to make some changes... We did not

change his schools, and I don't know if I am going to get in trouble. He was also in GT [Gifted and Talented]. We felt bad, we talked about it with my husband, and I am sorry, but it is going to be a little difficult driving back and forth, but he had already started the year. And like I said, it was going to affect him in his studies and that is why we did not...Maybe we did wrong and there might be consequences for us, right? But that is why we did it, most of all his grades, I did not want his grades to be affected.

The mothers described sacrifices they made to foster the education of their children. Carmen, second-generation immigrant mother, stated, "I [got] pregnant when I was 14, and I got kicked out [of the house]. I...wanted to....you know when I was pregnant to finish school, but I just didn't get a chance. I want my boys to finish school." Similarly Tania, second-generation immigrant mother, shared, "I gave up my scholarships to go help my family when my mom passed away." Sofia, first-generation immigrant mother, crossed the border with three children, explaining "*They [the children] are from Monterrey, Mexico. We came because of my husband, he was here already. He did not want to be separated. He decided to bring them, and he also wanted them to study here.*"

These statements reflect the sacrifices these mothers made for their children's education, which goes beyond being involved in the classroom or being present at school. Furthermore, self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989) explained the

involvement of the mothers: they took these actions because they believed they could contribute to making a better future for their children.

Trusting the School. The mothers spoke of trusting the school and teachers with any academic decisions, because the mothers believed the teachers were operating in the best interest of their children's education. From this theme three sub-themes emerged: (a) cultural differences, (b) generational differences, and (c) language barriers.

Cultural Differences. Low-income mothers are typically not viewed as advocates for the education of their children because they are not present at school talking to the teachers on a daily basis (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). However, this lack of involvement may be due to cultural differences. First-generation immigrant mothers believed educational matters should be the responsibility of the school (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). The mothers in this study felt similarly. They believed their role was not to question the teachers when they disciplined their child, assigned detention, or required tutoring. The mothers stressed the importance of supporting the teachers and the school regarding their child's education. Tania, second-generation immigrant mother, stated on the importance of supporting the teachers, "I would get a note, 'Your child has not done the homework,' I would get on him for not being honest and now daily we are checking the homework." Sofia, first-generation immigrant mother, commented, "*Support them, as a parent; if a teacher has something to tell you in*

regards to your children, then you have to support the teachers.” Further, Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, talked about how she welcomed phone calls from the teacher, even if they were negative, because she saw it as a sign of caring. Nancy stated:

I get happy when they call because I see that my son matters to them. Just like I get mad at him when he does something wrong here at home, when they call me [it] is because they want what is best for him. As long as the punishment is within the limits of a school, yes, yes, I am in agreement.

Regardless of whether the mother was raised in Mexico or U.S., they had a similar view of the teachers’ role. The teachers were the experts, so the mothers supported without question the teachers’ decisions as long as it benefited the education of their children.

Generational Difference. Although past literature argued that immigrant mothers were not involved in the education of their children because they were unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system (Marschall, 2006), in this study, it did not matter if the mothers were born in Mexico (first-generation immigrants) or the U.S. (second-generation). All the mothers trusted the school when it came to educational matters and making academic decisions regarding their children. Carmen, a second-generation immigrant mother, did not question if the teachers kept her son after school, explaining “That’s a way for me knowing that you know they are focusing on him.” Further, Maria, a first-generation immigrant

mother, also strongly believed in supporting the school, noting “*If I go to school and they have to tell me something, I am ready to hear anything they have to tell me.*” These mothers show a strong sense of efficacy regardless of their generational status and were willing to meet with school personnel in spite of barriers.

English Language Ability of Parents. Another factor the literature views as a barrier of involvement is the limited English of immigrant parents (Campos, 2008). Bohon et al. (2005) revealed that parents with limited English were less likely to be active in school-based activities because they felt embarrassed communicating with school personnel. Further, Ramirez (2003) stated parents with limited English felt frustrated due to a lack of a translator at meetings. On the other hand, one mother in this study came to a different conclusion. Lesly, the only first-generation immigrant mother whose child was in a monolingual classroom (i.e. the teacher speaks only English) felt that her lack of English should not be a barrier for not attending school meetings:

Sometimes the parents don't speak English and the teacher only speaks English and there are parents that say, "I won't go because I won't understand." I don't want the teachers to view us like this. You have to make an effort.

Four mothers spoke Spanish and two spoke English; and in spite of the language differences, the perception of their maternal role was similar. Nancy, first-

generation immigrant mother, commented on how often she communicated with the teacher, *“Every time they give me a conference and every time I see he is struggling or if he complains that somebody is bothering him at school.”* In addition, it is important to note the mothers who participated in this study were selected by teachers based on established relationships, so they may have experienced more positive exchanges than other parents. These were mothers who had successful children and were willing to be present at school and involved at home, whether English was a barrier or not. The findings of the current research demonstrated positive experiences the mothers had with the school.

In summary, the mothers supported the education of their children by creating a strong home structure, teaching family values, and trusting the teachers on any educational decision. Both, first-generation and second-generation Mexican-immigrant mothers participating in this study revealed a sense of self-efficacy. The mothers were involved by communicating to their children on a daily basis the value of education, teaching discipline, assuming responsibility as a mother, providing a daily routine, instilling family values, maintaining high expectations, teaching about their personal sacrifices to support education, and trusting the school decisions. Therefore, the majority of the supportive actions took place in the home, even though they did attend teacher conferences when required. There were cultural and language issues, but they did not interfere with the educational goals of most mothers, although there is some suggestion that they

were problems for other parents. There did not appear to be any generational differences that limited the involvement of the mothers. The findings of this study reveal that the mothers had a motivation to be involved in the education of their children which supports self-efficacy theory. Bandura's (1989) theory suggested that mothers who feel their actions benefit their children remain engaged and active.

Mothers' Perceptions of the School's Role

This section highlights the results of how mothers perceive the role of the school. Two themes emerged from the mothers' perceived role: (a) there should be partnership between the mothers and the school; and (b) the school should prepare their children academically.

Partnership. Creating a teacher-parent partnership through communication was a theme that emerged from the data which Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) believed was a critical element for parental involvement. The literature viewed this partnership as teachers and mothers working together at workshops or cooperatively teaching their children (Civil & Bernier, 2006). However, the mothers in this study viewed the partnership as separate roles working toward the same goal. Maria, first-generation immigrant mother, strongly believed educating her children was not only the responsibility of the teacher, but as a parent, she needed to invest time as well:

Teach them [teachers teach the children] and us we have to help too. I think they have to do what they know best over there at school and we can do what we can here at home. I know the teachers say, "All of our responsibility is ours." They have their piece to do and we have to do something too.

Both school and parents know that educating the child is a partnership. Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, stated, *"We have to work together, because we understand that the teachers can't do it all themselves."* Strategies suggested by previous literature to increase the communication between parents and schools include calling home, having a flexible schedule, providing translations, making home visits, and attending Saturday meetings (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006; De Gaetano, 2007). These findings align with those of the current study because the teachers also shared ways they communicated with parents, including texting, home visits, holding parent conferences on a Saturday, presenting informational sessions for parents, and providing Saturday tutoring for the parents. Many teachers seemed to reach out to the mothers in any way possible. For example, Ms. Rubio volunteered her time to provide an informational workshop on the weekends for the parents:

I still do the parent academy on Saturdays. We invite the parents and the students to come and I teach the parents [in Spanish] how to help their kids, I still do that on Saturdays. Last year we did 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade.

But this year we will only do it for 3rd. I really liked Saturday school because, like I said, some parents didn't know how to help their kids so we kind of helped them. The parents liked it.

These parents participated in the parental workshops and received information in a low-stress environment because the sessions were provided in their primary language.

Further, Ms. Rosa commented, "I text with them. I send pictures of whatever he has to do. If they have a question they have my cell phone." Ms. Rubio also shared how she communicated with the parents. In addition to emailing or texting, she said: "We did home visits too. I also had an issue with one of the students, so I invited a parent to come and observe their student." Ms. Jones also made an effort to communicate with parents by accommodating parents' schedules, explaining "Instead of doing parent conferences throughout the week, I tried to do them all on a Saturday, which is more accommodating." Further, Ms. Jacob also put in the effort, stating "I drove to their neighborhood and went over to talk to parents that I couldn't get to come to school." The teachers in this study were willing to extend themselves to communicate with the parents. In addition, Tania, second-generation immigrant mother, felt connected with her child's teacher and felt she could call or text any time she had a question: It happened during a conference that we had... she said, "No, here is my number anyway, when you have a problem or would like to check on

anything on a quick thing, just give me a quick text.” She answers back during her lunch or during their specials and stuff.

The teachers and mothers at this school have formed successful patterns of communication that extend beyond the normal workday and the school. The teachers felt communication between the school and the parents was important in terms of increasing student success. However, teachers also clarified that communication with the parents was at times a challenge. Ms. Jacobs expressed this challenge, noting “It’s hard to be like really involved with every single parent, the level that you would like to be just from time constraints and trying to catch them at the right time cuz they all have different schedules.”

Furthermore, the partnership included meeting the needs of the parents. Lesly, first-generation immigrant mother, felt she could call the school any time she needed help, “*When I call, if they answer in English, right away I speak in Spanish [and] automatically they switch, ‘Yes m’am good afternoon, how are you?’*”

The partnership also included having an open-door policy which welcomed parents to take part in meetings, activities, or simply to go ask questions. Parents were told they were welcome any time of the day. Nancy, first-generation immigrant mother, stated, “*We have been told that...the doors of the school are always open for us.*” This openness is supported by previous research, which stated that parents need to feel welcome (Smith, 2006). It also

supports Bandura's self-efficacy theory, which contended that parents have a higher self-efficacy when they feel invited to participate. Parents felt welcomed at the school, and this helped establish a partnership and motivated the mothers to want to help their children at home so they could continue to be successful.

Prepare Children Academically. Previous literature noted that Latino parents see the school and teachers as the experts (Civil & Bernier, 2006). This partially aligns with my data. Carmen, second-generation immigrant mother, strongly believed it was the responsibility of the school to prepare her children to be academically ready for the future. As she stated, "[The] role of school is to prepare them for the next year... The... [teacher's] role... is to make sure they are teaching them, you know an education. Their role is pretty much to get them ready." These mothers, with limited education, trusted that the school would prepare their children academically for the future.

Overall, the mothers of both generational statuses expressed a high-self efficacy and did not avoid involvement. The mothers perceived that their involvement produced a positive outcome in the children's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Their roles included being involved inside and outside the home. They believed it was part of their role to create a strong home structure, instill values in their children, and communicate with school personnel. Likewise, the mothers believed the teachers should academically prepare their children.

Teachers' Views on the Parents' Role and the School's Role

What follows are descriptions of the teachers and the school's role of the student's education from the perspective of the teachers. The first section presents data on the teachers' perception of the mothers' role; followed by the teacher's view of the schools' role. These perceptions show a disconnect between the teachers' perception and those of the mothers' regarding their own role.

Teacher Perceptions of the Mothers' Role

Teachers were interviewed to get a more complete view of the role of the parents and the school. In this section, there are two central themes: (a) how parents support their children and (b) expectations of involvement.

Parental Support. Teachers stressed that it was important that parents discipline their children, because it contributes to the students' success in the classroom. Ms. Rubio, a bilingual teacher, responded that parents made sure the students did their homework, explaining "You [students] have to do your homework and they [mothers] make sure you [student] complete it." Ms. Rosa, another bilingual teacher, commented "[Students need] structure and, you know, support that they [mothers] care." Most importantly, Ms. Rubio believed parents should value education, "Some parents do see that there is an importance of education." When parents reinforce this value, the students are more likely to be successful in school.

Another perception the teachers had was they believed parents should provide consequences at home, which helped support the academic success of their children. Ms. Jacobs stated:

At first you kind of think like, “Oh okay these parents really are not involved, they don’t care” but the minute you call, they’ll do whatever they can to fix the situation, which makes things a lot easier because again they [student] see the link between you can’t do this in class because this is the consequence. You know they are being held accountable for.

Ms. Jones added, “When something happens at school, there is a repercussion at home. And the kids are seeing the connection that whatever happens here has a repercussion that is longer lasting than what happens here.” Both focus groups believed, whether the child was in monolingual or bilingual classes, when the parents provided structure with strong discipline or consequences it made the teachers feel supported. Teachers felt they could call home if there were behavior issues because the students would be held accountable for their actions. Ms. Rosa commented on this topic, clarifying “But the students know that if I am going to call home, you know there are more like, ‘Oh my God,’ you know, ‘I am going to have a consequence.’ So you know, they [students] are more like, aware of their responsibilities.”

One teacher believed the mothers only provided these repercussions to children with behavior issues. Ms. Jones stated, “We can get a parent on the

phone and they would be there talking to us in [a] second about behavior but not necessarily if like they are getting some low grades or something like that.”

Therefore, this teacher felt supported by the parents regarding behavior issues but not about academic concerns.

Although the mothers supported and trusted any decisions made by the teachers at school, the teachers expected and wanted the mothers to take additional actions at home. This was one of the many points of disconnect between the mothers and the teachers. Ms. Jones commented that her goal was for her students to go home to “a good environment where they can continue their learning...” The teachers offered some reasons why the parents were not as academically engaged at home as they hoped. For example, Ms. Rubio believed that the parents lacked a formal education, so “they [the parents] don’t have the skills...maybe because they didn’t finish middle school or high school...So they don’t know how to help their children at home. I think that is one of the problems parents have.” Ms. Rosa followed by noting, “Maybe many of them, you know, feel like they are not capable of helping their kids or that it’s my job and not theirs.” Both teachers worried that parents were not equipped to help with their child’s academics.

The teachers perceived the mothers were not supporting the child’s academics. In fact, this comment was heavily supported by previous research that parents did not provide assistance at home due to a limited education (Perna,

2000). However, the mothers did not see that it was their job to take a leading role academically; it was the job of the educators.

Further, the teachers believed the role of the mother was to support academics and communicate with teachers, but not all parents were as involved as they'd hope. Ms. Rosa shared her concern, explaining "Many parents do respond positively and others don't. You know, there are some that are too busy or don't care." Teachers expressed frustration when parents did not show up to conferences. Ms. Jones explained, "You feel like they don't value you because you are requesting to meet with them... You really want to discuss [their] child's performance but they are not showing up." Additionally, this frustration is included in other situations as well. For example, Ms. Jones was upset when she offered tutoring to the children and the students did not attend. Ms. Jones added that mothers should "not [be] letting them get away [with]...not coming to tutoring." Although the mothers who participated in the study were involved in these ways, clearly not all parents were. The fact that these mothers were invited to participate in the study because of their relationship with the teachers may explain their higher levels of engagement.

Nevertheless, there is a disconnect regarding the nature of parental involvement at school. These teachers expected the parents to be engaged at home and be physically present at school; while the mothers felt their primary role occurred in the home. Additionally, the teachers believed the parents should

be advocates for their children. Ms. Jones stated, “Advocating for your child, making sure that things are being followed through the way they should from the teacher level to the administration level.” Apart from the teachers, the mothers perceived their home-based involvement as being an advocate for their child and frequent contact with school was not always necessary. The findings of the mother’s responses contradict the teacher’s views because of how mothers perceived their involvement.

In spite of these slight differences, both the teachers and the mothers felt the parents did put enormous trust in the school. However, the trust is so great that it may lead to some problems. For instance, Ms. Jacobs stated that “They [the parents] trust the teacher so much that they really don’t know what is going on [in school].” Past literature connected this lack of awareness to being unfamiliar with the U.S. educational system (Delgado-Gaitan, 1993). But, the issues may be more fundamental than that. The issue may be cultural. The mothers come from a culture where they do not question what the teacher does, and always support any academic decisions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1999; Marschall, 2006; Perna, 2000). As a result the teachers and mothers seem to have a slightly different understanding regarding the trust placed in the educational system. The mothers in this study see the teacher’s role as the educational expert who should not be questioned; whereas the teachers see the mother’s role as an advocate, checking on the educational decisions for her child.

Expectations of Involvement. The teachers believed it was the responsibility of the parents to enroll their children into school with an understanding of numbers and letters. Ms. Jones stated:

The role of the parent is to make sure that even when the child enters school that they have started a foundation with them, before they even get here they should have started a foundation of letter recognition and number sense.

The teachers perceived this was an aspect that was not happening at home before enrollment due to the children being academically behind compared to their middle-class peers (Smith, 2005). The teachers saw the children as not prepared for school, but the mothers felt that a well rested, clean child was prepared for school. There continues to be a disconnect in the perceptions of involvement.

The mothers' comments revealed that they understand teachers cannot get the job done alone, and that parents must help at home (e.g. structure, routine, discipline, communication). However, the teachers were not aware of this perception and miscommunication continued to grow. Consequently, Quioco and Daoud (2006) argued Latino parents can meet the expectations of the teachers as long as the teachers explicitly define what involvement should be.

Ms. Jacobs described what she felt involvement required, "Staying involved with the progress of their child, knowing where they are and what else they need help [with] and not only that but how else they can help at home." Ms.

Rosa expressed a similar view stating “They [the mothers] should be more of the leaders [making decisions], and the teachers are kind of the enforcers [facilitators].” These teachers believed the mothers were not sufficiently involved with their children academically, and the teachers did not understand the level of care the mothers provided at home.

To increase the expectation of parent involvement, the school or teachers provided food at events. The school figured out an incentive that worked for the families, and was willing to spend extra money to increase the participation of parents. Ms. Rubio explained an incentive the school had tried: “It was like Literacy Night, and she [a bilingual teacher] would always provide food like hot dogs. And that seemed to bring more parents. That was a good turnout.” Ms. Jacobs also commented on another strategy tried by another bilingual teacher to increase participation:

I saw a bilingual teacher this year, at the beginning of the year, that had a random parent night and it was like maybe 6 o clock in the evening and the campus ordered pizza. All the parents came and I mean all the parents came. And I don’t know if it’s because of the food, but I think the teacher sold it [parent night] like they are trying to get parents to understand where their kids are and the levels they are, and how low they are according to other students.

This was one method used by this site to increase attendance at a school-based activity.

De Gaetano (2007) found providing parents with instructional strategies to apply at home with their children also increased the participation of parents in their child's education. The strategy workshops in De Gaetano's study fostered parental involvement. Similarly, in the present study, teachers noticed that when schools held events or informational meetings where language issues were addressed, parent turnout increased. Ms. Jacobs commented, "I have noticed on parent nights seems like there is a bigger turnout for bilingual students and their parents on the bilingual program [because they speak Spanish]." Ms. Jacobs added, "I think it's the atmosphere where they [Hispanic parents] feel comfortable enough with that person [bilingual teacher] where they can come and find out what else they can do at home."

Teachers perceive the mothers' role as a supportive parent in their child's education and have a certain level of expectation for the mothers' involvement. Even though the teachers recognized obstacles the mothers faced in their school-based involvement, and the school attempted to address them, there only seemed to be a higher participating rate at meetings from parents who had children in the bilingual classroom.

Teachers' Perception of the School's Role

The teachers' perception of the schools' role included one major theme, a partnership between the parents and the school. This partnership could be established through constant communication between the parents and the school.

Ms. Rosa commented:

What I think and what I would like for it to be...I mean I think is 50/50...cuz you can only do so much in the classroom and if they don't follow up at home...you know there is very little growth that the kids are going to have.

When this partnership is shared equally between school and home, the children are more successful.

Partnership. The teachers believed school personnel and parents should communicate and have similar goals towards the education of the children. Ms. Jones stated that "The kids have to know that the teacher and the parents are on the same page." However, the teachers were also aware parents might not know exactly how to be involved. Ms. Rosa commented that if parents did not know how to help their children, then teachers must help the parents, "I mean a lot has to do with us the teachers. It's our job to make them aware of what is going on that they need to help out." Smith (2006) found that for a successful partnership between the school and the parents to be established, educators needed to be aware of the daily challenges faced by parents. Consequently, the teachers tried

to recognize the daily struggles of the parents. Ms. Rosa explained, “We didn’t hear much [at school from the parents] because most of them work.” In fact, the teachers offered explanations for the lack of school-based involvement. Ms.

Jacobs stated:

I think for a lot of our parents it is kind of hard for some of them because they are second language [limited English speakers], so some things some ways we might explain it, they don’t understand. So I know at some point, I think they [the school] did parent classes so that parents [with limited English] could kind of understand what was going on [meetings were translated].

Further, to increase the partnership between parents and teachers, the school hired a parent liaison to bridge the gap between the community and the school. Ms.

Jacobs stated:

They hired a parent liaison here and she kind of facilitates parent involvement throughout the campus and it is a lot easier for parents to go through one person instead of just kind of feeling like you have to go through so many people in the office to "get to your teacher.

In fact, this is a strategy also mentioned in the literature to bridge the gap between the community and the school (Quiocho & Daoud, 2006). In addition, Lesly, first-generation immigrant mother, stated that the parent liaison played a critical role in the partnership:

Sometimes parents don't speak English and the teachers only speak English. The liaison says, "I don't want you to feel that you can't communicate. You communicate with me. Now you don't have to go to the office, you can come directly to me." And this is going to help a lot of parents so there is no language barrier and there is more communication.

The school-filled position increased communication and strengthened the partnership between the mothers and the school. According to the mothers it was a strategy that worked.

Latino parents become better advocates for their children, once they are aware of the school expectations (Lopez, 2001). The findings from this study concurred with previous work that identified effective communication about those expectations (e.g. informing parents about school policies, grades, testing) impacted the learning of the child (Lopez, 2001). Ms. Rubio shared how the school communicated with parents:

They had a meeting. They invited all the parents to come and then they talked about the importance of like how the kids are going to be tested and how it's changed...so the parents could be more aware of what is going on in the classroom and what the students have to do.

It was clear that both the teachers and mothers believed that a partnership between the parent and the school was critical to the students' success.

Summary

This chapter includes the findings and analysis from the interviews. Data provided from the interviews included the mothers' view on their role of involvement with the understanding of self-efficacy as to why the mothers were involved, as well as how the mothers perceived the role of school involvement. The data also provided the teachers' view on the parents' role of involvement, the school's role from the teacher's perspective, with the discussion of the disconnect between parent and teacher perception. The next and final chapter addresses implications for research, theory, and practice.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore ways Mexican-descent immigrant mothers support the academic success of their children. Due to limited literature, attention was given to the mother's role of what they do in and outside the school to help their children be successful academically. Furthermore, the study focused on Mexican-descent students who are doing better academically than would be predicted based on their school demographics and home background (e.g., low-income schools and low socioeconomic status). The intent was to provide an understanding of the mothers' role and how they contribute to the education of their children. Moreover, Bandura's theory (1989) of self-efficacy was selected to guide this study in order to understand why the mothers were involved in their child's education. Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) explained that parents make their decisions about involvement "by thinking about the outcomes likely to follow their actions" (p. 109). In other words, parents become involved if they believe their actions will improve learning and academic performance.

The specific setting for this study was a single elementary school, Roosevelt Elementary (a pseudonym) located in North Texas. Demographically, the student population was 84.9 percent Hispanic, 93.1 percent economically disadvantaged, 63.6 percent Limited English Proficient (LEP), and 88.7 percent

at-risk at the time of data collection. In addition, it was successful in spite of its academic barriers (e.g., low-income, economically disadvantages, LEP, at at-risk students) having earned an Exemplary rating by Texas Education Agency (TEA) for the 2010-2011 school year and a Recognized rating for the 2011-2012 school year. Therefore, this site was selected for this study because it had successful students that often are found to be underachievers and academic low-performers.

The participants were selected through purposeful sampling. Initially, fourth-grade teachers were selected because the school's successful ratings were based, in part, on third-grade TAKS scores and those students were in the fourth grade at the time of the study. The teachers came from both monolingual and bilingual classrooms, because they worked with the children of first-generation and second-generation Mexican-descent immigrant parents, which was the population of interest for this study. The teachers nominated first- and second-generation immigrant Mexican-descent mothers who had academically successful children in a bilingual classroom and in a monolingual classroom to participate in individual interviews. There were a total of 10 participants: six Mexican-descent mother and four teachers (two bilingual and two monolingual teachers).

Specifically, three first-generation immigrant mothers with children who were in a bilingual classroom, one first-generation immigrant mother with a child who was in a monolingual classroom, and two second-generation immigrant (U.S.-born) mothers with children who were in a monolingual classroom participated in

the interviews. The monolingual teachers were interviewed in one focus group and the bilingual teachers were interviewed in another group. Using teachers from bilingual and monolingual classrooms along with the mothers provided a fuller understanding of the mothers' contributions and the role of the school in the students' success. It also provided triangulation of the data.

Summary of Findings

The study attempted to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of their role in their child's education?
- 2) What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of the role of the school in their student's education?
- 3) What are the teachers' perceptions of the education experience of low-income Mexican immigrant students at home?
- 4) What are the teachers' perceptions of the role of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers and the role of the school in the students' educational experience?
- 5) Is there a disconnect between the teachers' perceptions and those of the low-income Mexican immigrant mothers regarding the role of the mothers and the school? If so, what is the disconnect?

The following sections address each research question and provide a summary of the findings associated with each question.

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of low-income Mexican immigrant mothers of their role in their child's education?

Three major themes that emerged from this research question were: creating a strong home structure, teaching their children family values and life lessons, and trusting the school to make any decisions for their children.

The mothers, whether they were first- or second-generation immigrants, both commented on similar roles. The mothers believed daily communication, teaching discipline, assuming responsibilities as a parent such as taking the children to the library or attending school functions, and providing a daily routine helped establish a strong home structure.

The second theme of instilling family values derived from instilling good values to the children, maintaining high expectations, and understanding parents' sacrifices to support their child's education. In general, the mothers believed they were responsible for raising a well-rounded child by assisting the children with their homework, making sure the child went to school prepared, communicating with their children on a daily basis, providing consequences for unacceptable behavior, giving advice about life, being a responsible parent, and providing a daily routine. These were the various ways the mothers' spoke about their role, regardless of generational differences, and it was their way of being involved in the academic success of their children.

Finally, the mothers supported their children's education by trusting any decision made by the teachers. They accepted, without question, the decisions of the school whether it was receiving a negative phone call due to a behavior issue or allowing the child to stay after school for tutoring. There were also no generational or cultural differences on expectations regarding the role of the school. The mothers, regardless of their backgrounds, believed the school was operating in the best interests of their children. The mother's decisions of involvement had a positive outcome.

The mothers wanted their children to be successful in life and live a better life than they did. Therefore, every mother that was involved in these ways had a high sense of efficacy because they believed their involvement made a positive difference in the schooling of their children.

Research Question 2

What are the perceptions of Mexican immigrant mothers of the role of the school in the student's education?

The mothers believed that the school needed to develop a strong partnership with the parents, which included constant communication regarding their children's educational progress. Furthermore, the mothers commented on being part of a school-friendly environment that made them feel welcome. This was accomplished by letting the parents know they could go to the campus at any time of the day and spend time with their children, having a translator at all

meetings, and accommodating the parents' schedule. For instance, the teachers were flexible if parents could not make it to a conference at a certain time or date. Some teachers scheduled Saturday meetings and others even went to the parents' homes to discuss matters. This policy of engagement helped establish a strong communication between school and parents, because the parents felt welcomed. Overall, the parents had a positive experience at the school site.

Research Question 3

What are the teachers' perceptions of the education experience of Mexican immigrant students at home?

The teachers believed the mothers provided structure and discipline at home. The teachers perceived the mothers made sure the children attended school with completed homework and this demonstrated that the parents cared about their children. Teachers also believed parents reinforced the importance of education and talked to their children about it at home. This strategy made the students aware that the parents cared, so the students were more likely to be successful in school. However, even though the teachers felt the parents did discipline their children regarding inappropriate behavior, they wanted the parents to be equally as engaged with their child academically. Ultimately, the teachers did not believe that the at-home activities supported the children's academic achievement.

Research Question 4

What are the teachers' perception of the role of the mothers and the role of the school in the students' educational experience?

The teachers expected the mothers to be academically engaged at home and also be physically present at school. More specifically, they believed the role of the mothers was to support their children in their academics by being physically involved at the school as well as enrolling the children in school with an understanding of basic numbers and letters, and communicating regularly with the teachers. Teachers felt frustrated when parents would not show up to meetings or conferences and believed that these were the ways that parents advocated for their children. So, when they did not speak to the teachers or come to school, they were not viewed as supporting their children.

Nevertheless, the teachers did understand reasons why the parents may not attend school meetings such as to job constraints, multiple children, or had limited English. An equally challenging obstacle according to the teachers was that they believed that the mothers did not know exactly how to be involved and it was part of the school's responsibility to make the parents aware of those expectations. The school attempted to address this concern by hiring a parent liaison to bridge the gap between parents and community. The teachers spoke about the liaison, and the mothers did as well. The mothers believed the liaison would help bridge

the communication gap between parents and teachers because it would eliminate the language barrier.

Research Question 5

Is there a disconnect between the teachers' perception and those of the mothers regarding the role of the mothers and the school? If so, what is the disconnect?

There was, in fact, a disconnect in the perception of the role of the mothers. The mothers believed their role included some school-based efforts, but should be focused on at-home activities that were related to raising a respectful, hard-working individual. They did this by providing strong discipline at home, teaching good values, checking homework, and also providing a daily routine so the children had a quiet space to complete their assignments. The mothers left all academic decisions to the school representatives.

However, the teachers believed the role of the mothers should include being physically involved at the school site. Although the mothers believed they were engaged at the school because they attended parent conferences and school functions, asked the teacher questions about the progress of their child, and supported the teacher's academic decisions, the teachers questioned the parents' commitment because they did not see the mothers at the campus. They had different expectations for involvement. Teachers wanted more support from the

mothers in the academics of their children and mothers believed it was the responsibility of the teacher to prepare their child academically.

Bandura's self-efficacy theory helps us understand why the mothers provided the support they did for their children. Ultimately, the mothers demonstrated a high sense of efficacy, through their actions. The mothers wanted their children to value education in order to graduate and have a better life than their parents. The mothers meant well and wanted the best for their children, which is why they invested the time to be involved. However, their involvement is not visible to the school representatives, because it did not fall under the traditional definition of parental involvement, leading many teachers to believe the parents may not be engaged in their children's education. Nevertheless, the findings revealed that these Mexican-immigrant mothers; whether first- or second-generation immigrant, had a motivation to be involved in the education of their children and consequently supported the academic success of their child.

Implications

Parents are a key element in supporting a school's efforts to increase student achievement. This study provides implications for research and implications for practice.

Implications for Research

While this research establishes a starting point for understanding parental involvement practices among Mexican-immigrant mothers at a successful low-

income elementary school, there are potential research questions that remain. First, the participants in the current study represent a limited view of parent involvement and are parents who were selected by the teachers who knew they cared about their children and had constant contact with the teachers. Future research on parent involvement should seek to examine the voices of those parents that are not visible at school, because it would present a deeper understanding about parent involvement. Comparing the present findings with findings from such a study would further refine the definition of parent involvement. Secondly, future research exploring the fathers' views and perceptions about their parental role in the academic achievement of their children would provide valuable information about the unique contributions of each parent. Thirdly, further research may be done with Critical Race theory to see what schools are doing in order to bridge the gap between minority parents and school personnel. Immigrant students face unique issues as they attempt to conform to the demands of an educational system established by the dominant culture. Therefore, a study that explores the clash of opposing cultures within a school setting and its potential for creating a feeling of alienation and distrust within this context is ripe for study (Halgunseth, Ispa, and Rudy, 2006). It is necessary to see how schools are meeting the needs of parents when they are aware of the parent's challenges, barriers, race, and ethnicity. Further, research should be done on a non-successful low-performing low-income elementary

school with similar demographics in order to determine the differences in mothers' perceptions regarding their roles and their actions to invest in the academic success of their children. Lastly, future research may be replicated with this study at the high school level in order to see if the mothers' perceptions of involvement changes with older students. Each of these studies would provide additional insights into the important role parents play in student achievement.

Implications for Practice

The present study made an important contribution to our knowledge of parent involvement. The findings of this study support that Latino parents are not passive towards their children's education but in fact have great hopes and aspirations for them. However, too often, these motivations or desires of wanting a better life for their children do not translate to the desired level of involvement with their children's education due to barriers such as limited English skills, time constraints, child care, or transportation (Bohon, Macpherson, & Atilas, 2005; Ramirez, 2003). This study showed the actions of mothers in a successful school, which provides important lessons for other campuses.

Based on the study's findings, the following are implications for practice. Schools could promote parent meetings; however, not to give educational information, but instead to personally learn about the lives of the families and how they are involved at home. The teachers assumed the mothers were not involved directly in the education of their children. This recommendation can

attempt to increase communication between the teachers and parents, which in turn can communicate both the expectations of the mothers' role in the life of their child's education and that of the school. Hearing their voices allows for a deeper understanding of what parent involvement means among Latino parents and a realization that traditional definitions may need to be expanded in order to include practices that may lie outside of commonly held views about parent involvement. Furthermore, the mothers in this study made no reference of what they thought was expected as parents from the teachers. Teachers need to explicitly tell the parents what they view as their role and what is expected from them.

Additionally, the school representatives took actions that may be helpful practices at other low-income schools. First, both the teachers and mothers stated the importance of a parent liaison, who helped them form a stronger school-parent partnership. The parent liaison served as a mediator between the community and school representatives, because they were able to speak to the parents in their own language (i.e., Spanish), which helped the parents feel supported. Also, the school had a Spanish translator at every meeting, which was important for the parents in the study. Other schools could provide translators as well, especially if they have a high Latino population, because they make the parents feel welcomed and heard. Their presence would likely increase parent participation and make parents feel their needs were being met. Finally, another practice that proved

helpful at this school was that the teachers accommodated the parents' schedules by being flexible in when and where they met the parents. For example, if parents were not able to meet at the specific time for a parent conference, the teachers rescheduled to a more convenient time for the parents. Also, the teachers used multiple means to communicate with the parent. They did not rely on a note home from school or a phone call, they would text or email, make home visits, or schedule parent conferences on Saturdays all in an effort to connect with the parents about their children. This school was aware of the daily challenges low-income parents face and re-adjusted in order to better meet their needs. These strategies may help other schools serving a similar population.

Conclusions

The Mexican-immigrant mothers in this study are deeply involved in the education of their children and genuinely care for the success of their children. Additionally, the mothers were involved because they had high self-efficacy. Although most of their actions took place at home focused on developing "good" people, these efforts were undertaken to support the children's academic success. Previous research identified different types of home- and school-based involvement, but had not explored the parents of Mexican-descent children, which is the largest sub-group of the Latino population. This study exposed the specific actions and beliefs of mothers of successful Mexican-descent children. Teachers can use this information to better understand the views of this population, so they

can provide guidance and support to the parents. When this happens parents feel included in their children's education and a true partnership can be established.

The findings of this study have provided a deeper understanding of the Mexican- immigrant families and their role of involvement, that for too long has been targeted as a monolithic group and blamed for the low-achievement of Latino children in low-income public schools. The voices heard in this study are ones that very few educators ever get to hear. I heard stories of hardship and sacrifice such as a mother getting pregnant at a young age (Carmen, second-generation immigrant mother), another leaving their country behind for a better life (Sofia, first-generation immigrant mother), still others working nights in order to be present during the day for the children (Maria, first-generation immigrant mother). These stories and others allow researchers to understand the parents' realities and how, in our quest as educators and researchers, we make decisions and form conclusions about these parents based on limited information.

Latino parents' perceptions about their own roles vary from what schools expect of them. This disconnect should lead to a more inclusive definition of involvement that takes into account the varying views. Furthermore, the findings of this study paint a picture of parent involvement through the lens of Mexican-immigrant mothers. It is imperative that these voices be incorporated in the parent involvement dialogue so that Latino parents can be better understood.

Even though the mothers who participated in this study may offer a somewhat biased view, because of their relationship with the teachers, they still provide a closer look as to what mothers do to promote their children's success and to understand why they get involved. This school had successful children, in spite of the disconnect regarding the role of involvement between teachers and mothers. A key lesson we can take away from this work is to value the involvement mothers do, in and outside the school, because then the students' success becomes the goal that unites us all.

Appendix A
Mother Interview Questions

Mother Interview Questions

1. What do you hope for your child's future?

Probe: Do you think your child is being prepared for the future? Why or why not?

2. What do you think your role is in the education of your child? Why?

Probe: Can you give me an example of how you participate in your child's education? How does your child respond to your role in the participation of his/her education? Why?

3. Is there anything you wish you were doing that you haven't done yet?

Please explain

4. What has been your experience working with the school?

Probe: How have you been involved? Please give an example of the school's role.

5. Are you the primary contact to the school?

Probe: What has been your relationship with your child's teachers? The school?

Can you give me an example of when they connect with you? What is the reason for the interaction? What are your views regarding the interactions?

6. What do you think is the role of the school for your child's education?

7. Are there things you wish the school did for the parents, but haven't done yet? (Be specific). Why or why not?

8. Explain to me what is your child's routine once he/she gets home after school.
9. What would you like for your child's future?
10. Anything else you would like to add?

Cuestionario Para Las Entrevistas a las Madres

1. ¿Qué desea usted para el futuro de su hijo/a?

Preguntas de sondeo: ¿Cree usted que a su hijo/a está preparado para enfrentar su futuro? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué no?

2. ¿Qué cree usted que es su rol en la educación de su hijo? ¿Por qué? ¿Por qué participa usted en la educación de su hijo/a?

Preguntas de sondeo: ¿Me podría dar un ejemplo de cómo participa en la educación de su hijo/a? ¿De qué manera reacciona su hijo/a al rol que usted desempeña al participar en su educación? ¿Por qué?

3. Hay algo que usted quisiera hacer que todavía no lo ha hecho? Por favor, explíquelo.

4. ¿Cuál ha sido su experiencia al trabajar con la escuela? ¿Cuál es la relación que tiene usted con la escuela?

Preguntas de sondeo: ¿De qué modo usted está involucrada con la escuela? ¿Cómo ha participado o trabajado en la escuela? Por favor de dar un ejemplo del rol de la escuela.

5. ¿Usted es el contacto principal de la escuela?

Preguntas de sondeo: ¿Cuál ha sido su relación con la maestra de su hijo/a? ¿La escuela en general? ¿Me podría dar un ejemplo de cuando se comunican con usted? ¿Cuál es el motivo del contacto? ¿Cómo interactúan con usted? ¿Cuál es su opinión sobre cómo interactúan?

6. Según su opinión, ¿cuál es el rol de la escuela en la educación de su hijo/a?
7. ¿Hay cosas que usted desea que la escuela hiciera para los padres, pero no lo han hecho todavía? (Por favor, explíquelo). ¿Por qué?
8. Explique sobre la rutina de sus hijo/as cuando llegan de la escuela.
9. ¿Qué es lo que quiere para el futuro de su hijo/a?
10. ¿Hay algo más que le gustaría agregar?

Appendix B
Demographic Questionnaire

Demographic Questions for Mothers

Who has primary communication at school?

Mom Dad Grandma/Grandpa Older sibling Other: _____

1) How many children do you have? _____

2) What are their ages? _____

3) Where were you born? _____ When? _____

4) Where was your fourth-grade child's other parent born?

When? _____

5) The highest grade I completed is: (Please circle the most accurate response.)

K-5th Grade 6th – 8th Grade Some high school

High School Graduate Some College College Graduate

What is the name and location of the college/ university you attended? _____

6) Do you work outside the home? Circle one: Yes or No

7) If so, what hours do you typically work?

8) How many hours do you work a week?

9) What is your marital status? Please circle one:

Divorced Married Single Widowed

Preguntas Demográficas Para Las Madres

¿Quién es el contacto principal de la escuela?

Mamá Papá Abuela/lo Hermano/a mayor Otro: _____

1. ¿Cuántos hijos/as tiene en total? _____

2. ¿Cuáles son las edades? _____

3. ¿Dónde nació usted? _____ ¿Cuándo? _____

4. ¿Dónde nació el otro familiar de su hijo en cuarto grado? ____

_____ ¿Cuándo? _____

5. El grado más alto que complete fue: (Por favor circule la respuesta más precisa.)

K-5^{to} Grado 6^{to} – 8vo Grado Un poco de secundaria

Graduada de secundaria Un poco de universidad/ colegio

Graduada de universidad/colegio

¿Cuál es el nombre y sitio del colegio/ universidad que atendió?

6. ¿Usted trabaja fuera de casa? Circule uno: Si o No

7. Si trabaja, ¿Qué horario es el que trabaja?

8. ¿Cuántas horas trabaja a la semana?

9. ¿Cuál es su estado marital? Favor de circular uno:

Divorciado/a Casado/a Soltero/a Viudo/a

Appendix C
Teacher Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this interview.

This interview should take about an hour. I will be taking notes and recording during our interview. You can also ask me questions at any time during this process. I will not use your name, so your identity will not be disclosed.

Teacher interview questions:

1. How have parents been involved at your school?

Probe: What are your thoughts about the parents of this campus?

2. What do you think is the parents' role in the education of their children?
3. How do parents contribute to the educational success of their child?

Probe: How do parents contribute to the educational success of their child at home? How do parents contribute to the educational success of their child at school? Other?

4. What are ways you work with parents? (Be specific with details and/or events).
5. Are there things you wish you or the school did for the parents, but haven't done yet? (Be specific). Why or why not?
6. Do you see a difference of involvement between parents who have children in the bilingual program and parents who have children in a monolingual classroom? If yes, why do you think that is? Please provide an example?
7. Any other comments you would like to add?

Appendix D
Letter to Mothers

Dear Parent,

My name is Mrs. Isela Russell and I am a teacher at John Haley Elementary. I am conducting a study about Mexican descent mothers and their role of involvement in their 5th grade child. I am asking several parents from Mexico or Mexican descent to tell me what they think about involvement and their role. I want to understand your perspective on education and the importance of school for your children. I am interested in what you believe and care about.

The previous fourth grade teacher of your child nominated you and believes you have a lot of information to share for this study. The study will be conducted at your desired location.

This research is being conducted for my requirements as a doctoral student at UTA. I am looking forward to meet you and learn about your thoughts about the role of involvement. Please fill the form and return back to your child's teacher. You may contact me at John Haley Elementary at 972-600-66__ if you have any questions about the study or setting up an interview time and date.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Russell

_____Thank you, but I am not interested in helping with the study at this time.

_____Yes, I am willing to be part of the study.

If yes, please write a time and date that is best for you.

Estimados padres,

Mi nombre es la Señora Isela Russell y soy maestra en John Haley Elementary. Estoy haciendo un estudio sobre madres Mexicanas y su role de involucramiento escolar con su hijo/a de quinto grado. Les estoy pidiendo a varios padres de México o descendencia Mexicana que me cuenten lo que piensan sobre el rol de involucramiento en la escuela de su hijo/a. Yo quiero entender sobre su perspectiva en la educación y la importancia de la escuela para sus hijos. Estoy interesada en lo que ustedes creen y les importa.

La maestra anterior de cuarto de su hijo/a la nomino a usted y cree que usted tiene bastante información de compartir para este estudio. El estudio se va a conducir en el sitio que usted indique.

Esta investigación se está conduciendo para los requisitos como estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Texas, Arlington.

Estoy emocionada de tener el placer de conocerle y aprender sobre sus ideas sobre el rol de involucramiento. Favor de llenar la forma de abajo y regrésela a la maestra de su hijo/a. Usted se puede comunicar conmigo en John Haley Elementary al 972-600-66__ si es que tiene preguntas sobre la investigación o para arreglar una fecha y tiempo para una entrevista.

Sinceramente,

Señora Russell

_____ Gracias, pero ahora no estoy interesada en ayudar en el estudio.

_____ Sí estoy dispuesta a participar en el estudio.

Si es que sí, favor de llenar la hora y fecha que es mejor para usted.

Appendix E
Telephone Call to Mothers

English:

Good afternoon,

My name is Mrs. Isela Russell and I am a teacher at John Haley Elementary. I had sent you a letter about the possibility of an interview about finding out more about the role of involvement.

You are being asked to participate in a research study about the role of involvement and the contribution to student success. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

The specific purpose of this research study is as follows:

- To look at the role the mother plays in her student's academic experience.
- To look at the educational contributions at home and at school.
- To look better understand the role of involvement to their students' academic success.

You will be asked to participate in one interview, which will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes.

This research is being conducted for my requirements as a doctoral student at UTA.

Do you think there is a time and date we can meet at a desired location for an interview?

You may contact me at John Haley Elementary at 972-600-66__ if you have any questions about the study or setting up an interview time and date.

Thank you for your time and trouble and we appreciate everything you do for our students.

Spanish:

Buenas tardes,

Mi nombre es la Señora Isela Russell y soy maestra en la escuela John Haley Elementary. Yo le había mandado una carta sobre la posibilidad de una entrevista sobre información del role de involucramiento.

Se le pide participar en un estudio de investigación sobre el papel de la participación y la contribución al éxito de los estudiantes. Su participación es voluntaria. El rechazar a participar o discontinuar su participación en cualquier momento implicara ninguna sanción o perdida de beneficios a los que tiene derecho.

El propósito específico de este estudio de investigación es el siguiente:

- Para ver el papel de la madre que desempeña en la experiencia académica de su hijo/a.
- Para ver los aportes educativos en el hogar y en la escuela.
- Para buscar y entender mejor el papel de la participación para el éxito académico de sus hijos/as.

Usted será invitado a participar en una entrevista que tendrá una duración de aproximadamente 45 a 60 minutos.

¿Usted cree que hay una fecha y hora que nos podremos encontrar en el sitio que usted desee?

Esta investigación se está conduciendo para los requisitos como estudiante de doctorado en la Universidad de Texas, Arlington.

Usted se puede comunicar conmigo a John Haley Elementary al 972-600-66__ si es que tiene preguntas sobre la investigación o para arreglar una fecha y tiempo para una entrevista.

Muchas gracias por su tiempo y le agradecemos todo lo que hace por nuestros estudiantes.

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Biographical Information

Isela Russell is an Instructional Specialist who works from Kindergarten to Fifth grade in all content areas. She works with teachers and helps design lesson plans and models lessons in the classroom. She was previously a fifth-grade math teacher. She is passionate about the education system, student learning, and equity for all minority low-income students. Her research interests include Latino parental involvement, school-community relations, low-income minority students, English language learners, teacher preparation, educational policy, and closing the gap between successful and non-successful students. Her Bachelor of Arts degree from University of California, Santa Barbara is in Sociology and Spanish. Her Master of Education degree from University of California, Santa Barbara is with an emphasis in English language learners. Her PhD from the University of Texas at Arlington is in Educational Leadership and Policy studies. Her publications cover topics in tenure mentoring track. She plans to become a professor in curriculum and instruction and continue research on ways of closing the academic gap between minority and non-minority students.