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# A Study of Latino Parent Involvement Practices in the United States

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# A Study of Latino Parent Involvement Practices in the United States

## **Abstract**

Historically, parental involvement has been viewed as a vehicle for academic success, especially in addressing the ever-widening achievement gap of Latino students. Despite this, minority parents frequently remain reluctant to engage in school programs. The reluctance to be involved can be attributed to several factors such as language barriers, lack of child care, low levels of education, and low English proficiency. The purpose of the dissertation was to explore the reasons for Latino parents' reluctance to engage in their children's school. Ecological Theory and Integrative Model of Family Involvement influenced the direction of this study. The research methodology was qualitative. Data collection was gathered through two focus groups, one for teachers and one for teacher assistants. In addition, there were six interviews for parent participants who were selected to participate after they completed a demographic fact sheet. Three of the families interviewed have been in the United States fewer than three years and three families have been in the United States over five years. The study provides early childhood educators, administrators, and policy makers with tangible strategies for effectively engaging Latino parents. Through the data collection, the study sought to uncover and assist schools in identifying meaningful ways to better meet the needs of Latino families and their children.

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation has been a long, but worthwhile journey. Glory and Honor to God, for His grace and mercy, as I persisted towards my goal. I dedicate my dissertation to my children, Dulani, Sekou, Alexander, Aswad and my beautiful grandchildren, Aniya, Dulani Jr., Preston and Juliana. To my siblings, Owen, Jacqueline, Sharon and Sonia, thank you for your love, encouragement and believing I could accomplish my dream. Dearest mommy, you are forever in my heart.

I would like to give a special thanks to Dr. Jennifer Schulman, who not only agreed to Chair my committee, but also went the extra mile to ensure that I was successful in achieving my goal. I cannot quantify the many ways in which she has guided me on this journey; she has been my guiding angel. I would like to let my Committee Member, Dr. Christine Casey, know how much I appreciate her support and encouragement to keep moving ahead.

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*“Delight yourself also in the LORD, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.”*

### **Biographical Sketch**

Marcia Lawrence is an Education Director at BronxWorks Early Childhood Learning Center, a Non-Profit Organization in the South Bronx. She is also the mother of four sons and grandmother of four grandchildren. Marcia Lawrence attended The College of New Rochelle where she earned a Masters degree in Early Childhood and Elementary Education from 1998 to 2001. In 2002 she earned an advanced degree in School District Administration. She began her doctoral studies in the Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the summer 2010 and conducted her research, A Study of Parent Involvement Practices in the United States, under the direction of Dr. Jennifer Schulman and earned her doctoral degree in 2013.

## **Abstract**

Historically, parental involvement has been viewed as a vehicle for academic success, especially in addressing the ever-widening achievement gap of Latino students. Despite this, minority parents frequently remain reluctant to engage in school programs. The reluctance to be involved can be attributed to several factors such as language barriers, lack of child care, low levels of education, and low English proficiency. The purpose of the dissertation was to explore the reasons for Latino parents' reluctance to engage in their children's school. Ecological Theory and Integrative Model of Family Involvement influenced the direction of this study. The research methodology was qualitative. Data collection was gathered through two focus groups, one for teachers and one for teacher assistants. In addition, there were six interviews for parent participants who were selected to participate after they completed a demographic fact sheet. Three of the families interviewed have been in the United States fewer than three years and three families have been in the United States over five years. The study provides early childhood educators, administrators, and policy makers with tangible strategies for effectively engaging Latino parents. Through the data collection, the study sought to uncover and assist schools in identifying meaningful ways to better meet the needs of Latino families and their children.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the formal education of young children was a joint venture between families and schools (Hill & Taylor, 2004). At the outset, families had a voice in decision-making as it pertained to the hiring of teachers. However, by the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was a major division between families and educational institutions. The primary role of school was to educate, while the role of families was to teach moral ethics, religious education and to teach children skills during their formative years (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Today, parents still remain a pivotal part of their children's learning. Parental involvement in children's schooling is a critical component to early school success (Durand, 2011; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2008). As these aforementioned researchers noted, parents who are involved with their children's education are laying the foundation for their child's future educational success. Other researchers went on to say that children whose parents are involved will be better assimilated in school, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Furthermore, according to Henderson and Mapp (2002), children whose parents are actively involved have better attendance records, drop out less, and have higher expectations and overall positive attitudes toward school. In addition, involved parents are sending a clear message to their children that education is

important and valued and that education helps to socialize children into society (Domina, 2005; Phillips, 2009).

Likewise, McNeal (as cited in Domina, 2005) added that parental involvement generates social controls for parents through the involvement with PTA meetings and volunteering in school, thereby developing relationships with their children's teachers and parents of their peers. Lastly, McNeal (as cited in Domina, 2005) posited that parental involvement gives parents access to administrators, networking opportunities with other parents, and insider information, such as when issues arise at school with other children. Involved parents learn about these problems first-hand and can better intervene.

Unfortunately, many Latino parents have been reluctant to become involved (Robles, 2011). Research has shown there are many reasons for this reluctance (Cotton & Wilkelund, 1989). As these researchers continued to note, parents cite the failure of school personnel for not sending correspondence such as letters, school calendars, lunch menus, and newsletters printed in Spanish, causing confusion for the children and the parents. For example, children may arrive at school on professional development days for teachers where the students are not scheduled to be in school. (Smith, Stern, & Shatrova, 2008). These authors also noted that the parents' inability to understand and express themselves in English causes major obstacles to effective communication between the school and the Latino parents. Consequently, it is not uncommon for parents to use their children as interpreters for communication between the parents and the school personnel. Parents have also expressed a reluctance to question authority or advocate for the rights of their children due to the lack of effective communication (Quezada, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2003).

Quezada, Díaz, and Sanchez (2003), like the previously cited authors, noted some likely reasons Latino parents are reluctant to participate in their children's school experiences. Language barriers and parents feelings of self-worth being are diminished because they cannot read or decipher complicated forms are sent home, and parents feel they are limited in their ability to help their child with homework. Due to these issues and a lack or limited literacy skills, an even greater sense of helplessness and embarrassment is created (Quezada et al., 2003). Furthermore, as these authors documented, parents believe they have nothing to contribute to their child, much less help in their child's classroom. Lastly, the authors noted that parents frequently complain that school personnel are actually part of the barriers to involvement. Parents feel school personnel do not listen to their concerns or respect them as individuals. These findings are explored in more depth in chapter 2.

**Benefits of parent involvement.** Given the above key findings, parental involvement in children's schooling is critical to early school success and beyond (Durand, 2011; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2003, 2008). By engaging with their children in school, parents can readily meet teachers, take part in classroom activities and events, volunteer for school trips, have first-hand information on their child's academic growth, and impart their educational values to their children (McNeal, as cited in Domina, 2005). According to Clark (2007), the benefits of parental involvement extend beyond the realm of educational achievement. Studies have demonstrated that children whose parents are involved show greater social/emotional development (Allen & Daly, 2002) including notable resilience to stress, an improved quality of life, greater self-direction and self-control resulting in positive social/mental

adjustments, improved supportive relationships, greater social controls, positive peer relations, high tolerance, more successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviors (Allen & Daly, 2002; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Gonzalez-DeHass, Williams & Holbein (2005) indicated that literature has revealed positive benefits of parental involvement in schooling for a number of motivational variables, including school engagement, intrinsic motivation, perceived competence and control, self-regulation, mastery goal-orientation, and motivation to read. Needless to say, parental involvement has been linked significantly with children's ability to redirect the self and stay focused by monitoring their own work (Stright, Neitzel, Sears, & Hoke-Sinex, 2001). In addition, Lawson (2003) noted that most research on parent involvement explores how parents are engaged in activities that are mainly organized by the school. Jackson and Remillard (2005) added that in this and other scenarios, parent involvement is prescribed along a school-focused continuum.

**Definitions of parent involvement.** In further looking at the constructs of parental involvement through other research, Epstein (1996) and Epstein and Dauber (1991) discussed a typology of parent involvement which denotes six categories of ways in which schools can involve parents. The authors' typology delineated ways school and family can make linkages to foster relationships between home and school. The typologies are defined as (a) "parenting" (helping parents with basic childrearing), (b) "communicating" (sending home report cards), (c) "volunteering" (involving parents as assistants in the school), (d) "learning at home" (advising parents on how to help their children with homework), (e) "decision making" (including parents in school-wide decisions), and (f) "collaborating with community." Epstein's typology (2004)

recognized the role parents play in the home in helping their children as well as the school in support of schooling for their child.

Parental involvement has more than one meaning (Weiss, Caspe, & Lopez, 2006). For example, parental involvement has been defined across studies as having multiple constructs, which include practices at home or at school (including parental aspirations, expectations, attitudes and beliefs) regarding a child's education (Hong & Ho, 2005). Other researchers and theorists pointed out that the operational use of parental involvement is not always clear and for the most part is vague and at times inconsistent despite the intuitive meaning of the concept (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001; Georgiou, 1997; Hong & Ho, 2005). According to Brito and Waller (1994), parent involvement is a term that can include many different activities. Parent involvement can range from a regular visit to school once a year, to frequent parent-teacher conferences, to active school governorship. It is further noted by these researchers that when different cultures are explored, the views of this involvement are also perceived differently.

In continuing to look at parent involvement, The Family Support America (FSA, 2001) added there is no universal definition of parental involvement. FSA (2001) stated there are over-arching definitions that include greater participation in school life and increased contributions to an individual child's learning process. Other definitions of parental involvement, according to FSA (2001), incorporate the family into the learning process citing parent education, parenting classes, and after school activity contributions. Programs such as Head Start and other school-based programs involve families in



governance, planning processes, and building broad ownership of student achievement goals (FSA, 2001).

Alternately, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) defined parental involvement as regular two-way dialogue and meaningful discourse of parents regarding their children's academic development and other activities. According to NCLB, examples of parent involvement activities include assisting with educational activities in the classroom setting, full partnership in decision making processes, and serving on advisory committees or boards (Parent Involvement Action Guide for Parent and Community Leaders, 2004).

The dissertation study specifically explored the parent involvement practices of Latino families with children in preschool, focusing exclusively on families in the United States and their involvement practices in a Head Start program in the South Bronx, New York. Furthermore, the variables of the definition of parent involvement, the importance of this involvement, and the benefits and barriers to parent participation were examined.

**The family in Latino culture.** A look at the Latino culture, according to Delgado-Gaitan (2004), highlights the importance of the extended family. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and family friends stay close-knit. Parental authority and respect are held in high regard and considered a form of endearment. Children are expected to take instruction from parents without questioning. Questioning parental authority is sometimes considered disrespectful (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Guliamos-Ramos, Dittus, Jaccard, Johanson, Bouris, and Acosta (2007) showed the relevance of Latino culture by highlighting the cultural constructs of *Respeto*, *Familisimo*, *Personalism*, and *Simpatia* underpinning strong familial relationships.

*Familism* has been defined numerous ways, but generally describes the collectivistic nature of the culture (Romero, Robinson, Haydel, Mendoza, & Killen, 2004), and is representative of Latino attitudes, beliefs and values (Astwood, 2009). *Familism* includes parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents, godparents and life-long friends. *Respeto* is an important value in many traditional Latino homes and encompasses respect for the authority of parents, older family members, and the expectation for politeness, obedience, and ongoing deference to elders (Guilamos-Ramos et al., 2007). Gender roles within Latino families are traditionally viewed as domineering, where males are portrayed to be strong and the breadwinner for the family (Guilamos-Ramos et al., 2007).

In continuing to look at the research on the Latino cultural constructs, the Spanish word, *Personalismo* emphasizes honesty, personal character, and inner qualities in establishing social relationships that are warm, respectful, nurturing, and form the character of mother and wife (Yasui & Dishion, 2007). *Simpatía*, while appearing to mean ‘sympathy’ in Spanish, denotes pleasantness and congeniality. *Simpatía* refers to behaviors and actions that promote pleasant relationships and includes behaviors such as behaving respectfully and in ways that promote harmony and conflict avoidance (Marin & Marin, 1991). Jones and Fuller (2003) and Brown (2004) defined culture as the sum total of beliefs and norms, values, attitudes, and behaviors that any given group holds, some of which are explicit and some of which are not as explicit. However, the authors made clear that culture is a learned process shared among a specific group. Thus, when Latino children, whose beliefs and values are specific and culturally indoctrinated, are placed in preschool programs in the United States, the value systems may clash, causing a

disconnect, which results in the parent involvement issue of Latino families (Brown, 2004).

**Head Start and parent involvement.** The dissertation study focused on the Latino parent involvement practices in a Head Start Program in New York City. A review of the research on the development of the Head Start Program in early childhood indicated that parent engagement has always been a cornerstone of Head Start (Head Start Office of the Administration of Children and Families Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center, 2011). In the early 1960's, President Lyndon B. Johnson launched *The War on Poverty* in his State of the Union speech (Head Start Office, 2011). Shortly thereafter, Sergeant Shriver spearheaded a panel of experts to develop a comprehensive child development program that would help disadvantaged communities meet the needs of preschool children (Head Start Office, 2011).

The government's initiative at the time was influenced by research on the effects of poverty and its educational impact. This research illuminated the need to help disadvantaged families and communities; compensating for social inequities. Head Start's primary focus was developed to help break the cycle of poverty and to provide preschool children of disadvantaged families with a comprehensive program that meets children's overall needs (Head Start Office 2011).

Parent involvement has been an integral component of Head Start since its inception in 1965. Inherent in Head Start's mission is the belief that parents and families are the bedrock of their children's education (Schumacher, 2003). Head Start also recognized the importance of partnering with parents to build on their collective strengths and to assist them in obtaining their goals. Furthermore, Head Start has been committed

to ensuring that this partnership is done as early as during the initial enrollment process (Schumacher, 2003).

**The Ecological Theory of Development.** The theoretical work of Urie Bronfenbrenner, one of the co-founders of the Federal Head Start program (Head Start Office, 2011), informs the dissertation research. In 1965, Bronfenbrenner joined other developmental psychologists on a planning committee to move the work of Head Start forward. His theory profoundly changed the views about what children need in order to develop into healthy well-rounded individuals. Bronfenbrenner fervently believed that families who are closely woven help children gain a solid sense of self and belonging with loved ones (Amini, 2011).

As a staunch advocate for parent involvement in a child's development and education, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) developed the Ecological Theory of Development. His Ecological Theory highlighted the inter-connectedness among the varying contexts as well as individuals (such as, families, peers, teachers, schools, communities) in addition to cultures that influence children's ability to navigate the demands of their future. This ability can have important consequences for children's subsequent achievement and adjustments throughout their educational journey and into adulthood (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory provided a conceptual framework to support the policies of the National Research Council (NRC), which indicated that schools need to promote partnerships to increase parental involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2000; NRC, 2001).

Likewise, Bronfenbrenner viewed the family system as the most influential and proximal system in children's early learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). He also acknowledged the importance in establishing home-school connections, which has also been documented in other research (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001). These connections are integral to children's developmental milestones and the emergent skills necessary for children's later school success (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

In addition, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005), further defined later in this chapter, relates well to the topic of parent involvement and most especially with this topic of Latino parent involvement. Bronfenbrenner's theory was particularly relevant to a study of Latino families because it argues that children do not exist in a vacuum and the inter-connectedness of family, school and community helps to mold the developing child (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Weiss, Caspe and Lopez (2006, 2007) also believed that family involvement processes are critical for children's learning and development and that this involvement can be reinforced with positive results for children's school success. This concept will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

### **Problem Statement**

The existing research is clear that partnering in children's learning has been linked to positive indicators of student academic success (Desimone, 1999; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). According to these researchers, parents partnering in children's learning has been repeatedly linked to positive indicators of student academic success. The benefits of parental involvement on student academics has been

shown to be so significant that it has captured the attention of policymakers, school administrators, and teachers. All have agreed that parental involvement is a key component for children's educational success (Fan & Chen, 2001).

Researchers also asserted that when school administrators and other school personnel support parent's involvement, regardless of family income, level of education, or ethnic background, it is likely that children will earn better grades and test scores. Improvement of social skills, attendance, behavior and the ability to adapt well to school are also greatly enhanced, thereby leading to a higher rate of high school graduates, who, in turn, enroll in higher institutions of learning (Christenson, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 2001a; Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Miedel & Reynolds, 1999). Robles (2011) noted parents are the most central and critical influences in shaping their young children's lives. Cotton and Wilkelund (1989) suggested that the earlier in life parents are involved in a child's educational process, the more powerful the effects will be. Furthermore, the benefits of involvement are twofold. For example, Henderson and Berla (1994) cited the benefits for students as higher grades and test scores, higher achievement in reading, better attendance and more homework completion, as well as higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in post-secondary education.

The benefits for parents are equally as rewarding. The Family Strengthening Policy Center (2004) reported that beyond student success, parental involvement has other benefits such as parents, themselves, being more familiar with the school environment and having access to administrators (McNeal as cited in Domina, 2005). There is an increased confidence in the school and in the parents' ability to advocate for

their children. There is also a greater chance that parents will enroll in continuing education classes (Wherry, 2003).

In contrast to the benefits and success projections for involvement, there is research that showed minority and low-income parents are frequently under-represented within the schools (Cotton & Wilkelund, 1989). There are numerous reasons for this under-representation such as lack of quality-time resulting from inflexible and long work hours, lack of energy due to arduous physical labor, shame of low educational level or linguistic abilities, and lack of understanding and information about U.S. schools (Cotton & Wilkelund, 1989).

Despite the many obstacles parents encounter, their involvement is an essential ingredient in the educational growth of their children, and parents need to take an active role in their children's learning (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). There is no better place to begin this journey than in preschool (Amini, 2011). Amini pointed out that children who attend high quality preschool programs prior to entering kindergarten are better prepared academically and socially and are less likely to be retained in the same grade or require special education classes. Also, they are more apt to graduate from high school and to progress to college (Barnett & Camilli, 2002; Growth, 2006). In addition, students are also less likely to become involved in youthful offenses or criminal activity during their juvenile and adult years (Growth, 2006). Former preschool students are also less likely to be unemployed or to depend upon public assistance and are more likely to have higher earnings than similar students who do not participate in preschool programs (Growth, 2006).

According to Lee, Burkham, Ready, Honigman, and Meisels, (2006), only 10% of preschool-aged children who live in poverty can recite the letters of the alphabet and many cannot count to 20 or write their name. Barnett and Belfield (2006) asserted that a high-quality preschool program shows positive outcomes, such higher test scores, and better social skills among the children who attend.

Historically, parental involvement has been viewed as a vehicle for academic success especially in addressing the ever-widening achievement gap of Latino students (Moreno, Lewis-Mennchaca, & Rodriguez, 2011). Despite this, minority parents frequently remain reluctant to engage in school programs (Durand, 2011; Robles, 2011). This reluctance to be involved can be attributed to several factors. Quezada et al. (2003) noted some likely barriers, such as lack of childcare, and low levels of education and limited English proficiency. The authors noted that parents frequently reported that school personnel themselves are part of the obstacles. Parents feel school personnel do not listen to them (Quezada et al., 2003).

In addition, little is known about parental involvement practices in the early school years among Latinos (Durand, 2011; Shield & Behrman, 2004). Latinos currently represent the largest racial/ethnic minority group in the United States, which in 2010 was reported to be 16% of the total population of 308.7 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Moreover, alarmingly relatively few studies have examined parent involvement practices at the early childhood preschool level (Arnold, Zeljo, Doctoroff, & Ortiz, 2008; Durand, 2011). Since this data will continue to gain significance, it is paramount that research, such as the one described in this dissertation, can provide answers and recommendations for the future success of education in the United States.



Thus, the dissertation study adds to the existing research on two levels. First, the study expands the existing body of knowledge on Latino parent involvement practices., It focused specifically on Latino involvement during the preschool years. This researcher hopes the information unearthed will help early childhood educators, administrators, and policy makers to recognize that Latino children play a central role in the future of America. As such, it is imperative that legislations be crafted to better educate and to better provide for the children of Latino families (Shields & Behrman, 2004).

### **Theoretical Rationale**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979) was used as a framework for the dissertation study. The theory explains the complex layers comprising a child's environment. In his 1979 book, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Bronfenbrenner presented his Ecological Systems Theory. He compared the layers of his model to that of a set of Russian Dolls embedded within each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified these systems as the (a) microsystem, (b) exosystem, (c) mesosystem, (d) macrosystem, and in 1986 added the (e) chronosystem. The first system, known as the microsystem, as he noted in his theory, consists of the child's most immediate environment. This central entity stands as the child's initial source of learning about the world, which other authors also noted (Swick & Williams, 2006). Swick and Williams (2006) expounded on Bronfenbrenner's theory when they discussed the second system, the exosystem, which encompasses the closely-meshed, intimate relations within families that creates a safe haven and "nest" for being with each other. Next is the mesosystem, which connects two or more systems in which child, parent, and family live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Last, the macrosystem is the largest of the systems and includes

a family's cultural beliefs, values of society, and political and neighborhood occurrences, which are a conduit of energy in our lives (Swick & Williams, 2006). The chronosystem, which he developed later, is the structure of all the dynamics of a families' historical context as it presents within the varying systems (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005) captured the essence and the central role parents play in their children's educational trajectories. His constructs also offered insight into the need for teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate in helping build and strengthen relationships within families (Swick & Williams, 2006). As noted, Bronfenbrenner also played a significant role in the study of child development in the early 1970s. Based on this theory, Bronfenbrenner viewed a child's development as shaping his environment (National Institute for Early Education and Research, 2006). His theory is further explored in Chapter 2.

A second theory used in this study is Weiss, Caspe, and Lopez's (2006) Integrative Model of Family Involvement. This model suggested there are three categories that are evidenced-based and linked to positive outcomes: Parenting, Home-School Relationships, and Responsibility for Learning Outcomes. Parenting includes the attitudes, values, and practices that parents use in raising young children. Parenting also includes supportive parent-child relationships and child focused practices. Home-School Relationships pertain to both formal and informal connections between families and young children's early childhood education programs. Communication with teachers and efforts by the early childhood education programs to increase nontraditional contact between families and teachers, such as home-visits or parent-discussion groups, may be included. Responsibility for Learning Outcomes relates to how parents can support the

language and literacy development of their children through direct parent-teaching activities such as reading aloud and engaging in linguistically rich conversations with their children. This theory also is explored further in Chapter 2.

### **Statement of Purpose**

This topic is selected for a number of reasons. As witnessed by this researcher in a professional setting and noted in the research, there is reluctance from Latino parents to engage in their children's school (Robles, 2011). Turney and Kao (2009) found that minority immigrant parents, compared with their native-born parents, experience more barriers to parent engagement and are subsequently less likely to be involved at schools. In addition, the authors asserted that many minority parents and those with minimal education face numerous barriers to full involvement. Furthermore, according to the research, a number of the barriers Latino parents encounter include lack of English proficiency, little or no knowledge of the American educational system, life and time constraints on the family, inflexible work schedules, limited financial capital, and lack of transportation, which makes it difficult for them to participate in school (Lahie 2008; Patrikakou, 2008; Zoppi, 2006).

A report written by Advocates for Children (AFC) (2009), discussed interviews of 82 immigrant parents and offered their comprehensive views on what hinders parent involvement in the New York City Public Schools. According to AFC (2009), the parents cited several significant barriers to participating in school activities. Some obstacles worth noting include being stopped at the door when they do not have identification, feeling intimidated by school personnel who are insensitive or unresponsive to their needs, and being treated badly because of their cultural background or limited English.

Despite gains in language resources for Spanish-speaking parents, the study noted there are still parents who speak other languages and assert they could not get answers to basic questions about their children's school (AFC, 2009).

Likewise, immigrant parents carry with them unique assumptions and expectations based on their own educational experiences (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). In many instances these perspectives are not often considered, much less understood. Consequently, parents are likely to feel intimidated by teachers, and teachers may become frustrated trying to reach and engage parents across the cultural divide (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). According to Garcia (2004), the reality of connecting home and school is not an easy task and is a source of angst for some teachers who do not fully grasp the parental involvement process and how to relate to families of diverse origins. As such, Garcia (2004) noted that she finds most teachers experience frustration in their attempts to involve parents, and many are stumped when they do not achieve the desired results.

This study sought to uncover the barriers and challenges of parent involvement practices of preschool Latino parents so that educators and administrators can better help parents become more involved in their children's learning and become better acclimated to the American school system.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were explored in this study in an effort to gain a better understanding of Latino parent involvement practices.

1. How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement, and what does parental involvement mean to them?

2. What factors affect parent involvement practices of Latino children?
3. What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents?
4. Are there differences in parent involvement practices in their own country that have contributed to the ways in which they view how they involve themselves in their child's school experiences?

### **Potential Significance of the Study**

Researchers suggested unequivocally that parent involvement in education can bolster young children's academic success, promote greater social competence, and show solid improvements in attendance (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Hill 2001; Izzo, Weissbert, Kaspro, & Fendrich, 1999; Lin, 2003; Marcon, 1999; Ramirez, 2003; Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999).

Given the above findings, the dissertation study of Latino parent involvement at the preschool level can illuminate ways educational institutions can better prepare parents to support and engage with their children earlier rather than later. According to Cotton and Wilkelund (1989), the earlier parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the stronger the effects will be. The authors noted that educators often point out the important role home and family plays in determining children's educational success and add that the earlier the linkages between home and school is solidified the greater the likelihood of higher student gains in school. In addition, the authors noted that early childhood education programs with solid parent involvement practices have amply demonstrated this practice.

Moreover, this study offers tangible insights to educators and policy-makers on how to better understand and start dialogue, and how to initiate and maintain authentic relationships with Latino families. This early involvement with parents can potentially solidify those parents' future involvement practices. For example, early involvement can boost parents' self-efficacy acquired through exposure to leadership and learning opportunities in early childhood surroundings and as children transition to kindergarten (Kreider, 2002).

In addition, the benefits gained by parents can be helpful in order to develop/foster trusting relationships with educators and other parents that go beyond just the preschool years (Kreider, 2002). Furthermore, this study is significant for policymakers and funding sources, enabling them to consider the value of early education given the findings that young children enter school at a higher level of cognitive functioning and possess positive skills and attitudes that support steady gains when they begin formal schooling (Lin, 2003).

Studies demonstrating the beneficial effects of early childhood education programs to children and parent and their successes are worth noting (Lin, 2003). The Perry Pre-School Longitudinal Study Parks (2000) found that although test score advantages for students in the project (as compared with a demographically similar control group) eventually waned, participating children experienced long-term benefits such as higher rates of employment and income and lower rates of being on welfare and incarceration.

### **Definition of Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the definition of terms is described below.

**Parent involvement.** Involvement in preschool (going on field trips), engaging in parenting education (workshops and class activities). In addition, the term Parental Involvement, under No Child Left Behind (2004), has been defined as the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities. Parents are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school, thus becoming full partners in their child's education and included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child (Parental Involvement: Regulatory Guidance, Title I, Part A, 2000).

**Latino or Hispanic.** A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.

**Preschool.** The period in a child's life that ordinarily precedes attendance at elementary school.

**Head Start.** A program of the United States Department of Health and Human Services that provides comprehensive education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

### **Chapter Summary**

Research has shown that parent involvement in a child's education has numerous benefits (National Research Council, 2001; U. S. Department of Education Goals, 2000). Likewise, parents who are involved with their children's education are setting a solid foundation for their children's future success, and these children are more likely to assimilate into school (Sy, 2006). In addition, parents are sending a message to their children that education is important (McNeal as cited in Domina, 2005; Phillips, 2009).

Regrettably, Robles (2011), noted that many families, and particularly Latino parents, are reluctant to become involved in their children's learning. According to Cotton and Wilkelund (1989) there are a number of mitigating factors, such as the aforementioned barriers why Latino families are reluctant to participate.

A search of the literature showed a plethora of reasons why parent involvement is important to the education of young children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Hill 2001; Izzo et al,1999; Lin, 2003; Marcon, 1999; Ramirez, 2003; Scribner et al., 1999). Additionally, the literature highlighted the role of schools in this process and how many schools fail to implement parent involvement. Research literature also revealed the many reasons why Latino families are disengaged and are reluctant to become involved (Robles, 2011).

Two theoretical frameworks were used to highlight the importance of parent involvement in children's learning. The major construct is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005), which captures the essence of and the central role parents play in their children's educational trajectories. His work also offered insight into the need for teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate in helping to build and strengthen relationships within families (Swick & Williams, 2006).

Next, Weiss, Caspe and Lopez's (2006) Integrative Model of Family Involvement suggested that there are three categories that are evidenced-based and linked to positive outcomes: (a) Parenting, (b) Home-School Relationships, and (c) Responsibility for Learning Outcomes. Parenting includes the attitudes, values, and practices that parents use in raising young children. Parenting also includes supportive parent-child relationships and child focused practices. Home-School Relationships pertain to both



formal and informal connections between families and young children's early childhood education programs. Communication with teachers and efforts by the early childhood education programs to increase nontraditional contact between families and teachers such as home-visits or parent-discussion groups may be included. Responsibility for Learning Outcomes relates to how parents can support the language and literacy development of their children through direct parent-teaching activities.

Thus, the topic of parent involvement is essential to explore and in order to understand the reason for the reluctance of Latino parents to engage in their children's school (Robles, 2011). Turney and Kao (2009) found that minority immigrant parents, compared with their native-born parents, experience more barriers to parent engagement and are subsequently less likely to be involved in schools. Researchers unequivocally argued that parent involvement in education can bolster young children's academic success, promote greater social competence, and show solid improvements in attendance (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Henderson et al., 2007; Hill, 2001; Izzo et al., 1999; Marcon, 1999; Ramirez, 2003; Scribner et al., 1999).

The empirical research and other key literature on parent involvement and Latino involvement is discussed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides the details of the data collection used to discover perceptions of parent involvement from teachers and staff in a preschool program and the Latino parents of the school who have been in the United States from 0 to 3 years and over 5 years. Chapter 4 provides details of the findings, and Chapter 5 provides recommendation based on the findings.

## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

### **Introduction and Purpose**

In the colonial period of the United States, families had a voice in the education as the result of a 1642 law in Massachusetts that ensured that children learned to read and learned a trade (Brenner, 1970). In addition, Coleman (1968) and Hill and Taylor (2004) believed that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the education of young children was a joint venture between families and schools. Furthermore, at the outset, families had a voice in decision-making as it pertained to the hiring of teachers.

Unfortunately, according to Hill and Taylor (2004), by the twentieth century a major division occurred between families and educational institutions. The primary responsibility of schools was to educate, and the role of families was to teach morals, instill values, ethics, and religious education (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Families were also charged with teaching children much needed skills during their formative years (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

Today, parents remain a pivotal part of their children's learning and a substantial body of empirical data has shown that parental involvement is linked to increased academic achievement in the early years (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004; Izzo et al., 1999; Mcwayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekino, 2004). Likewise, parental involvement in children's schooling has been shown to be a central component to early school success (Durand, 2011; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes 2003, 2007). For example, Dearing et al. (2006) found increases in family involvement in children's education predict increases in

literacy. The authors reported that between kindergarten and beyond, increased family involvement was linked to improvements in low-income children's literacy achievement. More importantly, Dearing et al. (2006) noted that results showed that adding one or two involvement activities per year was associated with meaningful improvements for children. It is important to note that the authors' findings revealed that involvement in school between kindergarten and beyond matters most for children who are at greatest risk. In addition, the authors revealed that high levels of involvement were most strongly and positively associated with the literacy achievement of children whose families were low-income and whose mothers had low levels of education. The authors stated that the findings corroborated the usefulness of family involvement in schools as a way to improve the achievement of children living in low-income families and illuminated the value of empirically modeling both family involvement and child achievement as developmental phenomena.

As Dearing et al. (2006) noted, parents who are involved with their children's education are laying the ground work for their child's future educational success. Another study by Fan (2001) revealed that parental involvement activities have a notable affect on children's academic growth. Moreover, the study revealed that parents' beliefs and aspirations for their children's educational future yield positive effects on children's academic success. Other researchers noted that children whose parents are involved will be better assimilated in school, get better grades, and score higher on standardized tests (Henderson & Mapp, 2002).

Regrettably, many Latino parents are reluctant to become involved, and research has shown there are many reasons for this reluctance (Cotton & Wilkelund, 1989; Robles,

2011). According to Turney and Kao (2009) minority immigrant parents, compared with their native-counter parts, experience more barriers and subsequently are less likely to be involved at schools. Among the barriers Latino parents' face are little or no knowledge of the American educational system, lack of childcare, time constraints on the family, inflexible work schedules, limited financial capital, and lack of transportation, all of which makes it difficult for them to participate in school (Lahie, 2008; Patrikakou, 2008; Zoppi, 2006). In addition, Quezada et al (2003) suggested that other barriers are likely a result of lack of childcare, low levels of education, and limited English proficiency. Zoppi (2006) stated that while Latino parents value education, the multiple challenges they encounter regularly is an obstacle to participating fully in their children's schools. For example, unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system hinders parents' involvement with it. Moreover, Zoppi (2006) added that parents may also erroneously believe that their own lack of education precludes them from being involved. The collaboration that should occur between home and school is further compromised when parents feel that schools only notify them when there is something negative to report. Conversely, all too often, Latino parents do not realize they have the right to inquire about their child's education (Zoppi, 2006).

Latino parents may also face significant economic challenges, which affect their inability to get involved. In many instances, it is imperative that parents work two or three jobs, which prevents them being involved in school (Zoppi, 2006). New immigrant situations are even more complex as parents may face special challenges that can affect their offspring's ability to succeed in school (e.g., work hourly wage jobs, temporary work, and unemployment). In addition, school personnel's negative or condescending

attitudes, parental lack of transportation, and lack of childcare also hinder parental involvement (Zoppi, 2006).

Based on the research, the dissertation study of Latino parent involvement at the early childhood stage can serve as a road map to illuminate ways educational institutions can better prepare parents to support and engage with their children earlier rather than later. According to Cotton and Wilkelund (1989), the earlier parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the stronger the effects will be. The authors noted that educators often point out the important role home and family plays in determining children's educational success and add that the earlier the linkages between home and school is solidified, the greater the likelihood of higher student gains in school. In addition, the authors noted that early childhood education programs with solid parent involvement practices have "amply demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach" (p.3).

To further support the relevance of the dissertation study, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005) served as the major theory in developing the research. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory profoundly changed the views about what children need in order to develop into healthy, well-rounded, viable members of society. Bronfenbrenner believed that families who are closely woven help children gain a solid sense of self and belonging with loved ones (Amini, 2011). Furthermore, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005) captured the essence of and central role parents play in their children's educational trajectories. His constructs also offered insight into the need for teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate in helping build and strengthen relationships within families (Swick & Williams, 2006). The theory

highlighted the inter-connectedness of the varying contexts as well as individuals (families, peers, teachers, schools, and communities) and cultures that may influence children's ability to navigate the demands of their future, which, in turn, can have important consequences for children's subsequent achievement and adjustments throughout their educational journey and into adulthood (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1997). Moreover, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005) related well to the topic of parent involvement, and most especially with the topic of Latino parent involvement because Bronfenbrenner (1979) argued that children do not exist in a vacuum and the inter-connectedness of family, school and community helps to mold the developing child.

Similarly, a second minor theory supporting this study is the work of Weiss, Caspe and Lopez (2006, 2007). These researchers also argued that family involvement processes are critical for children's learning and development, and this involvement can be reinforced with positive results for children's school success. Their model of family involvement suggests there are three evidenced-based categories that are linked to positive outcomes: Parenting, Home-School Relationships, and Responsibility for Learning Outcomes. Parenting includes the attitudes, values, and practices that parents use in raising young children. Home-School Relationships pertain to both formal and informal connections between families and young children's early childhood education programs. Communication with teachers and efforts by the early childhood education programs to increase non-traditional contact between families and teachers such as home-visits or parent-discussion groups may be included. Responsibility for Learning Outcomes relates to how parents can support the language and literacy development of

their children through direct parent-teaching activities. This minor theory is explored in more depth later in this chapter.

### **Review of the Literature**

This section reviews the empirical research on parent involvement. The section first presents a historical perspective on the issue, and then focuses specifically on the historical perspective of Latino families. The literature on the importance of preschool is then reviewed. The review of the literature then explores parent involvement through a discussion of the influences of parent involvement, the importance of parent involvement and the benefits of parent involvement. The literature review ends with a discussion of the barriers to Latino parent involvement.

**Historical perspective on parent involvement in the United States.** In the colonial era of America, families had a voice in education as a result of a 1642 Massachusetts law that ensured that children learned to read and learned a trade (Brenner, 1970). In addition, Coleman (1968) and Hill and Taylor (2004), stated that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the education of young children was a joint venture between families and schools. At the outset, families had a voice in the decision-making process of schools. Berger (1981) also argued that education during this time period was largely carried out privately by the family rather than publicly through the use of public institutions. Unfortunately, according to Hill and Taylor (2004), by the 20<sup>th</sup> century a major division occurred between families and educational institutions. The primary responsibility of school was to educate, while the role of families was to teach morals, instill values, ethics and religious education (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

***History of Head Start.*** As noted by Hill and Taylor (2004), the role of families in education had eroded. The relationship changed because schools took on the function of educating children and parents were seen to have their own roles. Today, however, federal mandates require schools to involve parents in their children's education. One such program, which is integral to this study and the site of data collection, is Head Start (NCLB Action Brief, 2004). Project Head Start was founded in 1965. Parent engagement has always been a central component of Head Start (Head Start Office, 2011). The genesis of Head Start was in the 1960s, when President Lyndon B. Johnson launched *The War on Poverty* in his State of the Union speech. Shortly thereafter Sergeant Shriver spear-headed a panel of experts to develop a comprehensive child development program that would help disadvantaged communities meet the needs of preschool children (Head Start Office, 2011).

The government's initiative was influenced by research on the effects of poverty and its educational impact. The research illuminated the need to help disadvantaged families and communities by compensating for social inequities. Head Start's primary focus was to help break the cycle of poverty and to provide preschool children of disadvantaged families with a comprehensive program that met children's overall needs (Head Start Office, 2011).

According to the Head Start Office of the Administration of Children and Families, the Office of Economic Opportunity initiated this project under President Richard Nixon's administration in 1969. The project was then handed to the Office of Economic Opportunity to the Office of Child Development in the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. Under President Jimmy Carter's



administration in 1977, Head Start initiated bi-lingual and bi-cultural programming across several states (Head Start Office, 2011). During President Ronald Reagan's administration in 1984, over one billion dollars was dedicated to the initiative. Following in the path of his predecessors, President Bill Clinton's administration funded the first Early Head Start Program in 1995, and in October 1998, the Head Start Program was re-authorized to expand to full-day and full-year services (Head Start Office, 2011).

Under President George W. Bush's administration in 2007, multiple provisions were added to solidify Head Start (Head Start Office, 2011). Provisions included alignment of Head Start school readiness goals with state early learning standards, higher qualifications for the Head Start instructional staff workforce, State Advisory Councils on Early Care and Education, and increased monitoring, including a review of child outcomes (Head Start Office, 2011). Under President Barack Obama's leadership in 2009, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act added more than 64,000 slots for Early Head Start and Head Start programs (Head Start Office, 2011).

Since its inception, Head Start has served over 30 million children. Currently, Head Start is managed by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and serves children and their families throughout all 50 states (Head Start Office, 2011). As mentioned, the central tenet of Head Start is to serve disadvantaged children in the inner cities. The program serves at-risk children in inner cities and rural areas to promote school readiness for low-income preschool children and offers comprehensive social services for families.

Parent involvement is mandatory in Head Start. The aspects parents can be involved with include serving on policy councils, contributing to program planning,

working with children in classrooms, self-development, attending parenting and child development programs, and receiving ancillary services to support their emotional, social, and vocational needs (Hill & Taylor 2004; Mendez, 2010).

*Educating children of poverty.* Vinovskis (1992) stated that societies are always confronted with the problem of dealing with poor children, and in many ways this means finding ways of overcoming or compensating for the disadvantaged backgrounds of these children. Additionally, the fate and well-being of disadvantaged children in America has led numerous policymakers to look once again to the schools to educate children (Vinovskis, 1992). Overall the article explored the relationship between schooling and poor children. Specifically, it looked at the origins and development of education in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with special attention to whether or not schools helped poor children obtain better jobs. To accomplish this task, Vinovskis (1992) utilized different perspectives. First, he viewed the expansion of schools during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Next, observations on schooling poor children were explored by looking at the relationship between education and economics. Lastly, he looked at what he called antebellum school reforms intended to help poor children, meaning the education of children during that period was mainly about protecting society, rather than helping the destitute get ahead.

According Vinovskis (1992), in the early part of the nineteenth century England experienced rapid industrialization and was plagued with problems of poverty and social unrest. As a result, the author noted, there was a call for education, but this call met with opposition. The reason for this opposition, Vinovskis noted, was the argument that schooling would encourage unrealistic work aspirations and lead to unrest among

children of common laborers. Silver (1965), as cited in Vinovskis (1992), asserted that the English feared education would lead to rebellious ideologies against religion and civic authority.

Conversely, no such opposition took place with the education of poor Caucasians in the United States (Vinovskis, 1992). Although there was strong and widespread support for educating poor children in the United States, it was generally justified as a protection for society rather than of helping individuals move forward (Vinovskis, 1992). During that period, the value of education, for most commentators, was to improve the moral character of the poor rather than to enhance their occupational skills or to foster individual social mobility (Vinovskis, 1992). According to Rorabaugh (as cited in Vinovskis, 1992), this way of thinking was due, in part, to the expectation that workers would acquire their specific job skills through apprenticeships instead of schooling.

The only person who addressed the economic productivity of education was Horace Mann in his Fifth Annual Report to the Massachusetts Board of Education (as cited in Vinovskis, 1992). Mann responded to the legislative thrust to abolish the Massachusetts State Board of Education in 1840. He pursued ways to broaden the support for public education by demonstrating its economical contributions to the state economy and to the individual (cited in Vinovskis, 1992). Prior to Mann's argument, early 19th-century Americans lauded and promoted education, but they usually did not acknowledge or emphasize its economic value for the individual or the society (Vinovskis, 1992). It was due to the endeavors of Mann and his supporters that the economic productivity of elementary education was recognized and welcomed by the time of the Civil War. Vinovskis stated that education was held in high esteem, even more as an alternate means

of occupational mobility, once other ways of training young people, such as apprenticeships, declined in early 19th-century America.

Another perspective on the education system in American history is the landmark case of *Brown versus the Board of Education, Topeka* (1951). Towards the final year of the First World War, a bill was presented to extend authority to further expand the circle of communities throughout the State of Kansas to segregate public schools, which snaked its way through the State Legislature (Rosenblum, 2012). According to Rosenblum (2012), a 1879 bill sought to expand the school communities to include school boards in cities with populations of over 15,000 to create a dual elementary school system. State lawmakers entertained granting the same discretionary powers to towns with populations as few as 2,000 (Rosenblum, 2012).

In continuing to note how history paved the way for parents to be involved in schools, Cozzens (1995) explained that the *Brown versus the Topeka Board of Education* resulted from the experience of a Black third-grader named Linda Brown who had to walk one mile to school through a railroad switch yard in order to get to her Black-only elementary school, despite having a white elementary school in close proximity to her home. The child's parents attempted numerous times to enroll her in the White elementary school, however the principal of the school categorically refused. The child's parents then sought help to sue the state through the head of the Topeka, Kansas branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) (Cozzens, 1995). Other Black parents followed suit and joined them in suing the state. The NAACP requested an injunction that would forbid the segregation of Topeka's public schools (Knappman as cited in Cozzens, 1995).

While the landmark ruling did not abolish segregation, it gave parents a voice in advocating for and becoming involved in their child's education. Subsequently, with the court rulings, parent involvement gained impetus with assistance from diligent labors of education researchers whose studies championed the importance of parent involvement (Guarjardo & Guarjardo, 2004).

**Historical perspective of Latino parent involvement.** Historically, despite, one's race, creed or color, the common denominator across cultures is that the parent-child dyad is critical to early socialization and the development of the child's social system (Donovick & Rodriguez, 2008). Researchers recognized the significance of transmitting values to children that have endured over decades and even centuries in order to ensure children's accommodation and survival within the family context (Harrison, Wilson, Pine, Chan, & Buriel, 1990; Rogoff, Mistry, Concu, & Mosier, 1993). Still, other researchers pointed to the importance of cultural practices (LeVine, Miller, Richman, & LeVine, 1996).

Currently, family-focused research is sparse and what little empirical research exists offers little attention to the differences in cultural-based parenting practices (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). A host of researchers concurred that family-based research has paid little attention to this difference in cultural-based parenting practices (Amato & Fowler, 2002; Hill, Bush, & Rosa, 2003; Ruiz, Rosa, & Gonzales, 2002; Zayas & Solari as cited in Guliamos-Ramos et al., 2007). The studies that do exist on Latino parenting practices reported inconsistent findings (Martinez, 1999; Solis-Camara & Fox as cited in Guliamo-Ramos et al., 2007).

Specifically, three studies described Latino parents as being authoritarian, unduly directive and firm disciplinarians with their children (Cardona, Nicholson, & Fox, 2000; Leyendecker, 2002; Schulze, Harwood, Schoelmerich, & Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown as cited in Guliamos et al., 2007). Conversely, other studies have noted the warmth and closeness that epitomizes Latino parenting (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Julian, McKenry, & McKelvey, 1994; Molina & Chassin, 1996; Raffaelli & Green as cited in Guliamos-Ramos et al., 2007). Moreover, other studies stated that Latino and White parents are not as different, particularly those at comparable socioeconomic levels (Fox & Solis-Camara, 1997; Lindahl & Malik, 1999; Medora, Wilson, & Larson, 2001; Uno, Florsheim, & Uchino cited in Guilamos-Ramos et al., 2007). A further look at this viewpoint, as cited in Guliamos- Ramos et al. (2007), noted that this focus on behavior lacks a broader view of Latino parenting practices. As such, the authors drew attention to the rapid growth of the Latino population, which is projected to increase to 60% of the total U.S. population by 2025.

Moreover, Guliamos-Ramos et al. (2007) stated Latinos hail from diverse nations and regions within nations, yet the nomenclature "Latino" refers to identifiable social and psychological characteristics that "differentiate Latinos from other cultural or ethnic groups" (p. 18). The authors noted that "the extent to which researchers rely on shared traits to characterize Latinos must be counter-balanced by attention to distinct ethnic groups" (p. 18). Therefore, the authors concluded that there needs to be additional studies done on Latino parent involvement practices, which is also the impetus for this study.

Guliamo-Ramos et al. (2007) conducted a qualitative research study of Latino parenting practices in an urban setting. They wanted to find out how Dominican and

Puerto Rican mothers and their adolescents identify parental control and closeness in their relationships. They used focus groups with Dominican and Puerto Rican mother-adolescent pairs in an urban borough of a New York City middle school where 80% of the school population was Latino. The purpose for the study was to also understand the parenting styles with Latino cultural constructs to better illuminate social work practices with urban Puerto Rican and Dominican populations. There were 82 Latino families randomly selected from the school's official attendance roster of approximately 500 students for the study. Participants were further narrowed to 63 mother and adolescents pairs (sixth, seventh, and eighth graders). Specifically, of the 63 mother-adolescence pairs, 44 were Dominican and 19 were Puerto Rican. Many of the pairs were Spanish speaking and the majority was not born in the United States. Of the mothers in the sample, 62% had completed some secondary education, and 31% had some college education. Of the adolescents in the sample, all were between the ages of 11 and 14 with an equal distribution of boys and girls.

The findings from Guliamo-Ramos et al. (2007) noted specific results related to Latino parent involvement practices. There were four main themes: (a) the importance of close monitoring or control of adolescents, (b) the importance of warm and supportive relationships characterized by high levels of parent-adolescent interaction and sharing, (c) the importance of explaining parental decisions and actions, and (d) the importance of making an effort to build and improve relationships.

These themes emerged from the data collected in the focus groups. In the focus groups there were different parenting practices noted based on the gender of the adolescent children. In general, the mothers overwhelmingly attributed these gender

differences to Latino cultural norms of male freedom and female submissiveness, that is, *machismo* and *marianismo*. Both Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers explained that boys should be raised with more freedom than girls, and how, in some Latino families, girls were strongly encouraged to participate in activities inside the home and boys were allowed more freedom to explore activities outside the home.

Despite acknowledging that boys enjoy greater autonomy and freedom outside the home, the findings revealed that both Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers were concerned about parenting in a culturally diverse urban environment. Mothers reported that the urban setting and the many potential negative distractions in the neighborhood influenced their communication with, and supervision of, their adolescents. Mothers were aware that the culturally derived family values guiding their parenting practices might not be in alignment with those of other families. They knew that given the ethnic heterogeneity and cultural plurality of New York City and its public school system, adolescents were likely to meet and befriend youngsters from other ethnic groups (Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007). Mothers were not only worried about distractions and physical risks their adolescents might encounter if adult supervision lapsed, but also about deviations from cultural norms. Further analysis revealed that adolescents' responses regarding parental control and cultural values were similar to those of the mothers' responses. Like their mothers, the responses from the Dominican and Puerto Rican adolescents in the focus groups supported the cultural values of *familismo*, *respeto*, *simpatia*, and *personalismo*.

The cultural value findings were consistent with what has been noted in the research. Specifically, *familismo* is way of maintaining a close connection to the family.



According to the literature (Santiago-Rivera, Arrendondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002), Latino families are socialized to value close relationships, cohesiveness, and cooperativeness with other family members. *Respeto* implies deference to authority or a more hierarchical relationship orientation. *Respeto* emphasizes the importance of setting boundaries and knowing one's place of respect in hierarchical relationships (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). *Simpatía* ("kindness") emphasizes the importance of being polite and pleasant, even in the face of stress and adversity. As a result of the construct *simpatía*, some Latinos/Hispanics may not feel comfortable openly expressing disagreement with a service provider, such as a school. *Personalismo* is the valuing and building of interpersonal relationships. *Personalismo* encourages the development of warm and friendly relationships, as opposed to impersonal or overly formal relationships (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

The Latino adolescents' expectations were that their responsibilities were to assist, respect, and support their families. For instance, one adolescent participant noted that demonstrations of *respeto* were necessary to earn parental trust. The youngsters in the focus groups were quick to recognize the importance of parental control as a force that could help them remain safe and fulfill important goals. Most of them believed that parental exercise of authority and close monitoring were manifestations of parental love and concern. Many of the teens believed that abdication of parental authority showed a lack of interest. The research suggested that within the context of the urban Dominican and Puerto Rican families participating in this study, the Latino construct of *respeto* is consistent with the construct of demandingness (that is, control) and that the construct *simpatía* is consistent with the concept of responsiveness (that is, warmth). "Within

Latino culture, *respeto* describes the importance of adhering to authority, be it based on age or social status.” Likewise, *simpatia*, in turn, connotes positive, smooth, interpersonal relations and refers to the mutual accord Latinos strive to achieve in their interpersonal relationships. For the mothers in the focus groups, *respeto* not only encompasses parental authority and the obedience that youths accord to elders but also stresses proper conduct.

The mother and child pairs noted that a level of control over adolescents is necessary because adolescents benefit from limits on their behavior, particularly in an urban setting. However, the mothers said that the parental control must be rational and consistent, which is contrary to the stereotype of Latino parenting as being unilateral and authoritarian (Guliamo-Ramos et al., 2007). This maternal concern for talking with their adolescents to explain their use of parental authority and instill a sense of responsibility and proper behavior can be viewed as aspects of Latino cultural norms previously mentioned and serves to highlight the five essentials of parenting practices noted in the study: (a) ensuring close monitoring of adolescents, (b) maintaining warm and supportive relationships characterized by high levels of parent-adolescent interaction and sharing, (c) explaining parental decisions and actions, (d) making an effort to build and improve relationships, and (e) differential parenting practices based on adolescents' gender.

Another study by Gonzales-Ramos, Zayas and Cohen (1998) was conducted with Puerto Rican mothers of preschool children. The results showed that mothers ranked honesty, respect, and responsibility as most important, followed closely by loyalty to family, affection and sharing. These results were consistent with the Latino cultural constructs found by Guilamo-Ramos et al. (2007). The authors conducted focus groups in Spanish and in English, interviewed cultural consultants, and reviewed literature. A

convenience sample of 80 low-income, urban Puerto Rican mothers with at least one young child under age six years, was recruited from the day care centers of Head Start. Parents were asked to rank in order of importance the 13 child-rearing values that were presented to them from the survey entitled, The Maternal Child-Rearing Values and Behavior Inventory (MCRV-BI) (Gonzalez-Ramos, Zayas, & Cohen, 1998). Mothers reported that the values of *respecto* were the most important to teach preschool children. The authors also wanted to know how these values would reflect in children's behaviors. The findings revealed similar results from Guilamo-Ramos, et al. (2007) in that Puerto Rican mothers ranked parental controls as a significant value in order to develop a child's love, closeness, and deference to parent authority, obedience, family loyalty, and personal honor.

Calzada and Eyberg (2002) similarly examined the normative parenting practice of a sample of Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers of young children in the U.S. in a quantitative study. Parenting was viewed from the levels of authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. In the study, authoritative parenting was viewed as punitive and absolute obedience to parents. The second style of parenting from the study, known as authoritarian, was viewed as providing the child with an explanation when giving a directive. Last, the permissive parenting style in the study was viewed as imposing little or no restrictions and little demands on the child. There were 240 first generation immigrant mothers with a child between the ages of two to six years old. Mothers completed questionnaires related to their parenting practices and demographic questionnaires to measure their acculturation into U.S. culture. The research yielded a 41% return on the completed questionnaires. The results revealed that Dominican and

Puerto Rican mothers show high levels of positive parenting practices, which are consistent with authoritarian parenting patterns and avoiding punitive, harsh, and inconsistent parenting practices associated with authoritative parenting patterns. The findings also revealed that more than 80% of the mothers used praise and affection numerous times throughout the day. The authors discovered that the parent-child relationships were characterized with a high degree of warmth and mothers rarely or never used corporal punishments, negating other studies that said that Latino parents resort to physical discipline for misbehavior management (Garcia Coll, 1990; Laosa as cited in Calzada & Eyeberg, 2002). Moreover, the study reported that mothers in the study refused to ignore misbehavior and made a point of showing consistency with discipline. In addition, both Dominican and Puerto Rican mothers stated that they utilize reasoning in disciplining their young ones, which indicates that parent's authority is firm as it pertains to the context of mother/child (Calzada & Eyeberg, 2002).

Lastly, though there appeared to be numerous similarities between both groups, some parenting differences were found. For example, Puerto Rican mothers were more likely to use non-reasoning and punitive measures, utilize ignoring, and decreased warmth and involvement than did the Dominican mothers. Additional findings from the study revealed that Puerto Rican mothers appeared not to be as authoritative in their method of parenting as Dominican mothers, which supports prior evidence of cultural variations in parenting between Hispanic sub-groups.

**Importance of preschool education.** The first five years of life for young children are a time of rapid growth (Gayl, 2007). The cognitive, social, and emotional skills that children develop during this early stage are essential building blocks for the

rest of their educational future (Gayl, 2007). The National Research Council (as cited in Gayl, 2007), reported that the environment in which a child grows up has a major impact on how the child develops. Gayl (2007) argued that early education programs play an important role in setting a positive trajectory for youngsters' success and can serve to help bridge the achievement gaps that exists among children prior to entering school.

Barnett and Camilli (2002) and Growth (2006) also recognized that children who regularly participate in high-quality preschool are likely to be successful in their later schooling, are less likely to repeat the same grade or require special education classes, and are more apt to graduate from high school and move on to college. Moreover, these authors claimed that children who benefit from early childhood programs are also less likely to become involved in youthful offenses or criminal activity during their juvenile or adult years. Furthermore, these authors concluded that adults who were participants of preschool programs were found to be less unemployed, more likely to have higher earnings than similar students who do not participate in preschool programs, and less likely to depend on public assistance.

More importantly, early childhood is a critical period for the development of brain functions of children (Rural Education Action Project (REAP), 2004). This development, including early emergent skills in areas such as language/literacy, motor skills, psychosocial cognitive and learning, is now known to be greatly influenced by exogenous factors, including the nature of the educational environment to which the child is exposed during the first six to eight years of life (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns as cited in REAP, 2004).

Love, Kisker, and Ross (2005) conducted a three year study with 3,001 families in 17 Early Head Start programs across the United States, in both urban and rural settings. In order for families (99% mothers) to be eligible for enrollment in the research programs, they had to meet Early Head Start guidelines and consent to be randomly assigned to the program or control groups. Control groups did not receive Early Head Start services but could access other services in the community. Families in this study were diverse in race-ethnicity, language, and other characteristics. According to the study, sample enrollment and random assignment began in the summer of 1996 and concluded in the fall of 1998. Participants in this mixed method study had to have a child under the age of 12 months or be expecting a child.

Data was obtained by data officials who were centrally trained and certified as reliable. The collectors and coders of videotaped parent-child interactions had no knowledge of the families' program status. The authors stated that to obtain data on developmental outcomes, interviewer-assessors tried to visit families in their homes when children were 14, 24, and 36 months old. Research questions were (a) did the Early Head Start programs have a significant impact on child and parenting outcomes at age 3, when the program ended (b) does adherence to the Head Start Program performance standards matter, and (c) are impacts more likely to be found, or likely to be greater in magnitude, in Early Head Start programs that offer both center-based and home-based services than in programs that offer only, or primarily, home or center-based services?

Love, Kisker, and Ross (2005) reported regression analyses showed that 3 year-old children who participated in Early Head Start made more significant gains than children in the controlled settings in cognitive and language development and displayed

reduced aggressive behavior as rated by caregivers. In addition, children in the program exhibited increased emotional engagement and sustained attention with play objects. Strongest gains were evident in the mixed-approach programs, which combined home visiting-center based services such as Head Start. Overall, positive impacts of participating in the program indicated parents were more emotionally supportive of their children, spanked less, provided more language and learning supports, and showed increased parent-child time activities such as reading to their child.

Another study on young children was a longitudinal, quantitative study conducted by Forget-Dubois, Lemelin, Boivin and Dionne (2007). Their study analyzed the predictive value of a school readiness measure using the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (2000). The instrument relies on kindergarten teachers' ratings of children's well-being, and social, emotional, and cognitive development. The authors also compared the predictive value of the EDI with that of a direct school readiness test and a series of cognitive tests. The data were collected when the children were in kindergarten and one year later. The research looked at measuring the value of early childhood education with measures of readiness skills such as cognitive, literacy, numeracy, and communication.

A further review of the study noted that school readiness was defined as multi-level constructs that refer to the cognitive, communicational, behavioral, and emotional skills, as well as basic knowledge that facilitates the child's learning and adjustment at school entry. Forget-Dubois et al. (2007) stated that the goal of the study was to assess the psychometric properties and the predictive validity of the EDI with a large, representative sample of children from Quebec, Canada. A total of 1,134 children were assessed. The series of tests was comprised of a variety of cognitive and language

measures, including a standardized school readiness test, known as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (1981), which is a visual cue recall task test, and a number knowledge test, known as the Early Development Instrument (EDI, 2000). Findings revealed that the EDI results showed that readiness skills tested, such as literacy, numeracy, and communication skills, were a significant predictor of school achievement. On the other hand, social emotional domains did not predict school achievement.

Some scholars suggested that the benefits of preschool may be even higher for children who are at a significant disadvantage, such as those living in extreme poverty (Gorey, 2001). Proponents of preschool education maintained that the ability to think critically, reason abstractly, and problem-solve through the manipulation of words and numbers could be improved through environmental interventions such as early childhood programs (Gorey, 2001). More importantly, studies of brain development suggested that quality experiences in early childhood can have a positive impact on the child's ability to acquire language, develop problem-solving skills, and form healthy, trusting relationships (Peterson & Park, 2003). Lastly, Gorey (2001) stated that the longer the child participates in the programs the higher the impact on IQ and achievement.

According to Anderson et al. (2003), preschool programs can help children prepare for school but not be sufficient to compensate for poor schools and learning environments once kids enter school. Nevertheless, the research concluded that preschools have a positive impact on Latino children (Laosa & Ainsworth 2007). Much of the research concluded that preschools have a positive impact on Latino children (Laosa & Ainsworth 2007). In addition, the authors noted that Hispanic children who attend high-quality preschool programs are likely to benefit as much as children from



other ethnicities, and in some cases, more. Similarly, providing access to high-quality early childhood programs assures a more successful transition to primary school.

On average, Head Start reduces the gap in test scores between Latino and non-Hispanic White children and two-thirds of the gap in the probability of grade retention (Currie & Thomas, 1999). Research on the impact of prekindergarten programs in Oklahoma, for example, found positive and persistent impacts of the programs on Latino children (Gormley & Gayer, 2005), but there was some variation by Latino subgroups. For example, Head Start had more of an impact on cognitive tests scores among children of U.S. born Latina mothers than for foreign born Latina mothers (Currie & Thomas, 1999).

Looking at Latino subgroups, Currie and Thomas (1999) found that Puerto Rican children in Puerto Rico who stay at home, do better in reading and math tests than children who participate in preschool programs. They attributed these differences to the lower quality of the programs available to Puerto Rican children in their native country. But in spite of the differences, the authors noted that preschool programs are generally viewed as beneficial for Latino children. Nonetheless, the research has been clear that Latino children who attend high quality preschool programs prior to entering kindergarten are better prepared academically and socially than their peers (Laosa & Ainsworth, 2007; Lee, Burkham, Ready, Honigman & Meisels, 2006).

**Influences of parent involvement.** Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979) was used as a framework for this study. His theory explained the complex layers comprising a child's environment. In his 1979 book, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Bronfenbrenner presented his Ecological Systems Theory. He compared

the layers to that of a set of Russian Dolls embedded within each other (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Bronfenbrenner (1979) described these systems as (a) microsystem, (b) exosystem, (c) mesosystem, (d) macrosystem and in 1986 added the (e) chronosystem. The first system, known as the microsystem, consists of the child's most immediate environment. This central entity stands as the child's initial source of learning about the world, which other authors also noted (Swick & Williams, 2006). These authors continued to expound on Bronfenbrenner's theory when they discussed the second system, the exosystem, which encompasses the connections and processes taking place between two or more settings where one does not ordinarily affect the developing child. Next is the mesosystem, which connects two or more systems in which the child, parent and family live (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The macrosystem is the largest of the systems and includes a family's cultural beliefs, values of society, and political and neighborhood occurrences, which are a conduit of energy in our lives (Swick & Williams, 2006). The chronosystem is the structure of all the dynamics of a families' historical context as it presents within the varying systems (Swick & Williams, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory (1979, 2005) captured the essence and the central role parents play in their children's educational trajectories. His constructs also offered insight into the need for teachers and other stakeholders to collaborate in helping build and strengthen relationships within families (Swick & Williams, 2006). As noted, Bronfenbrenner also played a significant role in the study of child development in the early 1970s. Based on this theory, Bronfenbrenner viewed a child's development as shaping his or her environment (National Institute for Early Education and Research, 2006).

In a study closely aligned with parent involvement and the how a child's development shapes the environment, Strayhorn (2010) drew on Bronfenbrenner's theory (1979). Strayhorn (2010) conducted research using linear regression analysis to determine the influence of affective variables such as parent involvement, teacher perceptions, and school environments on Black children's math achievement in grade 10. The author's findings included the role that locus of control, gender, parental involvement, teacher perceptions, and opportunity to learn, all influence Black students' math achievement. He set out to measure the influences of schools and families on shaping the personality factors of a person. He went on to say that the model has relevant assumptions about the ways in which background/social psychological traits such as self-concept (microsystem), family-level variables such as parental involvement (mesosystem), and school factors such as perceptions of teachers (exosystem) interact and influence individual-level outcomes, such as academic performance in math.

There were 24,599 students in the sample size, which was collected from 1998-2000. The students were asked to complete a base-year survey to measure math achievement. Strayhorn (2010) used hierarchical regression analysis to estimate the impact of math achievement based on three sets of factors - background/social-psychological variables (microsystems), family factors (mesosystems), and school-related variables (exosystem). Outcomes of the study, according to Strayhorn (2007), suggested that all three systems affect Black high school students' achievements in math and that the demographic variables of cultural background and the social/psychological variables were significant in predicting math achievement among the Black males in the study. Thus, in using Bronfenbrenner's theory, Strayhorn (2010) pointed out the importance of

context and of the roles that intersecting systems play in determining outcomes, meaning that family factors such as parent level of education and firm supports in the home may lead to academic capital (parent involvement).

Another theory that supported the dissertation research is the Weiss, Caspe and Lopez's (2006) Integrative Model of Family Involvement. This model suggests there are three evidenced-based categories that are linked to positive outcomes: Parenting, Home-School Relationships, and Responsibility for Learning Outcomes. Parenting includes the attitudes, values, and practices that parents use in raising young children. Parenting also includes supportive parent-child relationships and child-focused practices. Home-School Relationships pertain to both formal and informal connections between families and young children's early childhood education programs. Communication with teachers and efforts by the early childhood education programs to increase nontraditional contact between families and teachers such as home-visits or parent-discussion groups may be included. Responsibility for Learning Outcomes relates to how parents can support the language and literacy development of their children through direct parent-teaching activities, such as reading aloud and engaging in linguistically-rich conversations with their children.

Weiss et al. (2006) developed the Integrative Model of Family Involvement and refer to it also as Complimentary Learning. The model evolved over time from a compilation of work extrapolated from a wide selection of research on family involvement processes related to children's academic and social achievement. Their work encompassed research published over a six year period from 1999–2005 in the Family Involvement Network at Harvard University.

Halgunseth and Peterson (2009), in their study on parent involvement, referenced Weiss et al.'s (2006) Integrative Model as a template for family involvement, although the 2009 model sought to expand the model of parent involvement practices. The Family Involvement Model (Weiss et al., 2006) is evidence-based and is connected to positive child outcomes and also encompasses three important categories: (a) Parenting, meaning the attitudes, values and practices of parents in rearing youngsters; (b) Home-School Relationships, meaning the formal and informal linkages between family and school settings; and (c) Responsibility for Learning Outcomes, meaning the aspects of parenting that relates to activities in the home and community at large, which fosters learning skills in youngsters.

**Importance of parent involvement.** The research made evident that parent involvement plays an important role in a child's development (Arnold et al., 2008; Tang, Dearing, & Weiss, 2012). In a study conducted on the importance of parent involvement, Arnold et al. (2008) looked at the relationship between parent involvement and preschool and children's pre-literacy skills. The study also examined socioeconomic status, parental depression, and single parent households as predictors of the level of parent involvement. Participants for the study were 163 preschool-aged children from mostly low-income families, including parents and their teachers. There were a total of 157 parent participants in the study of mixed origins, such as Puerto Rican, African American, non-Hispanic White, and multi-racial. Mothers, fathers, grandmothers, and lead pre-school teachers from an urban New England setting made up the participants. Demographic information was gathered using forms were completed by parents and care-givers about their education, income, and single parent status. Questionnaires were completed.

Preschoolers were given the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (1981), which measures language and literacy skills in predicting future academic achievement. Results of the study provided empirical data to support the widely-held belief that preschool parent involvement is important. Also, through the use of a Likert scale, it was discovered that single parents are less involved in their children's schooling.

The findings Arnold et al. (2008) supported the results noted in Love et al. (2005), wherein they demonstrated that children participating in Early Head Start show sustained cognitive and language gains and that parents who were involved in the program were more emotionally supportive, read to their children more, and were less likely to use corporal punishment. Furthermore, the findings lend significant credence to the need for early childhood education, especially in light of low socio-economic status being found to be a predictor of the challenges families and single parents face in respect to being involved in their children's education (Arnold et al., 2008).

Tang et al. (2012) conducted a qualitative study investigating the associations and relationships between family involvement in school-based activities and children's literacy in their desired language (English or Spanish) during early elementary school years. The authors also looked at the literacy development of students who had bilingual teachers. The authors noted that between the periods of kindergarten and third grade, family involvement in school related activities showed increased gains for children who initially had literacy struggles. Literacy gains were more significant for children who consistently had bilingual instructors than for those children who did not have bilingual instructors. In addition, the authors stated that increased family involvement results in

better literacy skills at the third grade level, and this is especially true for children who initially struggled with literacy.

Participants in the Tang et al. (2012) study were 72 low-income children of Mexican-American families from an urban area in the western United States. Families for the study reported being of Mexican origin and speaking primarily Spanish in the home. Data was drawn from four sources: (a) child, parent, and family data collected at childbirth; (b) family questionnaires at kindergarten and third grade; (c) teacher questionnaires at kindergarten, first, and third grades; and (d) child literacy assessments at kindergarten and third grade. The data was gathered from the School Transition Study (Harvard Family Research Project, 2011), a longitudinal study that focused on children's early learning experiences.

Tang et al. (2012) addressed three research questions: (a) does low literacy performance at kindergarten more strongly predict increases in school-based involvement between kindergarten and third grade for children who consistently have Spanish–English bilingual teachers than for those who do not, (b) do children with low literacy performance at kindergarten demonstrate greater achievement by third grade if they consistently have bilingual teachers than if they do not, and (c) are differences in achievement explained by rates of family school-based involvement for students with and without Spanish–English bilingual teachers?

Findings revealed that the teacher's ability to communicate fluently in Spanish and English versus teachers who are monolingual may, to a large extent, determine school-based family involvement for Mexican-American families who speak Spanish (Tang et al., 2012). The authors also pointed out that it appears that Mexican-American

children are better supported in the classroom with a bilingual teacher. Furthermore, the findings indicated that classrooms with monolingual teachers appear to limit family involvement in school and, in turn, the achievement of students who had early struggles with literacy.

In essence, Tang et al. (2012) suggested that fluent bilingual teachers seem to be a better match for Mexican-American children's academic achievements. Furthermore, the authors suggested that Mexican-American parents are more likely to be involved in their children's education when teachers are able to speak Spanish and increase children's literacy skills through third grade. In general the research has established the benefits of parent involvement for all children. However, based on Tang et al.'s (2012) work with Latino parents, it is concluded that when parents are able to communicate with staff that speaks their native language, the parents are more receptive to being involved.

**Benefits of parent involvement.** The research has been clear that one of the central resources for academic success is parent involvement (Chang, Park, & Kim 2009; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006). Chang et al. (2009) conducted a study using Early Head Start research and evaluation database information to examine the effect of parenting behaviors on children's cognitive outcomes. The dependent variables were parental language and cognitive stimulation, parent-child interactive activities, and the Bayley Mental Development Index (MDI) of Children (1993). The authors used a two level longitudinal Hierarchical Linear Modeling technique (HLM). In the study, HML was used to analyze the longitudinal effects of parenting classes on parental cognitive stimulation on children's development. Multivariate analysis was used to examine the effects of parenting on the parent cognitive and language stimulation and the child-



interactive activities at 36 months of age, and to determine what would be the most effective predictor of a student's achievement later on in the child's schooling.

The overall goal for the Chang et al. (2009) study was to provide sound empirical research on the effects of active parental involvement in children's cognitive development. The findings revealed that when compared to families who did not participate in parenting classes, those who participated in the classes increased their children's cognitive and language stimulation over the years. Also, the parent classes helped parents engage in more parent-child activities, such as parent-child play, reading bedtime routines, reading daily, and reading frequently. Last, children of parents who participated in the parenting classes had higher scores on the Bayley Mental Development Index Assessment (1993). These findings supported the argument that parental involvement is an important aspect of development in young children's lives (Dearing et al., 2006). This finding further solidifies the need for this present study.

Dearing et al. (2006) also supported the findings on the benefits of parent involvement with a longitudinal study of children from kindergarten to fifth grade on family involvement in school and children's literacy. More specifically, Dearing et al. (2006) utilized individual growth modeling and latent growth modeling to examine the extent to which family involvement determined literacy performance. The authors developed the following research questions: (a) was average family involvement levels associated with average literacy performance, (b) was average family involvement associated with changes in literacy performance, (c) were changes in family involvement within families associated with changes in literacy performance?

Data for the study were taken from the impact evaluation prepared by the Comprehensive Child Development Program (CCDP, 1999), which was a federally funded early intervention program for low income children and their families from birth to kindergarten entry at 21 locations across the United States (The School Transition Study (STS) as cited in Dearing et al., 2006). The STS was a longitudinal study by the Harvard Family Research Project (2006) that examined the impact of family, school and community and how these variables factor in on the developmental role of low-income children from racially and culturally diverse populations from kindergarten through fifth grade. The authors noted that the impact evaluation was done for half of the children who were randomly assigned to receive intervention services. The other half was included in a control group.

The study was conducted in three diverse sites. One site was a northeastern city with a mostly African-American cultural background. The second site was a rural New England town consisting of an almost entirely European-American population. The third site was a western city with primarily Latino families. Maternal education, defined as the level of education of the mother, was used as a co-variant and as a potential moderator of family involvement in school. Of the initial 403 children participating in the CCDP, 329 were tracked from kindergarten to fifth grade in the STS. A total of 281 children were observed for other variables that were measured longitudinally in the STS, in addition to the complete data for co-variants.

Dearing et al. (2006) reported that results showed increases in family involvement in schools positively correlated with increases in literacy indicators. In addition, the authors stated that findings corroborate the usefulness of family involvement in schools

as a way to improve the achievement of children living in low-income families and illuminate the value of empirically modeling both family involvement and child achievement as developmental phenomena. Given the above key findings, increased levels of involvement were associated with literacy performance. Implications for schools is that they need to look at family involvement over the long term, optimally creating a learning environment that increases the involvement of families who are disengaged and then sustain that involvement across elementary school (Dearing et al., 2006).

**Barriers to Latino parent involvement.** Parental involvement can increase academic and language acquisition, improve behavior and attitudes toward school, enhance parent-child relationships, help parents improve their self-confidence and knowledge, improve home-school relations, and increase student's cognitive growth (Bermudez & Marquez, 1996). Trueba and Delgado-Gaitan (as cited in Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001), found that Latino parents have an authentic interest in their children's academic future but can face a mismatch between their expectations and those of the school. They also claimed that immigrant parents acknowledge expectations based on their school experiences in their country of origin. Parents frequently are apprehensive of teachers, and teachers may get frustrated trying to reach and engage parents across the cultural divide (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

Most immigrant families bring to the school a concept of their role and a developed sense of place that is reflective of deep-seated cultural beliefs and patterns of behavior and interaction which a school staff should assume within a social system and context (Chrispeels & Riverio, 2001). As such, Chrispeels and Riverio (2001) noted, when there are new situations, role changes, or a new culture introduced in schools, an

individual's familiar behaviors and patterns of engagement may not be appropriate. Many immigrant parents, especially those who are undocumented, are cagey and afraid of school personnel who work in the schools. These findings also suggested that immigrant parents hold assumptions and expectations based on their school experience in their country of origin. Parents may feel intimidated by teachers, and teachers may give up trying to reach and engage parents across the cultural divide. The research suggested that the role of parents may come in conflict with those of teachers who have an image of what constitutes a good parent (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2002).

Chrispeels and Rivero's (2001) study explored the effect on immigrant parents' sense of place in their children's education. For the study, the authors used the parent involvement typologies of Chrispeels (1992, 1996), Epstein and Becker (1982), Epstein (1992), and Swap (as cited in Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). Chrispeels (1996) conceptualized parent-community-school partnerships as having five major types of interactive relationships, involving (a) two-way communication; (b) support of the child, family, and the school (including meeting children's basic needs and parental expressions of support through attendance at school functions and fund-raising events); (c) learning about each other and how to work together; (d) sharing teaching responsibilities (including the presence of parent volunteers in the classroom); and (e) collaborating in decision-making and advocating for their children. This was a qualitative study utilizing interviews and questionnaires to determine whether parents would be more involved with their child's schooling if they attended a Parent Institute. Interviews were conducted with parents, children, and community members. Questionnaires were completed as a reassessment to determine parents' perceptions of their parenting practices related to

children's learning in school, attendance at school events, sense of self-efficacy and more.

The methodology for the study was a phenomenological ethnographic design (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). There were a total of two schools in a metropolitan area in California with 300 parents participating in the study. Participants were the parents who attended the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). There was an orientation session scheduled at each school in the spring. Over 300 parents attended (approximately 150 at each site). At the orientation the project was explained, and participants were asked to sign a release giving permission to videotape and to review their children's cumulative records. At the Institute, parents shared their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities primarily as ensuring their child's attendance, instilling respect for the teacher, encouraging and expecting good behavior in school by their child, meeting their obligations to provide clothing, shelter, and food for their children (sometimes in the face of considerable poverty), and socializing the child to their family responsibilities.

Data collection included (a) pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire, (b) participant observation and video-taping of all sessions, (c) in-depth interviews, and (d) review of artifacts. Records were obtained and reviewed. To identify parents' past and current perceptions of their sense of place in the school, parents completed an 84-item Likert-scale questionnaire in addition to interviews and video-taped classes. In-depth interviews were conducted in parents' homes or in schools. There were 11 families and 19 individuals who participated in the interviews. A purposeful sample was selected reflecting a number of factors: (a) parents who came by themselves and those who came as couples; (b) parents from both instructors' classes; (c) parents who had minimal

educational levels, and those with some college; and (d) those with a child just starting school and those who had several children with varied school experience.

Results showed that before attending PIQE, parents indicated that they were supervising homework, reading to their children, and attending parent-teacher conferences and school functions, such as Open House (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). However, the interviews, revealed that prior to attending the PIQE, the supervision of homework or engagement in reading activities was at a minimal level. The findings suggested that after parents attended PIQE, their perspective on involvement in their children's learning at school and at home expanded to include other types of involvement, such as being able to advocate and negotiate new relationships with their children's teacher and learning what is required for their children to be a success in school and beyond to the college years. Lastly, Chrispeels and Riverio (2001) noted that concepts about parents' roles, based on cultural beliefs brought from Mexico and prior cultural experiences, can limit the range and type of parent involvement. However, the authors asserted that these concepts are not fixed and can be altered through parenting education, such as PIQE, and that parents will be responsive when given new ways to construct their roles (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

In another qualitative study noting the barriers to Latino parent involvement, Robles (2011) worked with Latino parents attending a weekend parent participation program. Robles (2011) wanted to understand the experiences of parents attending a Saturday program, the types of courses that would encourage more participation, and to learn what some of the parent involvement practices were that would contribute to the growth of parent participation. The Robles (2011) study took place in a school district in

New Jersey and involved focus groups and interviews with parents, staff, children, and community members. She sought to understand why despite the knowledge of the benefits of parent involvement in children's education and the attempts to improve parental involvement in the schools, there still remained the fact that minority parents often are hesitant to participate in school. Also, the goal of the program was to involve all members of the family in the learning process and to strengthen the family unit.

The findings of Robles (2011) study revealed several important themes about the barriers to Latino parent involvement. First, the children in the study said that participation helped them to gain new skills, learn from other cultures, appreciate diversity, and gain information about their career paths. The findings also revealed that combining the special interests of the children led to greater motivation for participation. Next, the findings with parents in the study revealed that they were more motivated to participate when there was a warm climate in the school and relationships were encountered with other adults, extended family, and staff. Furthermore, the author pointed out that when the constituents in the community are trained in varying skill sets, everyone benefits.

### **Chapter Summary**

In conclusion, this chapter outlined the basic components of Latino parent practices in the United States and provided an overview of parent involvement in the United States. There have been many studies heralding the history of parent involvement in the United States and a historical perspective on Latino parent involvement, the importance of preschool education, importance of parent involvement, influences and benefits of parent involvement, the barriers to Latino parent involvement, and the central

role parents play in the education of their young children, particularly in the areas of home-school activities, and the sense of self-efficacy when parents are empowered.

Through the historical perspective of parent involvement, a solid foundation has been created on how early education began and how parents came to be involved in their child's schooling. In addition, a review of Latino parent involvement practices revealed that it is important to educate parents so that they can become more knowledgeable about what schools and teachers expect, are able to communicate, and learn how they can be an advocate for their children through involvement in school, and at home by helping their children with things such as homework (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Robles, 2011).

When citing the importance of preschool education, one study revealed how preschool education and parent involvement can improve the learning and development of young children (Arnold et al., 2008). Arnold et al. (2008) used a sample of 157 preschool children and the relationship between parent involvement and preschool children's pre-literacy skills. The study supported the widely-held belief that preschool parent involvement is important. It also revealed through the use of a Likert scale that single parents are less involved in their children's schooling.

The influences of parent involvement are many (Chang et al. 2009; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Wherry 2003). The theoretical perspective that guided the literature review was the Ecological Theory of Development (Bronfenbrenner, 1978, 2005). This theory explained the complex layers comprising a child's environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) presented his Ecological Systems Theory as a series of systems reflective of that of a set of Russian Dolls embedded within each other: (a) microsystem, (b) exosystem, (c) mesosystem, and (d) macrosystem. Bronfenbrenner's systems embody the key



components needed to interconnect the building blocks of a child's educational future. In addition, Bronfenbrenner's work demonstrated the need for parents to be optimally involved in their child's education and beyond.

Another theory that guided the dissertation study and noted the importance of parent involvement was the Integrative Model of Family Involvement (Weiss et al., 2006). The model suggests there are three evidenced-based categories linked to positive outcomes for children: Parenting, Home-School Relationships, and Responsibility for Learning Outcomes. The Integrative Model of Family Involvement was also selected because it along with Bronfenbrenner's (1978, 2005) Ecological Theory speak directly to the important role all stakeholders play in educating and developing the whole child.

The importance and benefits of parent involvement have been well-documented through research (Arnold et al., 2008; Fan & Chen 2001; Henderson & Mapp 2002; Jeynes 2007; Wherry 2003). The studies documented in this chapter contributed an understanding for the factors in the field of the importance and benefits of parent involvement. Chang et al. (2009) conducted a study to examine the effect of parenting behaviors on children's cognitive outcomes. Using Hierarchical Linear Modeling technique (HLM) and multivariate analyses Chang et al. (2009) found that parents who attended parenting classes stimulated their children's literacy skills and cognitive development. Moreover, the cognitive outcomes of the children whose parents participated in parenting classes were relatively higher than those children of parents who never attended parenting classes.

Dearing et al. (2006) used longitudinal data collected from participants from kindergarten to fifth grade to investigate family involvement in school and children's

literacy performance of diverse low-income families. The authors found that increased parent involvement was associated with improved child literacy. In addition, the authors noted that average literacy performance rose with more educated mothers, but diminished with less family involvement. Last, the authors added that their findings, which indicated that the value of family involvement between kindergarten and fifth grade is positively correlated with increased literacy gains and high levels of school involvement, may potentially have added benefits for low-income children who have the risk of low parental education (Dearing et al., 2006).

Last, this chapter discussed the barriers to Latino parent involvement, noting the studies of Chrispeels & Rivero (2001) and Robles (2011). Chrispeels and Rivero's (2001) set out to explore the affect on immigrant parents' sense of place in their children's education and how this could limit parents' involvement in their child's schooling. The authors used a phenomenological ethnographic approach and looked at whether participation in a parent institute would result in greater parent participation. Data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Results of the study showed that before attending PIQE, parents indicated that they were supervising homework, reading to their children, and attending parent-teacher conferences and school functions, such as Open House. However, the in-depth interviews revealed that prior to attending the PIQE, the supervision of homework or engagement in reading activities was minimal. The findings also suggested that after parents attended PIQE, their perspectives on involvement in their children's learning at school and at home expanded to include other types of involvement, such as being able to advocate and negotiate new relationships with their

children's teacher and learning what is required for their children to be successful in school and beyond to the college years.

The Robles (2011) study noted similar barriers to Latino parent involvement. The study involved Latino parents attending a weekend parent participation program and explored their experiences, what the courses would encourage more participation, how their participation could benefit the outer community, and what specific program involvement practices could contribute to the growth of a Saturday program for Latino parents. Robles (2011) stated that it is important to explore these questions to learn why, despite knowing of the benefits of parent involvement in children's' education and the attempts to improve parental involvement in the schools, there remains the fact that minority parents often are hesitant to participate in school.

The methodological approach for the Robles study (2011) was a series of focus groups and interviews. Twenty-five individuals were randomly selected for interviews to gather in-depth information to determine why participants attended the Saturday program. The findings revealed that the students who attended the program improved by measures of homework completion and attendance. In addition, the parents felt that the program kept the children off the streets and helped them to live in a diverse world. Finally, the parents believed the students could improve their skills and gain awareness about their career path. The group also noted that if they were interested in courses that were offered, they would attend. Finally, the authors discovered from the children's feedback that combining children's interest with academics is a better way of learning for them. Last, parents in the study believed that when a school was warm and represented an extension of their family, they experienced a higher degree of motivation to attend.

Parents also reported that attending the Saturday program allowed them to build relationships with staff and other adults, as in an extended family. Furthermore, Robles (2011) pointed out that when the constituents in the community are trained in varying skill sets, everyone benefits.

Chapter 3 provides information about data collection for the dissertation study. This includes where the data is collected, who are the research participants, what instruments are used in the data collection, an analysis of the data, and a summary of the methodology. Chapter 4 presents the study findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings.

## **Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology**

### **Introduction**

This chapter summarizes the research design and methodology for the study of Latino parent involvement practices in the United States. The chapter outlines processes for data collection and participants. In addition, this chapter discusses the reason for selecting a qualitative research methodology as the best approach for addressing the research questions.

A solid body of research established that when parents are involved in their children's education this leads to academic success, especially in addressing the ever-widening achievement gap of Latino and other racial and ethnic students (Dearing et al., 2006; Lee & Bowen, 2006; Moreno et al., 2011). Furthermore, research showed unequivocally that parents who are involved in their children's education help boost children's social/emotional development, including resiliency, self-confidence, improved relationships, greater social controls, positive peer relations, high tolerance, more successful marriages, and fewer delinquent behaviors (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003).

Despite this evidence, Latino parents frequently remain reluctant to become involved in their children's education (Robles, 2011). This reluctance to involvement can be attributed to several factors according to Quezada et al. (2003) who noted some likely barriers, such as language, as being the most challenging. Quezada et al. (2003) go on to say that the parents' inability to speak English causes feelings of low self-worth, since they do not read or cannot decipher complicated forms. In addition, parents are limited in

their ability to help children with their homework (Quezada et al. 2003). Due to these issues and a lack of limited literacy skills in the parents' own language, there is an even greater sense of helplessness and embarrassment. Furthermore, in the Latino culture, parents hold teachers in high regard and respect (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995) and fully expect it is the school's role to instill knowledge. In addition, many Hispanic parents feel that their role as parents is to discipline and teach their children how to respect others and behave while at school (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004; Tinkler, 2002). Lastly, research noted that parents frequently complain that school personnel are part of the barrier and all too often do not listen or respect them. Specifically, McDermott and Rottenberg (2000) noted that in many instances teachers who teach in urban areas often lack knowledge and respect of the ethnicities and cultures of the children they teach. Robles (2011) stated the barriers for parents include feelings of inadequacy, adoption of a passive role by leaving education to schools, linguistic and cultural differences, lack of role models, information and knowledge about resources, suspicion about treatment from educators, and economic, emotional, and time constraints. This, she noted, is especially true for single-parent household or families in which there is one parent, guardian, or family member responsible for children.

Lightfoot-Lawrence (2003) adds another perspective. That is that, historically, teachers and parents have a love/hate relationship, and society tends to assume that parents and teachers should be natural allies and partners. Despite this assumption, Lightfoot-Lawrence argued that parents and teachers tend to feel "estranged" from and suspicious of one another. She aptly noted that "generational echoes" (p.5) can become problematic, meaning that distant memories surface for both teachers and parents and can

potentially interfere. These memories may include negative hurtful experiences from childhood that comes to light in adulthood when parents have children in school.

Research questions that drove the dissertation study were the following:

1. How do parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement, and what does parent involvement mean to them?
2. What are the factors that affect parent involvement practices of Latino children?
3. What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents?
4. Are there differences in parent involvement practices in the Latino culture that have contributed to the ways in which Latino parents involve themselves in their child's school experiences?

The purpose of the phenomenological research was to explore the study of Latino parent involvement in the United States. A phenomenological study allowed the researcher to highlight details/realities, and to identify phenomena through the lens of the participants. From the human "sphere" this normally translates into gathering "deep" information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s)" (Lester, 1999. p. 4). In addition, phenomenological study is concerned with lived experience from the point of view of the individuals (Lester, 1999).

In order to unearth authentic answers to the research questions, a qualitative design was selected. In addition, the qualitative design provided a means for exploring and understanding the meaning several individuals or groups ascribe to social or human

problems (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) stated that a qualitative inquiry employs different philosophical assumptions, strategies of inquiry, methods of data collection, and analysis of interpretation. Thus, this study used focus groups and in-depth interviews to collect data. Specifically, qualitative research was interpretive and required the researcher to describe the participants and setting in order to develop relevant themes and meaningful conclusions, and then led to more questions that needed to be asked (Wolcott, 1990).

In qualitative methods, researchers are interested in how participants make sense of their experiences and lives (Merriam, 1998). In order to fully capture the lived and authentic meaning of Latino parent involvement, it was important to utilize a design that would promote dialogue. Wilkinson (2004) stated that traditionally, the focus group provides a means of collecting data, which involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion or discussions focused around a particular topic or set of problems. Furthermore, focus groups are less threatening to participants, and this forum is helpful for participants to share their views, ideas, opinions, and perceptions (Krueger & Casey, 2000). In addition, a primary advantage of the focus groups is that it allows the researcher to gather a large amount of information over a relatively short period of time and is also effective for collecting a broad range of views on a specific topic (Mack, Woodsong, Mcqueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005).

For the purpose of the dissertation study, the researcher conducted two focus groups, one for teachers and the other for teacher assistants at an Early Childhood Community Based Organization (CBO) in New York City. The purpose of the two focus groups was to uncover the perceptions of teachers and teacher assistants on their



perceptions of parent involvement practices within the Latino culture. Both teachers and teacher assistants responded to the same four questions as the parent participants. They were the following:

1. How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does parents' involvement mean to them?
2. What are the factors that affect parent involvement practices of Latino children?
3. What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents?
4. Are there differences in parent involvement practices in the Latino culture that has contributed to the ways in which Latino parents involve themselves in their child's school experiences?

In addition to the focus groups, interviews were conducted with seven Latino families. The Latino families were selected based on the number of years they have been in the United States (zero to three years and more than five years, respectively). The original design was to interview three sets of parents who have been in the country for zero to three years and three sets of parents who have been in the country for over three years. However, due to weather conditions and other family commitments, there was one interview scheduled that was cancelled after numerous attempts to reschedule.

In-depth interviewing allows the interviewer to explore the respondents' feelings and perspectives on a subject (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011). In addition, in-depth interviewing allows the researcher to get an understanding of the lived experiences of individuals and the meaning ascribed to the experiences (Seidman, 2006). When

individuals tell stories, they draw from a reservoir of experiences from their consciousness. In addition, Seidman (2006) stated that interviews cover a broad range of information which offer preset, standardized, normally closed questions and more open-ended questions (meaning participants can respond freely using own thoughts and not prescribed yes or no answers), which leads to friendly conversations (Spradely as cited in Seidman, 2006). For the purpose of the dissertation study, open-ended in-depth interviews were utilized, meaning that they allowed for more informal dialogue flow. Through this, the researcher gained information that added to the existing body of scholarly work.

### **Research Context**

The dissertation study took place at a not-for-profit Community Based Organization (CBO). Although the researcher has been employed as an Early Childhood Director at a neighbouring CBO, the use of this facility, rather than that of the one where this researcher has been employed, was selected for the data collection in order to eliminate any bias resulting from existing relationships. For example, the question of whether the parents who interacted with the researcher on a daily basis would be forthcoming and authentic in their responses was a factor. Similarly, the question as to whether instructional staff would be able to respond openly and honestly was an issue, warranting the use of the sister facility.

The site was selected because it provides services to a large population of Latino families. The research site is in close proximity to the Bronx Museum of the Arts and a short distance from Yankee Stadium in New York City. This large multi-service organization provides a wide array of services and educational programming for at-risk

families in the South Bronx. The CBO began in the early 1990s and in the later part of the same year, the agency was instrumental in building permanent residences for over 130 families in the community. Moreover, the organization services over 35,000 diverse families annually in providing healthy and affordable residences, early childhood and youth programs, and comprehensive family services, to name a few. As with other CBOs in the community, funding is made possible from various sources such as direct government grants, private foundations, and individual donors (Young, 2004).

The CBO houses a Head Start program, which was used as the early childhood program from which to collect the data. The CBO has 111 children in the early childhood Head Start. As noted in Chapter 1, Head Start was of particular interest to this study because it has been a cornerstone of engaging parents' involvement in education (Head Start Office, 2011). Head Start is federally funded and nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Head Start is a high-quality program that provides low income families with the resources to promote school readiness and social competence for children from birth through age five. The program serves children and families by providing a learning environment that supports children's growth in language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical development, and health, social and emotional development (Head Start Office, 2011). The Head Start program was recognized by the organization Root Cause as one of seven programs making an impact in New York City. Root Cause is a not-profit research and consulting firm that partner with not-for-profits, philanthropy, government, and businesses to promote and advance solutions to society's pervasive social issues (Root Cause.org, 2010).

Furthermore, Head Start also provides comprehensive services to the parents of enrolled children that are responsive to each family's ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage (Head Start Office, 2011). Paying attention to families' ethnic, cultural and linguistic needs has been shown to be of major significance (Colombo, 2005). Children should be surrounded by caring individuals and be in a setting that is readily responsive to their families, communities, and racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds (Chang & Tobiassen, 2000).

Parent participants for this study had children in the Head Start program. In addition, teachers and teacher assistants from the Head Start agency were invited to be part of the two focus groups (one for teachers and one for teaching assistants) via an initial meeting arranged by the Head Start Director. The purpose of the focus group was to gather the practical, lived experiences of teachers on the parent involvement practices of Latinos. Likewise, parent participants selected for the study took part in various in-depth, structured interviews and were asked to respond to the research questions.

### **Research Participants**

Families participating in the Head Start Program hailed from Ecuador, Honduras, Mexico, Sub-Saharan Africa, Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, as well U.S. born African American families. The percentage of Latino families enrolled in the program was 84 %, Sub-Saharan Africa 11%, and 5% other, meaning bi-cultural or mixed race. Thus, data from immigrant families was easily acquired. However, parent participants for the study were solely selected from Latino parent participants whose children were enrolled in the Head Start Early Childhood Program for 3 to 5 years-old.

As previously noted, data collection included two focus groups (teachers and teacher assistants) and parent interviews. Parent interviews involved six families. Two of the families had been in the United States three years or less and four families had been in the country over five years. As noted earlier, the design was changed due to adverse weather. Instead of three families who had lived in the U.S. for three years or less, there were a total of two families. In addition, the original design sought to interview three families who had been in the U.S. for over five years; instead, four families were interviewed (three single mothers and one couple).

### **Instruments used in Data Collection**

In addition to the focus groups and interviews, a demographic fact sheet was given to all the parents in order to select those families that met the criteria of the number of years they had been in the United States. The researcher was the primary instrument in gathering the data. A translator assisted during the parent interviews for those participants who spoke only Spanish. Parent participants were asked to complete a demographic fact sheet (Appendix A), and parents, teachers, and teacher assistants' responded to the same four questions.

### **Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis**

In September 2012, the researcher sought approval from the Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College. Once approval was obtained, the data was scheduled to be collected in October 2012 (See Appendix C for a complete timeline). Research and data collection was concluded in December 2012, and data was analyzed from December 2012 through January 2013.

An initial letter of invitation (Appendix D) was sent to the teachers and staff requesting their voluntary consent to participate in a focus group. Interested staff signed and returned the consent within a week of receiving the letter. As agreed upon beforehand, the site director collected the letters, and the researcher picked up the consent forms.

Volunteers who participated in the study gathered at an initial meeting, where they were informed that their names would be kept in confidence and relevant pseudonyms would be used to ensure confidentiality. In addition, participants' personal information and identity were coded by implementing a system of name substitution before the session began to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. For example, participants were assigned numbers, letters, or pseudonyms for the researcher/moderator to use during recording or note-taking (Mack et al., 2005). Furthermore, all participants were reminded that they should respect each other's privacy and anonymity (Mack et al., 2005). As an added measure, all documents and pertinent records were locked in a file cabinet in the researcher's home.

An initial meeting was held with all 20 families in the Head Start Program, along with the director of the program, the researcher, and a translator. The parents received a letter of invitation (Appendix D) and were asked to sign a consent form to participate. In order to encourage participation, the parents were told that families who participated would receive a \$20 gift certificate. A brief data collection sheet (Appendix A) was completed in order to determine which families met the criteria (recent immigrants and those in the United States over five years). From the volunteer pool, two families who had recently immigrated in the last three years or less were selected, and four families

were selected from those who had been in the U.S. over five years. The families were selected using this process to gain a better comprehensive perspective on Latino parent involvement from varying points of view. For example, Latino parents new to the country would likely have a different perspective on what is expected pertaining to parent involvement practices in the United States than those parents who had been living in the United States five or more years.

When the families were selected, they were invited to participate in the study with a bi-lingual invitation in Spanish and in English (Appendix D), which explained the study and asked them to voluntarily participate and sign a consent form (Appendix E). The same process used with the participants in the teacher and teacher assistant focus groups was also followed with the parents. Specifically, the consent letter was signed and returned to the director. As with the staff information, participants' identity was not printed in written documents, but was coded by implementing a system of name substitution before the session began to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. For example, participants were assigned numbers, letters, or pseudonyms for the research/moderator to use during recording or note-taking (Mack et al., 2005). Furthermore, all participants were reminded at the beginning and end of each session of the importance of participants respecting each other's privacy and anonymity (Mack et al., 2005). As stated earlier and reiterated here for clarification, the researcher arranged a parent meeting with the site director to talk about the study. Families learned of the existing research, which stated Latino parents were hesitant to become involved in their children's education, and that the researcher's goal was to learn directly from parents

what caused this reluctance, in hopes of finding answers and ways to improve involvement in their children's education.

Within a week of receiving consents from the teachers and teacher assistants, focus groups were scheduled to begin at the study site. Shortly thereafter, appointments were arranged with the Head Start director to interview parents.

The focus group questions (Appendix B) were used to guide the questioning during the focus groups and the interviews. As previously noted, the researcher was the primary instrument in gathering data from the focus groups and the interviews. Data from the focus groups and interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed using NVivo (2010). In addition, once data was collected it, was sifted and coded according to themes that unfolded. Coding was defined as identifying and categorizing patterns in data symbols, descriptive words, or categories (Bryne, 2010).

Themes and coded data were analyzed in order to determine the challenges and barriers of Latino parent involvement practices. Graphs and tables were used to note specific patterns, factors, and trends that emerged. Demographic data was also analyzed to determine any significant patterns of information and its relationship to parent involvement.

### **Summary of the Methodology**

This study was qualitative in nature. Specifically, there were two initial meetings held at the study site to inform the staff and the parents about the study. Two focus groups were conducted with teachers and teacher assistants to glean their perceptions about Latino parent involvement practices based on four research questions. Parent



interviews were conducted with six families, two who had been in the United States for less than three years and four who had been in the United States for over five years.

The data was recorded and later transcribed using NVivo (2010) to determine patterns and themes that emerged regarding the issues surrounding the Latino parent involvement practices. Results were recorded in narrative form and charts and graphs were used where appropriate to enhance the demographic data and the themes that emerged.

Chapter 4 described the findings developed from data analysis in order to discover perceptions of parent involvement from teachers, staff in a preschool program, and the Latino parents of the school who have been in the United States from zero to three years and over five years.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to explore reasons why there is a reluctance of Latino parents to engage in their children's school. Furthermore, the study investigated barriers and challenges of parent involvement practices of preschool Latino parents. The study concentrated on four research questions, which all participants responded to (teachers, teacher's assistants and parents).

The qualitative study included focus groups, interviews, and a demographic survey that was completed by parents. The focus groups created an open, relaxed environment, which allowed participants to discuss different points of view and perceptions within the context of planned, research questions. Prior to the start of the focus groups and interviews, a letter was sent to the Director of the preschool program where the data was collected to inform her of the study. After initial meetings, the researcher received a letter from said Director sanctioning the study at the Head Start program. Letters in Spanish and English and consents in Spanish and English were given to the Director to distribute to teachers, teachers' assistants and parents and were returned to the researcher. The demographic survey was completed by the parents and included information about name, age, gender, country of origin, marital status, level of education, number of years in the United States and employment. Demographic information on the participants can be found in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3.

Table 4.1

*Teacher Demographic Information*

Participants	Years Teaching	Level of Education	Country of Origin	Ages			
				20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
AN 1	14	Bachelor	Latina American		X		
KS 2	10	Master	White American		X		
VC 3	5	Bachelor	Latina American	X			
SL 4	21	Master	Korean American			X	

Table 4.2

*Teacher Assistant Demographic Information*

Participants	Years Teaching	Level of Education	Country of Origin	Ages			
				20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59
JB 1	23	High School	White American			X	
EL 2	6	Some college	African American			X	
MR 3	4	High School	Dominican Republic		X		
AH 4	6	Some college	Mexico		X		

As previously noted, there were two focus groups (see Tables 4.1 and 4.2). The first group was with the teachers and the second group was with the teacher assistants.

Demographic information about each group was collected during the focus group

sessions. There were a total of four teachers in the first focus group, which consisted of all females; one of whom was between 20-29 years old, and two between 30-39 years old. The other female was between the ages of 40-49. Of the four teachers, there was one of Asian descent, a White American and two Latinas. All were teachers of 4 year-olds. Two teachers held Masters Degrees and the others held Bachelor's Degrees with credits towards their Masters. There were a total of four of teaching assistants in the second focus group, which consisted of four females (African-American, White American, and two Latinas; one from Mexico and the other from Dominican Republic). The ages of the teacher assistants are as follows: one between 20-29 and 30-29, and the other three are between 40-49. All work with 4 year-olds.

Table 4.3 shows the demographics for the parents who were interviewed. The individual interviews for parents included a social worker who served as a translator for Spanish speaking parents. The interviews were comprised of seven parents; one couple from the Dominican Republic (DR), two mothers from the DR, and three mothers from Mexico. Of the seven parents, two held Bachelors Degrees (one from Mexico and the other from the Dominican Republic). Another had some college level education. The remaining four had from second to twelfth grade education levels. Of the group, two were legally married, one was single and the others were in a relationship; meaning that they were living with their partner. In addition, the age of the parents interviewed fell into three categories; three parents reported their age in the 20-29 range and four were 30-39, and one reported as being 40-49 years old.

Table 4.3

*Parents' Demographic Information*

Participants	Gender	16-18	20-29	30-39	40-49	Country of Origin	Marital Status	Level of Education	Employed	Years in U.S.
D1	F					Dominican Republic	Single	12	Yes	3
AH2	F				X	Mexico	Single	Bachelor		6
S3	F		X			Mexico	Married	2	Yes	15
A4	F			X		Mexico	Single	9	No	12
Y5	F			X		Dominican Republic	Live in partner	12	No	3
O6	M			X		Dominican Republic	Married	Some College	Yes	23
O7	F		X			Dominican Republic	Married	Bachelor	Yes	25

There were a total of eight parents interviewed, with two parent interviews being conducted with those who have been in the country for three years or less and four parent interviews with those who have been here for five or more years. Of those who have been in the U.S. for three years or less, two were from the Dominican Republic and are both single. One of the mothers had an older daughter and a newborn. Her 4 year-old was part of the program. Similarly, the other mother had one child who also attends the program.

Of those who have been in the U.S. for five years or more, the first parent interview was with a mother who came from Mexico. She held a Bachelor's Degree from Mexico in Hotel Management. She was single and had a 3 year-old son and worked part-

time as a domestic so that she could care for her son. The second interview was with a married mother of four children, the youngest of whom attended the program. The mother reported only going as far as the second grade in school and has lived in the United States for 12 years. She was unemployed at the time of the interview. The third interview was conducted with a mother with seven children who as also from Mexico and had lived in the United States for 15 years with a live-in partner. She had a ninth grade education and worked as a domestic part-time when work was available. The fourth interview was with a married couple that has two young children. Both husband and wife worked full-time. The wife holds a Bachelor's degree in Human Services and the husband reported having earned some college credit. The husband migrated to the United States from the Dominican Republic at the age of 10 and has been in the United States for 23 years. The wife was also from the Dominican Republic and has been in the U.S. for 25 years.

The remainder of this chapter is organized into responses from the three groups participants: teachers, teacher assistants, and parents. The following research questions guided analysis.

1. How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does parental involvement mean to them?
2. What factors affect parent involvement practices of Latino children?
3. What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents?

4. Are there differences in parent involvement practices in their own country that have contributed to the ways in which they view how they involve themselves in their child's school experiences?

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

Analysis of the teaching staff focus group indicated that the teachers have strong beliefs regarding why Latino parents are hesitant to participate in their children's school. Mostly, the teachers believed parents lack understanding and really do not know what is expected of them. On the other hand, a few were very firm in their beliefs that some parents are frustrated with the demands put upon them and need time away from their children. Focus group discussion revealed that many families have five to seven children. In addition, three of the teachers (AN1, KS2, and VC3) said that there are those parents who "clearly just don't want to be bothered."

Analysis also indicated that there are many barriers and challenges Latino parents encounter. One significant finding was that parents have multiple appointments as reported by staff and parents, and they cited this as a reason why they cannot be involved. In addition, the findings showed that some parents have difficulty balancing life challenges and thus cannot be engaged with their children. Other findings, such as not speaking the language, parents' own fears of school, and other cultural challenges are shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Leading Themes for How Parents Define Involvement from Teacher Focus Group

Number of Themes	Themes	Sub-themes
Theme # 1	Lack of Knowledge/Information	<p>Parents don't understand what it really means to be involved.</p> <p>Parents don't know what is being asked of them.</p> <p>Parents are non-responsive when asked for information.</p> <p>Some parents lack education.</p>
Theme #2	Lack of Comfort	<p>Parents are afraid to ask questions because they are embarrassed that they don't know.</p> <p>Parents don't know what they are supposed to do or what their role is so they just stand back.</p> <p>Parents don't have experience going into the classroom.</p>
Theme # 3	School is Responsible	<p>Some parents don't know how to parent.</p> <p>Parents don't feel they need to be involved.</p> <p>Teachers are in charge of school matters.</p> <p>Parents are non-responsive when asked for information (bring in a picture).</p> <p>Parents believe teachers and school are responsible once children are dropped off</p>
Theme # 4	Cultural Differences	<p>Cultural traditions teach them that the classroom and the home should be separated.</p> <p>Parents have little or no education.</p> <p>Parents believe home is home and school is school.</p>
Theme # 5	Parents are stressed	<p>Some parents hurry the children inside.</p> <p>Some are upset when there are PD (professional development) days.</p> <p>Parents don't have time to spend with their children in the classroom.</p>

Analysis of data from the focus group with the teaching assistants, indicated that the teaching assistants believe that parents do not understand when they are asked to be involved in the classroom. This finding is consistent with what the teachers said. The



assistants felt parents needed to get more information from the program about what involvement means. In addition, the teaching assistants felt that this information should have been provided at the parent orientation prior to children starting school.

Much like the teachers, the assistants believed that barriers to involvement resulted from parents' cultural norms. The parents' frame of reference is limited to what they experienced in their country or from their parents before them. Thus, the concept of parent involvement may be foreign. Specifically, the assistants noted that in many of the parents' native country there is no relationship between teachers and parents. Parents drop their children off at school and leave. Additional barriers such as parents' lack of knowledge, comfort, work, and multiple appointments are displayed in Table 4.5.

Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) noted the central role parents play in their children's learning and the bigger role teachers play in building and strengthening families. However, the findings suggested that this connection is elusive for both stakeholders.

**Research question one.** How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does parental involvement mean to them? Through the focus groups, five themes were identified. The identified themes were representative of teachers and teacher assistants' perceptions on how parents define parent involvement. Table 4.4 provides the leading themes and associated sub-themes that emerged from teachers and Table 4.5 provides leading themes from the teachers' assistants

Table 4.5

*Themes of Factors from Teachers Assistants Which Inhibits Involvement*

Themes	Sub-themes
Family /Medical Responsibilities	Teachers report parents have medical appointment at different times for families. Appointments for social services (Medicaid, food stamps and Women Infant Children program).
Work	Parents have inflexible work schedules. Parents making hourly wage cannot miss a day of work. No work-no money coming into the household.
Language	Parents do not speak English. Not literate in Spanish. Parents are unable to speak to their children because they are now speaking English. Teachers' inability to speak Spanish. Parents fear being criticized by their own children. Different Spanish dialects cause confusion and staff is unable to comprehend.
Cultural	Parents feel teachers are in charge of school matters. Lack of knowledge/background differences. Parents don't have experience of going into classrooms. Experience in their country is to sign children up for school and not be responsible for providing support. Parents think bringing the child is being involved. Little or no education.
Life Stress	Some parents want to drop children off and go. Parents lack of interest in taking part. Need time alone for personal needs.
Parents Fears of Their Own School Experiences	Some parents did not do well academically in school. Bad experiences from their past in school with teachers and other adults. They don't want to repeat this with their own children.

The common theme that emerged from the focus group with teachers in response to question one is that “parents do not understand what is expected of them and do not comprehend what to do in schools (participant KS2). Teachers reported that many of the parents lack the ability to follow through with what is asked of them. Participant AN1 stated, “You are constantly asking them, I need your help with this, and they’re like unresponsive.” Other teachers in the focus group acknowledged similar challenges in

getting parents to contribute to the school community, such as bringing in the family picture for a unit. This sentiment was echoed repeatedly by other teachers. Participant AN1, for example, with frustration in her tone stated,

“I think they just don’t know. Some of the parents just don’t know what it really means to be involved at school, or what they are supposed to do or what their roles are, so they just stand back. It is just difficult. I think it is cultural, it’s education difference and other factors.”

Yet another noted (participant VC3), “It is very hard to get them to do something when you ask. It’s really been a difficult project trying to get the family pictures in. I spoke to my assistant today, I said, realistically, I don’t see it being done until January.” The teacher said, of the 20 children in her class she only received 2 pictures. All teachers acknowledged that, for the most part, Latino parents do not know what the teacher expects from them when they are asked to be involved. In addition, because of the culture differences parents are confused about their role.

The second theme that emerged from the teacher focus group findings is that some parents do not participate because they are afraid, unable to read, and are ashamed to acknowledge that they do not know what is being asked of them. The teachers mentioned that parents are afraid of being embarrassed. As such, they avoid interacting with teachers and engaging in the classrooms with their children. In contrast to the above statements, a third theme emerged in which parents do not feel they need to be involved. Many Latino parents hold the view that teachers are in charge of school matters and parents takes care of the home. Furthermore, the findings revealed that parents believe that teachers are the “boss” and are to be given the utmost respect (Participant AN 1).

The fourth theme that unfolded was cultural indoctrination, meaning that parents follow in the tradition of their parents. Participant KS 2 reported that, “Maybe parents are following the traditional way of parental involvement, maybe years ago it was, this is the classroom, and this is the home, so whatever you do at home this is how I teach the child and for some parents they are just not comfortable going in the classroom.” The teacher continued that she still hears parents talking among themselves that in their country parents drop children at school and then go home.

Lastly, the fifth theme from the focus group revealed that parents are stressed from everyday life and challenges. One teacher said (Participant AN1), “Many of these parents have four, five and more children to drop off to other schools or to a babysitter.” Teachers reported that parents can be seen hurriedly dragging their children inside, taking off their coats. Participant VC 3, said “I have noticed some parents seem like they can’t wait to walk out the door—you turn around and, boom (throwing her hand up) they are gone (paused) - - like here is my kid, he is in school, bye! bye! By the time you turn around to talk to the parents, they are gone.”

**Research question two.** What factors affect parent involvement practices of Latino children? In the teacher focus group, it was reported that there are many factors that impede parent involvement for Latino parents. The number one theme that emerged was that teachers felt that the many appointments parent have for children and themselves impacts parents’ timeframes and their ability to participate. The second theme that emerged was that the parents did not having the necessary education or prior knowledge and background to understand what it means to participate. In addition, a third theme was the language barrier. Along with the theme of language as a factor that impedes

involvement, was parents' fear of their children learning English to the point of not being able to communicate with the parents, which would lead to the parents being ostracized by their children. The fourth theme was that a few teachers on staff do not speak Spanish. For example, one teacher reported that because she does not speak Spanish, the parents do not speak to her, and she gets information second hand from the assistants.

The following quotes illustrate the themes developed from teacher responses to question two. Participant VC2 stated that when parents are asked to help in the classroom, they say, "I can't, I have a lot of appointments to doctors and to social services" and if they ask parents to come work with them they say, "Oh, I have an appointment."

Participant AN1, added:

"One thing I noticed with a lot of these parents is that they don't have a salary, they have hourly wage. They don't work, they don't get paid. Their finances are so tight, that for them they can't come into the classroom and spend two or three hours in the classroom. Another thing is culture—a lot of them are coming from countries where parents were not involved in schools. Their parents never set foot inside schools except to drop them off, to sign them up. Parents are not seeing the value and benefits of being involved with their children. All they see is the money they are losing that is not coming in the home."

Another significant revelation was that Latino parents, according to Participant KS2, do not have prior knowledge or education about being involved, and this poses a barrier. She explained, "I think it's their background, education, too, because if you have knowledge and background, then obviously you are going to do those things." Participant

KS2 went on to explain that when she grew up, it was different for her because her parents went to Parent Night and were involved. She also added that her parents were educated and had prior knowledge of the American system. However, KS2 stated, “These, then you see, these parents, there is no background, there is, you know—it was not done for them, so they don’t know how. They were not exposed so I am not saying anything bad, but some of these people lack education and exposure.”

One of the last teachers to respond, participant SL4 talked about the language problem, which exists for some of the Spanish speaking parents. She aptly noted however, that the language barrier is not just a problem solely for Latino parents in the center. Everyone concurred. Participant SL4 continued, “We have Malian and Gambian mothers, specifically, like you explain something to them, then you think you might be getting the message across, but you are not.” They don’t understand what you are saying. If you tell them there is no school, or there is half a day or something going on, then they either don’t show up, or they show up late.” Another thing participant SL4 mentioned was, “We had a language problem because we had deaf families here and we kept trying to communicate with the families.”

In response to SL4’s comment, the researcher asked whether the Latino parents were more responsive to the staff than other groups. Participant KS2 responded that they (meaning Latino parents) have those same issues. She said, “We have those Spanish that can speak English but still it is difficult.” Participant KS2 continued that more bothersome for her is the fact that, “I can’t communicate with them, because, you know, they don’t understand me and I don’t understand them, so there is still an issue there.” Participant KS2 acknowledged that, “It is nice that there is an assistant there that do

speak Spanish, and that is great, and I am thankful for that. But, it's still difficult, like if she is not in the room and I need to talk to a parent. I have to find somebody else. For me, it's just frustrating.”

The researcher asked if the issue of teachers not being able to speak Spanish is a factor that inhibits parent involvement and the response was that it was a factor.

Participant AN1 indicated that this is a factor not only for the teacher but parents, too.

AN1 stated, “I have had parents come back to me and tell me--well my child is speaking English now and I do not understand what my child is saying.” She continued to say that as teachers we hear this same story from parents constantly, and that is, “My child has stopped speaking Spanish.” She indicated as a teacher she wants the children to speak English, but you also want them to retain their native language. Ironically, she noted that while a vast majority of the staff speaks or understands Spanish there is still difficulty sometimes to understand some Spanish parents who speak another dialect.

In the teacher focus group, the researcher asked whether there was fear on the part of parents that their children will begin to speak more English, hence, ostracizing parents. Participant AN1 responded, “Yes, there is. Parents have voiced this very concern. I personally emphasized (to parents) to speak to them and respond to them in Spanish only in the home, because they (children) will have English in school; they are going to have English from the television. Parents need to learn English and on the other hand you want parents to keep Spanish going for their children's sake. Parents need to learn English, because this year's teacher may know Spanish but the next year's teacher may not.” The researcher interjected that it would be beneficial for parents to be enrolled in an ESL class while their children are being educated, so that they are able to communicate with

the teachers and their children. Participant AN1 responded in kind with, “Parents need to take ESL even as the children are getting older so that they can know what their children are involved in with their peers.” Participant VC3 said, “I would encourage them to go to ESL class. We are sitting in a room now where a number of the parents from upstairs attend ESL class because they want to learn English before their children go to the big school and they are going to have to communicate with the teachers.”

Another significant contribution by VC2 was when she said, “What would make parents not want to come into the classroom is because sometimes parents have had bad experiences with schools. Maybe they have had a bad experience in school as a child and they just don’t want to come into the classroom because they think it’s probably going to happen again. The experience could have been horrible and they may not have liked school.”

The researcher wanted to learn, in cases where parents are rushing to leave the classroom without talking with teachers, whether it is that the rushing resulted from parents having to go to work. Participant SL4 responded that in many instances parents just rush in and out. However, participant AN1 indicated that some parents do work and, because there are many children to drop off, there is no time to talk to teachers. However, she says there are those parents who have nothing to do with their lives, but they do not want to deal with their child, whether the child is well behaved or poorly behaved. For whatever reason their thinking is, “I have to get rid of my child.” Some parents, she noted, are honest and say, “I can’t deal with my child at home,” and I say, “What are you talking about—your child is fine here.”



Participant AN1 continued to say these are the same parents who bring their children burning up with fever and give them Tylenol, because parents do not wish to deal with their children. These are the parents AN1 said would not take time to sit with children even for half an hour to have breakfast, or read their child a story. In the next breath AN1 said she understands the parents' views because there are children whose behaviors are out of control, and she feels the parents of these children deserve a break.

**Research question three.** What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents? The recurring themes for this question were that there needs to be more workshops, parent orientation, open houses and events during the mornings and afternoons to accommodate families. Table 4.6 displays the over-arching themes.

In response to the question, participant VC3 asked whether it was possible to have workshops specific to parents being in the classroom, and events in the afternoons or late in the mornings to accommodate families with early morning appointments. She went on to say, "It would be good to create an anonymous survey to see what the issues are for families that hinder them from participating." Participant SL4 concurred with participant VC3 about the workshops and added, "Handbooks are helpful and translators would be a great asset to families who do not understand English (families from Sub-Saharan Africa) just as it is being done for Spanish families." Participant KS3 added, "Generally, it would be helpful to have workshops about parents being in the classroom and precisely what is expected of them. Maybe an open house to see what the child is doing monthly and newsletters." Participant KS2 believed open houses are a great opportunity for parents to learn firsthand what goes on in the classroom.

Table 4.6

*Themes From Teachers of What Preschools Can Do to Bridge the Gap for Latino Parents*

Themes	Sub-themes
Workshops	<p>Workshops and events in the afternoons or later in the mornings to accommodate families with early appointments.</p> <p>Workshops on what parents can do in the classroom.</p>
Open Houses/Orientation	<p>Open house once a month so parents can see what their child is learning.</p> <p>Parents can be in the classroom and do activities with their children.</p> <p>Outline for parents what is expected at orientation.</p>
Meetings	<p>Where parents are asked for their opinions.</p> <p>Be part of decision-making about the curriculum and where parents can feel some control over what their children are learning.</p> <p>Hold meetings to share what they can do with their children at home.</p>
Surveys/Newsletter/Emails	<p>Anonymous survey to learn what parent issues/needs.</p> <p>What hinders their involvement in the classroom?</p> <p>Parents can learn what is going on in the classroom.</p> <p>Events/workshops in center.</p>

Lastly, participant AN1 said, “It would be good for parents to have control over what their children are learning. They would feel a sense of responsibility for their children’s education.” Additionally, AN1 said preschools should, “Hold meetings to discuss the types of activities that are being done in the classroom. Our program is about getting people to participate. Each class should have open house so parents can experience what their children do throughout the day.” She continued to say, “Workshops should be held for moms and dads separately and together as part of getting parents more involved in educating them on the importance of their role and empowering them to voice their ideas and opinions on their child’s education.”

**Research question four.** Are there differences in parent involvement practices in their own country that have contributed to the ways in which they view how they involve themselves in their child’s school experiences?

Teachers were candid in their response as it relates to the families of their students. A number of themes emerged. The first significant theme was that parents do not understand what is expected of them when they are asked to be involved and there is a lack of knowledge about what happens in the classroom. The second theme is that parents do not have background knowledge, because many have parents who were not involved in their education beyond taking them to school and dropping them off or signing them up for school in their native country. Teachers shared that parents have mothers and fathers who were uneducated; however they still tried to send their children to school. Another significant revelation was that parents might be fearful of entering the classroom environment because they are embarrassed about their lack of knowledge.

Teachers also mentioned that parents rear their children with the value system of their homeland. Some of these values are shown in Table 4.7

Table 4.7

Themes of Cultural Practices Used by Latino Parents with Children

Themes	Sub-Theme
Respect /Listen	<p>Parents stress to children daily they must listen and follow rules.</p> <p>Children must focus on learning by being respectful to teachers.</p> <p>Parents do not tolerate their children misbehaving.</p> <p>Disrespect to teachers cause parents to lose face.</p>
Permission to Spank Children	<p>Parents encourage teacher to discipline children (put belt in book bag)</p> <p>Teacher can spank child.</p> <p>Parents encourage teacher to discipline child if necessary.</p> <p>Parents tell teachers to reprimand children.</p>
Parents Discipline of Children	<p>No TV/Wii video games or other electronic games.</p> <p>Parents report of spanking child at home.</p> <p>Some parents reprimand inappropriately.</p> <p>Parents tend to threaten children to behave or they will be punished (not clear what punishment involves).</p> <p>Parents do not tolerate their children misbehaving</p>

In response to the fourth question, participant VC3 said, “I can recall my mother telling me stories about when she was growing up and going to school the teachers used a ruler to hit them.” She continued, “Here in the school, I have had a parent (a father) come in my classroom and put a belt in the cubby.” He said, “When he misbehaves hit him.” The researcher asked the teacher whether it was only Latino families that give permission to hit their children. She answered, “No. It is also done by parents from Africa and I have witnessed firsthand a child being hit by the parent in the school.” Participant VC3 added, “I told my assistant, I am not going to say anything else.” She added, “Latino parents will hit their kids and tell us after the fact, whereas the African families will do it in front of you.” As a result VC3 stated, “The parent will ask, “How my child was?” The answer would be, “Child is beautiful, oh wonderful.”

In addition, participant AN1 said, “In most Latino countries—the Central and South American countries—even now, they use the ruler on the kids. And in those countries the parents just drop off the kid and that’s that. There isn’t the thought of helping in school. It’s kind of like teacher is boss.” She continued to say, “I had one Latino father ask me is his child behaving.” The father said, “I am telling you if she misbehaves, I give you permission to reprimand and do what you got to do.” Participant AN1 said the parent told his daughter that she is supposed to listen to the teacher and when the child leaves home she is a representation of the family. The father went on to say that they are supposed to show respect, “You know you are the teacher (*maestra*).” AN1 added, “When they greet you, it’s not Ms. (your name), it’s Teacher, when they speak to you, meaning that the term ‘teacher’ is used as a respectful term for that person.”

The researcher asked teachers to comment on the cultural construct *respeto* and participant VC3 commented that she was raised the same way. “When I was growing up, my parents warned, you better behave out in public, don’t embarrass me.” Participant AN1 said, “When it comes to Latino kids, parents don’t want to see their child misbehaving, they feel embarrassed.” AN1 also said that in the center teachers give children the freedom to express themselves—children can say ‘NO.’ However, she continued to say, children still need to respect teachers. AN1 noted, “For the Latino parents who have only been here a few years, these Latino parents, they get embarrassed. They don’t want to deal with it because the child is being disrespectful. Meanwhile, as teachers we are saying, “Wow, the child is expressing themselves.” Participant AN1 went on to say, “As a child, my mother and grandmother warned me to be respectful to the teacher. Both my mother and grandmother said, “Remember, the teacher could be wrong, but let us deal with the teacher.”

Other teachers shared that respect is a big deal for Latino parents and many warn their children before leaving, “Listen to your teacher,” or firmly tell them to behave, and this is done daily. The teachers added that you can see the parents pulling the child and saying “Remember what you were told at home.” Participant KS2 stated, “While I don’t understand Spanish, it says it clear from the parents’ body language that the child is being warned.” KS2 also shared, “I am not Latino, but parents had the same values of respect, respect for the teacher, and this respect is stressed in other cultures.” Participant KS2 acknowledged, “Working with Latino families is a new experience for me and it is challenging.” Participant SL4 concurred, “Respect is across cultures and respect is reinforced in my culture as well.” SL4 acknowledged also that while she does not speak

Spanish, her assistant shares the information that was conveyed regarding the children and culture.

In reviewing the focus group findings for teacher assistants, there were four teaching assistants who participated in the focus group. The findings in this focus group were similar to that of the teachers in that a number of themes surfaced about parents' lack of understanding, parents needing more information about involvement, and parents frustrated by life's challenges and with their own children. In addition, teacher assistants believed that some parents make excuses about why they can't stay in the classroom and they believe others need time away from their children. Some of the common findings for the same four questions given to the teacher assistant focus group are displayed in Table 4.8.

**Research question one.** How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does parental involvement mean to them? Participant JB1, a teacher assistant, said, "We all understand, but I don't think parents do understand. I think they just think parent involvement is just bringing their children and not being involved in the classrooms. I feel like parents think we are the only teachers in their lives." JB1 noted that parents do not see their roles as teachers. The second theme that surfaced was that parents have a tendency to be frustrated. Participant EL2 agreed. "I have noticed that when you do ask parents to be involved in the classrooms, a lot of times they seem frustrated because they have to come in the classroom and deal with their own children, and not just their own, but other parents' children." Participant JB1 continued to say, "Parents always have an excuse, like, they have something to do, maybe tomorrow, or maybe they may stay five minutes, ten, and they have to leave"

Table 4.8

*Teacher Assistants' Perception of How Latino Parents Define Involvement*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Lack of Understanding	<p>Parents don't understand what it means to be involved.</p> <p>Parents believe just dropping the children off equates involvement.</p> <p>Parents believe teachers have the sole responsibility to educate children.</p> <p>Parents know that they have a role to play in their children's education.</p>
Need more Information	<p>Parents don't know what to do.</p> <p>Parents say tell us what to do.</p>
Frustration	<p>Parents appear to not want to deal with their own children.</p> <p>Parents seem untruthful about why they cannot be involved</p> <p>Parents are frustrated and appear to need time for self after spending the weekend with children.</p> <p>Parents want to drop children off and rush out.</p> <p>Parents are frustrated- need time for themselves.</p>
Time Constrains	<p>Parents voice that they don't have time to assist in the classrooms.</p> <p>Parents have many things to do and that they have appointments</p>
Work	<p>Parents cite having to work.</p> <p>Some parents work. Others do not work and fabricate stories that they have appointments and later parents return with shopping bags.</p>

Participant MR3, agreed wholeheartedly. “You’ll say to parents, can you be involved with the children in the classroom, and they will always say, “I don’t have time; I need to do this, this, and this” (counting her fingers). She continued to say, “Other parents will say, I don’t know what to do.” With frustration, MR3 said, “But we explain to them what we are going to do. But in many instances they don’t want to deal with their children.” MR3 also noted that at other times parents will say, “I have to work.” “We even have open house and only two parents show up, and we have 20



children and parents left” (echoing again their disbelief). MR3 then adds, “They didn’t stay, they said they would be back, but they just left.”

The researcher asked whether the participants felt parents were making up stories about why they cannot participate. MR3 said that some parents do work, but others do not work. “Parents just don’t want to deal--they always have appointments. Sometimes they say, I have to do something. I will come back, but they never show up.” The other assistants agreed this is a regular practice. JB1 added, “At times parents just think being in the classroom with their children is a waste of their time. At other times they return with shopping bags and do not cover that they had gone shopping.”

**Research question two.** What factors affect parent involvement practices of Latino children? Teaching assistants in the focus group also felt there were some parents who simply did not wish to be bothered. The findings from the focus groups revealed there were many factors that dissuade Latino parents from being involved. One non-Spanish speaking teacher assistant echoed the same sentiment that was described in the teacher focus group. She said she finds that not speaking the language creates a barrier between her and the Latino parents. Much like the teachers, assistants cited language as a barrier to involvement, lack of comfort, work, cultural (not required in parents’ native country), and parents having other children to care for. Common themes that emerged from the teacher assistants’ focus group as inhibiting parent involvement is shown in Table 4.9. Participant AH4 shared, “It’s language. Yes. That’s why each classroom has to have a bilingual teacher, and it could be two bilinguals, but a bilingual teacher for that purpose, to be able to communicate with parents and children.”

Table 4.9

*Teacher Assistants' Perceptions on Factors that Inhibit Parent Involvement*

Themes	Sub-themes
Language/Communication	<p>Parents' inability to speak English language.</p> <p>Non-Spanish speaking teachers create barriers to communication.</p> <p>A parent acting as translator removes the possibility for a confidential parent/teacher discussion.</p>
Lack of Comfort/Knowledge	<p>Parents are not aware of the benefits their involvement in the classroom would give their child</p> <p>Parents are not comfortable in the classroom.</p> <p>Parents are not comfortable in classroom with teachers and working with own children and children of other parents.</p> <p>Parents cannot read and write.</p> <p>Parents need more information about being in the classroom.</p> <p>Some parents do not want to be bothered.</p>
Work/Appointment	<p>Parents cite having multiple appointments (medical, social services, WIC).</p> <p>Parents say they have to work.</p> <p>Parents do not always say what it is they have to do (evasive at times).</p>
Child Care	<p>Parents indicate that they have younger children to care for.</p>
Culture	<p>Culturally parents are not familiar with parent involvement.</p> <p>Parents go to school in their country to enroll or drops off/pick up children.</p>
Time Alone	<p>Parents need time for self after spending weekend with children.</p> <p>Parents feel of frustration from being home with children over the weekend. Parents may feel that they have limited time after dropping child off to school.</p>

The second theme that developed during analysis was that many Latino parents don't feel comfortable enough. Participant AH4 said, "It could be because of language, or they just don't feel comfortable being in the classroom or having to be with other children." On the other hand, participant EL2 stated, "I feel differently, I feel sometimes

the parents feel like, I don't know if it's frustrated, or they need that time by themselves because they deal with their children on the weekend, and maybe they have to pick them up a certain time, so when they drop them off, they feel, well, I need this time for me. So they don't want to come to school and have to stay with them also." Furthermore, participant EL2 believed that parents need more information on how they are to be involved in the classroom-- maybe their children will be happy, happier with their parents in the room. The researcher then asked whether the attitudes of the parents are cultural. Participant MR3 responded, "Yes. In my country, they just drop the children at school, and then they go home, that's it." Also, like EL2, participant MR3 concluded, "I think parents don't have information, they still misunderstand what is expected of them. We need to give them information so they know how to deal in the classroom."

**Research question three.** What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents? The responses shared by the assistants aligned with that of the teachers. However, there were differences. The themes that emerged from analysis of the responses to question three are outlined in Table 4.10.

While the teacher assistants discussed the varying meetings and workshop that the agency could implement, participant EL2 stated,

"I think more information, in their native language, would let them feel comfortable to come in and to talk about their culture, their country, and how things are done there. We could see what's the same or different and work with them. Parents will need to understand also what's different in our country."

Table 4.10

Teacher Assistants' Perception of How Schools Can Bridge the Gap for Latino Pare

Themes	Sub-themes
Information in Native Language	Parents need information in Spanish (flyers, newsletter and other documents.
Parents Need Opportunity to Communicate and Have Discussions	Discussions where parents can talk about their culture, country and experience with school.  Help parents to feel comfortable.  Help parents through discussions about the American school system and what it means to be in involved.  Teachers can learn what is the same or different about the culture and work with the parents
Open Houses	Hold more Open Houses where parents can see what children are learning.  Have more Parent/Child Activities.
Field Trips	Field trips are outdoors and in a neutral space.  Parents are more comfortable.  Parents feel closer to their children.  Helps to build rapport.

Other participants in the focus group agreed with EL2's statement. Participant AH4 said that in her country, the Dominican Republic, "They just bring the kids to school. They go home. But they need to understand that they can be part of their children's life, work with the children. Yet, they just bring children and drop and then go home." Sounding frustrated, participant AH4 said, "They need to get involved so that the children get support from parents and teacher, both together."

The question was raised as to what point parents should be provided with information. Participant JB1 mentioned that it should be done during parent orientation, before the kids even start. "They're given a parent handbook; I don't know whether they look at it. We had our open house last week. We say, we have an open door policy in the center, classrooms. Only two parents come in and volunteer (two Latino parents). I think there should be more open houses." Participant MR3 continued, "I invite the parents to come and read one book, they can be in Spanish or any other language. They can decide what day works for them" and then went on to say that only a handful of parents show up for book read.

JB1 felt that trips are very helpful for the programs to have. "We have parents volunteer for trips, and I think that makes them more comfortable, closer to their kids, closer to staff outside of the norm, the everyday." AH4 added that cultural celebrations and Thanksgiving and Mother's Day/Father's Day luncheons draw the parents in.

Table 4.11

*Teacher Assistants' Perception of Cultural Childrearing Practices Used by Latino*

*Parents*

Themes	Sub-themes
Punishment/Discipline	<p>Some Latino Parents still discipline children by spanking.</p> <p>Parents tell or threaten children to behave or they will be punished.</p> <p>Children sometimes mention that their parents will be mad. Teacher assistants are concerned this could mean physical discipline.</p> <p>Teacher assistant fearful to communicate with parents about children because of disciplinary practices.</p> <p>Teacher mention when misbehavior is reported to parents, next day child is not in school.</p> <p>Teacher assistant threatened to tell mother about misbehavior, child reacted by crying but obeyed.</p>
Respect/Listen	<p>Latino parents tell or threaten children daily to listen and respect their teachers and other adults.</p> <p>Some parents physically tug on children's collar reminding them to behave or else they will be punished.</p> <p>Punishment means taking away electronic games, TV or can be emotional and not physical.</p>

**Research question four** Are there differences in parent involvement practices in their own country that have contributed to the ways in which they view how they involve themselves in their child's school experiences? Teacher assistants share their perceptions to this question below and themes are displayed in Table 4.11.

Participant EL2 responded to the question of cultural differences by saying, "I am not Latino. I have different perspectives being American. I don't how the Latino cultures are where they live but here some of them are really Americanized and some aren't. I don't know what they say to their children in their native language, but I know that

sometimes it seems like they are screaming at their children.” For clarity, the researcher asked EL2 if she was referring to the Americanized families. EL2 answered, “No, No, the ones who only speak Spanish to their children. The American ones seem not as reactive. On the other hand, it depends on each parent, they come from different countries, and their upbringing is different.” Participant MR3 continued to add to the conversation by saying, “The parents from another country are a little more involved than the Latino parents that are born here.”

The researcher then asked the teacher assistants to talk about the issues relating to parents telling their children to be respectful. Participant MR3 said she hears parents saying this daily. MR3 said, “Latino parents-say the same. “You need to listen to the teacher because otherwise you’re-when we get back home you will be punished.” Participant JB says, “We don’t know what punish is going to be. I know for me punishment would be like taking away something from them (i.e. a toy, not letting them watch TV). But for some parents you don’t know what that will be.” The researcher then asked the teacher assistants what their perceptions were of the idea of punishment for the Latino families. Participant MR3 said, “For the Latinos sometimes they are going to whip them and others might take away toys for the whole weekend.” She continued to say that parents will tell the child the toy is being taken away because, “You need to listen, you need to behave, you need to respect the teacher, the adults.”

Participant EL2 added, “Like parents are a little bit different, because when they talk to the children about punishment, they talk by saying, ‘You are not going to watch TV’, or ‘You are not going to play the Nintendo Wii this week.’ Not like before, they just say, pow-pow (meaning a spanking).” Again for clarification, the researcher asked

whether the American Latino parents are more likely to say to their children that they will not watch TV or play electronic games. EL2 and MR3 concurred with the statement. JB1 then added, “I don’t speak Spanish, but I go by the tone of the voice that parents will speak to their child in Spanish. You can see their facial expression.” Participant EL2 says that like JB1 she doesn’t understand the language, but she can see some of the children get so scared, intimidated, by their parents. And sometimes, as she states, the students say, “I don’t want to go home because my mommy or my daddy is going to be mad at me.” Participant AH4 said, “In my case, I speak to the social worker and tell her to speak to the mother with this specific child because he is acting scared and don’t want to go home.” Participant EL2 continued, “It’s so bad that sometimes when you see the kids so scared of their parents, because you don’t know what is going on in the home. It could be emotional, not physical.”

Participant MR3 acknowledged that while she does not see children being scared of their parents in the school, she has seen it outside of school, in the community. “A lot of Latinos hitting or saying harsh words, you know, bad words in the street. And I don’t feel comfortable to say stop, stop this, or, because it’s only a child.” The researcher asked whether this is a behavior that Latino parents would have displayed in their country or is this only in the United States. MR3 responded, “It is here in the United States, not being comfortable and this is how they react to it here as opposed to their country and I think it’s education level too. Parents are being hurried. I see parents hurrying the children, say, ‘Hurry up, hurry up!’ You know, the children has little steps and parents has long steps. They are pulling the children and they are saying bad words and I don’t know they are frustrated because (of) time, and (they) have to work. Mostly every day I come I see



some parents doing that.” Participant MR3 then added, “Over the years that parents, when you tell them that their child misbehaves, or we have concern about something, the next day the child won’t be at school.”

The researcher asked for clarity about the statement that parents’ level of education can be a factor on how they parent and MR3 said, “Sometimes for me, parents’ level of education depends on how they deal with the child.” The responses of MR3 and the other assistants indicated that parents rear their children based on how they were reared in their culture. For example, parents may decide to warn children to listen, respect teachers and adults, while other parents may give, ‘pow-pow’ a Spanish term meaning spanking. In addition, the teacher assistants say they observed that more ”Americanized” Latino parents are more apt to punish children by taking away electronic games and TV, rather than physical punishments..

**Parent interviews.** In reviewing the results of parent interviews for those who resided in the country for three years or less, the results indicate that they were surprisingly in- tune and interested in what their children are learning, despite not fully grasping what involvement means. However, the parents say they are eager to learn. One parent explained that she initially observed other parents who have young children in programs going to their children’s school and that she has friends who explained to her that she too, would be expected to volunteer in her daughter’s school. The parent participant stated she did not know what to expect but acknowledged that once her child was registered in school she would have to help her child; meaning she would have to attend meetings and volunteer in the classroom.

Table 4.12

*Parents' Perception of Involvement for Those Residing in the United States Three Years or Less*

Themes	Sub-themes
Eager to Learn	Both parents acknowledge that they do not fully understand parent involvement but are interested in their children's learning. Parent knows they have to help their child.
Meetings	Both parents want to attend meetings, parent/child activities and workshops to learn and interact with children/teacher.
Classroom Support	Both parents are willing to help teacher in classroom to do whatever they can

The second parent participant indicated that she has some understanding of parent involvement. The parent stated that she went on trips with her eldest daughter and the only obstacle to her being involved would be medical appointments for her infant. On the other hand, both parents, excitedly, added that they are willing to learn and attend meetings. One parent participant said she was surprised to see such diversity of people at the first meeting she attended. She continued to say that she felt confident when she realized that she can talk about herself and contribute to the conversation at the meeting. Additionally, parents residing in the U.S. three years or less indicated that given enough notice of meetings they would change work schedules or reschedule appointments to make themselves available for parent involvement activities.

Table 4.13

*Parents' Perception of Involvement Residing in the United States Five Years or More*

Themes	Sub-themes
Lack Full Understanding of Involvement	Two parents who have lived in the states for more than 12 years could not articulate what is meant by parent involvement.
Meetings/Workshops	Two parents understood that they need to participate by attending workshops and meetings because it is required. One parent stated she is unable to read and write and as such is unable to participate in the classroom.

Findings from the parent interviews for two parents residing in the country more than twelve years indicated they found it surprising that they did not fully grasp what involvement means nor could they articulate how their involvement influences their children educational trajectory. The parents living in the U.S. for twelve years simply understood they need to attend meetings and volunteer. One of the findings that stood out the most was of the parent who has lived in the U.S the longest. This parent's understanding of involvement was that she is to attend meetings and volunteer in her child's class. However, she added that she is unable to because she works, and working to care for her family of seven is of utmost importance. Furthermore, she added that she could do neither of these because she is unable to read and write.

Table 4.14

*Understanding of Parent Involvement Based on Education Level*

College Educated	12 <sup>th</sup> Grade Education or Less
College educated. Two parents have a solid understanding of parent involvement and understand the importance of home-school connections.	Parents' with 12 <sup>th</sup> grade education understands that parent involvement is equally as important.
Awareness of providing various outings and cultural experiences to further advance their child's knowledge.	However, parents' views involvement as helping teacher in the classroom, going on trips and attending meetings.

The findings from parent participants residing in the United States longer than five years varied. For example, the parents who hold Bachelor's Degrees and have college credits explained they are very involved in their children's education and support their children in the home and in school when their schedule permits (take children to the museums, parks in Bronx and Manhattan, library, and engage children with activities at home, including enforcing cultural practices). Furthermore, parents with higher levels of learning were able to articulate the many ways in which they reinforce education in the home and verbalize having high expectations for their children's future. Parents with higher levels of education conveyed that through daily conversations with their children, parenting practices, and cultural upbringing they remind their children that education is a vehicle for success and a better life.

Conversely, while parents with 12<sup>th</sup> grade education and higher understood that their involvement in their children's school and attending meetings/workshop helps their children, there was no conversation beyond this. For example, there was no discussion of outside activities or conversation about expectations for the future. In contrast, a single mother interviewed who holds a bachelor's degree expressed that she has frequent conversation with her 3 year-old son about the importance of college and her expectation that he will attend college in the near future.

A surprisingly finding for this study is that, despite the many years (12-15 years) Latino parents have lived in the United States, many reported not understanding what is meant by parent involvement. Common themes for the parent interviews relating to question one is outlined in Table 4.15

**Research question one.** How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does involvement mean to them? The findings from the parent interviews from the two groups were not markedly different. However, one noticeable difference was that a parent who is educated is more apt to engage their children in activities outside the school. In response to the above question, participant D1 who has only lived in the United States three years said,

“When I was asked to join a meeting at my child's school, I was very nervous. I did not know what to expect. But when I got there, I was surprised to see so much diversity, so many languages. I found that I was not alone with my language struggles. I found I could talk about myself and wanted to be there for my child. I figure I was going to learn a little bit of a lot of different things. I asked ‘What kind of questions are they going to ask me at this activity?’ But I felt good

because I know that I can give explanation about myself. I did enjoy it because I participated in the activity. I know it involves going into the classroom and participating in activities.”

Table 4.15

*How Latino Parent Participants Defined Parent Involvement (Both Focus Groups)*

Themes	Sub-themes
Volunteering Classroom	Help the teachers to clean and to help teacher with other children. Help teacher with activities. Read to the child. Learn more and help children.
Going On Trips	Attend trips with my child and help with other children to zoo, museum and library.
Get Involved in Every Aspect of Education	Learn about the school. Learn about the teachers. Find out about the child’s behavior. Helping the child and being on top of the child when it comes to homework or reading. Doing activities at home, not just what the school does.
Parenting	Rearing the child (discipline is important). High expectations that the child will excel beyond parent. Family-oriented activities in addition to school. Instill family traditions.
Meetings	Active involvement of both parents. Attend meetings at the school. Attend workshops. Attend ESL class.

Participant Y5 who has lived in the United States for three years or less responded, “For me parent involvement means working with the teacher in every aspect of the child’s work and volunteering activities with the teacher. My older daughter, I help in her school, with activities.” Participant Y5 was asked whether she did home activities with her child and she said, “My daughter reads to us every night at 7:30 after dinner. I

talk to them, about their future, but we don't go out. We always stay in the house and watch TV. We don't go anywhere. My neighbor takes my daughter to church on Sunday."

In contrast, participant A2 from the over five year group responded, "Yes. Sure. I want to be involved with my child 100%, even if I don't have time. It's the only thing that doesn't allow me to participate." Participant A2 continued, "If teachers asked me to do something or print information it would be a pleasure to help. But I don't have the time because of work." A2 kept emphasizing, "I am a single mother. I have to work, and if I lose one day work is no good for me and my son and I have to pay rent, food and clothes." Participant A2 continued, "I ask his teacher how he is doing every day. I know he cries a lot. But I take him to library and read and play puzzles when I get home from work after giving him his bath."

Participant O6, who was the only male in the group, has lived in the States over 20 years. Regarding what parent involvement means, he said, "Helping the child, being on top of the child in all facets of his or her education. When it comes to homework or when it comes to reading or when it comes to engaging child in more activities. And other family events, whether you take them to the zoo or museum, so that the child can learn and develop." Participant O6 added, "The combination of both (home-parenting) that's when I hear involvement. But your roots kick in as well and you remember how you were raised." The researcher asked participant O6 whether he meant that by 'roots' he was talking about his country of the Dominican Republic and he said, "It's discipline. Discipline was top priority-my parents were both teachers and that also they instilled. They knew what it was like for a child that wasn't behaving and they would come home

and be rigid. Things got done the right way. I had to do the work. It was a lot of pressure put on us because they were teachers. They expected you to excel. Back then I did not understand what was going on. Later on I realize that they wanted me to do better.”

The researcher asked whether in his culture, discipline meant that his parents would spank him if he was not being respectful or doing what was expected. Participant O6 said, “In Dominican Republic, yes. My mother would never hit us, she would sing to us which translate into the beaten is coming if you don’t change the behavior. My father was most strict. If I wasn’t doing my work you would be punished. If you did well you were rewarded.”

Participant O7, wife of participant O6, has lived in the United States a few more years than her spouse. She said, “My parents came as immigrants in the ‘70s. My father was a factory worker and my mother was an exchange student from the Dominican Republic. She was more educated. My mother was more actively involved with my school. My dad always took a backseat and watched my mother-like, ‘Okay, she will takes care of everything.’” Participant O7 continued, “I am trying to incorporate a system so we both can be involved with our child’s education and not just one parent. We want to create our own system to use a little of what we were born with and what we know and we are trying to be more involved now as a family with our child’s education.”

Participant O6 said, “For the most part, most Dominican men, they just take a back seat on education. They are sort of like-they just go out and work and they let the woman take care/handle most of the school work and things like that.” Participant O6 continued, “The culture here is a little different, the way you engage your child. I think



between being an immigrant and being with the American culture is that engagement between parent-child is totally different in DR.” When asked to clarify that statement, he continued, “In DR it is an understanding among people and here it is about what level of control you have on a child. Here it can be a whole big thing if you reprimand your child. Here there are rules and regulations and where you can’t put your hand on the child. Your child can be taken away.” When asked if this happens in the DR, the parent continued to say, “No. Parents have the right to reprimand their child if they do something wrong and there are no repercussions. I think it helps. It’s the respect factor. I can’t say I was fearful of my parents. I would respect them.”

The conversation continued on what parent involvement means to parents and Participant S3, who has been in the country over five years, responded by saying, “Volunteering in the classroom, going on trips and attending workshops and meetings, for me that is involvement.” When asked whether they take part in the classroom activities participant A4 (over five years) stated, “I am helping in the classroom and attend the meetings and workshops so I can help my daughter. She has to get a better life than me.” Then, participant S3 added, “I don’t take part because I don’t speak English, and I can’t write. I don’t know what to do, and work and have appointments.”

The researcher asked the participant whether she was aware that there is an English class offered at the program and participant S3 said she was not aware of the class. The social worker, (with a look of amazement) asked participant S3, why she did not know about the class and she responded that she did know and then shrugged her shoulders. This is indicative of communication issues that surfaced with the population in question. Teachers and teacher assistant stated that in many instances they will

communicate with parents about their children or events that are taking place in the program and some parents will be responsive and others not. For example, if there is an event some parents may show up while others say that they did not know. Meanwhile, teachers will say that parents were told directly by staff.

Table 4.16

*Factors Perceived from Parent Interviews Which Inhibits Involvement for Latino Parents*

Themes	Sub-themes
Inflexible Work Schedule	<p>Parents work schedule whether it is full/part time impedes their ability to volunteer or attend workshops/meetings at school.</p> <p>Parent working part-time as domestic also experiences inflexibility in work schedule.</p> <p>Parents also fear taking time off from work and losing job.</p> <p>Parents fear loss of income and have to decide on the overall welfare of family or one child.</p>
Appointments	<p>Parents with young children have medical appointments.</p> <p>Parents also have social services appointments and sometimes have to go to pick up WIC (Women Infant Food Program).</p>

**Research question two.** What factors affect parent involvement practices for Latino children? The parents interviewed had varying views about the factors that impact them. The significant themes are highlighted in Table 4.17.

A reoccurring theme showed that parents' inflexible work schedule prevents involvement, be it part or fulltime. Participant D1 said, "I am only off on Thursdays. Also, I have doctor's appointments during the day for the children." The researcher asked if she can make adjustments to her schedule to participate in activities in her child's program and she responded, "I have done the adjustments for the appointments and also with work. Like if there is an activity and it falls on a day that I have to work, I will talk to a supervisor and they can change date. But only if I know in advance about meetings or trips."

Analysis showed that time was also an issue for participant A2 who said, "In my situation, the only factor is time. I have to work and from my point of view that is the only factor." A2 continued, "I speak the language English so that wouldn't be a factor that would keep me from the classroom." Participant A4 added, "I can't volunteer because I have to work and if I don't work, no pay. I have seven children. Other times I have no one to stay with my children." Participant A4 also said that for many parents work is a factor and they cannot be in the school full-time. "I have four children and they need me everywhere so I cannot be in three different schools at the same time. And other times I have appointments. Appointments are generally at the same time as meetings and activities."

Couple participants O6 and O7 said, "Our work schedule. It limits us from going on trips and stopping into the class to read or do an activity. We feel bad. Prior to (being

at) this center she (our daughter) was in another center in close proximity to our jobs. We took turns dropping in to read to the children or check to see how she is behaving and talk with her teacher.” The couple indicated if their place of employment had more flexibility in scheduling, it would be helpful. Participant S3 acknowledged that she could never take part in school activities. She stated, “I have seven children and only when I could find somebody nice enough to take care of my children, I could go once in awhile. It’s only this year that I have been more involved because I have a total of seven children. Now, the smallest one-now I have a little more time to go on trips or volunteer. But before, I could never do that with other children.”

Participant Y5 (less than three years), in contrast, stated that nothing hinders participation in their children’s schooling. Participant A4 added, “I always take part in activities in school. The question is strange to me because I am always here as much as I can. I didn’t go far in school. I want my children to be better than me.” Participant Y5 added, “Nothing is stopping me. I have all my time free. The only thing would be appointments for the baby (Y5 has a newborn).” She went on to say, “I attend all the meetings and the activities and the performances that she does.” Despite what Y5 said about being involved, analysis of the data from the teacher focus group revealed that Y5’s daughter does not participate on field trips because the child’s father is fearful that something can happen to the child (such as the child getting lost). Y5 acknowledged that they do not take their children out except to visit the child’s grandmother.

**Research question three.** What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents? A common theme that arose from data from both sets of parent interviews was that teachers and administrator should provide more

information about curriculum and schedule workshops in the morning and afternoons to accommodate parents' work schedule. Other parents felt the program is a great start to their children's future. The themes from the parent interviews are displayed in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17

*Parent Perspectives on How Schools Can Bridge the Gap for Latino Parents*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Meetings/Workshops	Parents want meetings and workshops to be scheduled for AM and PM to accommodate parents that work or have appointments.
Communication	Parents feel teachers can be more forthcoming with information about curriculum and activities so they can help their children at home.
Rapport Building	Teachers and administrators can attend meetings,
Opportunities/Support	workshops, and other parent activities to build rapport/greet and talk with parents, and to provide support so parents they can learn.
Learning in Head Start	Program is good for children. Children are learning. HS is better than a babysitter where children watch TV all day.

Participant D1, who was in the fewer than three year group stated, "It is important for the administration to build relationships as far as when there are activities related with parents—that way as an English learner, I can learn the English language. I am learning

and it's continuous." Participant Y5, also in the fewer than three years group, indicated that staff is very helpful to her child at school. She indicated that the parent coordinator is good and helps. "Teachers, social worker, and director they help me. Just the other day, director saw that I was not happy. She and social worker talked to me. I feel little different, more energy and help me to identify my problems."

When asked this same question, participant A2 who has been in the United States six years said the program was already helping her. She stated, "This kind of program in my personal point of view help me a lot because I want my child do more things than I am doing in this, in my life, yes. I did a Bachelor, I traveled around the world, and now I want my son to do something like that in his life. I expect something very important in his life." When asked to elaborate on what was important, A2 responded that college was important. "Yes, I want it. I hope so he decides to do that. And I don't know how difficult it is in this country or not. I am asking information about that (college)." She continued to say, "I actually talk to him as well. I encourage him to do Bachelor, travel. The kind of job I am doing led me to learn about that kind of things (taking son to library at 6 pm) to do for your kids. And they are going to be successful. It is what you expect. I used to take him to Bronx parks but I see a little violence. Manhattan is different. These Head Start program just help me, absolutely. I can put my child in a place and he is learning something. It's very, it's a huge different from the day cares where they go and sit and watch TV all the time. I don't know the system here; I want my child to stay here and learn something and not have to go to babysitter."

Another finding and theme that was revealed through the parent interviews was that the parents felt that the teachers should be more forthcoming with more information

and communicate better with parents about the curriculum and what children are learning. For example, Participant O6 and O7 (couple) in the over five year group spoke of their expectations for their daughter and wanting their child to excel and be well-prepared for the future. Specifically, both wife and husband stated, “We want to know a little more about what is going on with the curriculum—it’s like what stories are you going to read this week. Or, what kind of educational activities are they going to do with the child? This way you are aware what is going on and we can help at home. Prepare her with certain other things so that when she returns to school the child is more prepared-can be ahead of the game. The child will then say, ‘all right I remember this,’ that’s what kids love.” The researcher asked if they meant that they wanted to know what lesson the teacher will be teaching for the following week, and the couple responded, “Yes. Knowing, having the curriculum, knowing what they’re working on. You are prepared to help them and you know whether they are lost or they are getting it. The only communication we get is from the child, who sometimes, we don’t know exactly what they are working on, and we are trying to gather information every day.”

Both wife and husband continued to emphasize the need for their child to be prepared and to grow to understand the value of education and her “roots.” The couple explained that “roots,” means discipline. “Education is priority; her school must be top priority. She needs to understand that she must do better than us. We believe teachers should provide better communication.” Another parent said that they felt that programs can help Latino families bridge the gap by planning meeting and workshops with more flexibility in hours. Participant A4 stated, “They can plan a different schedule--maybe

hold one in the morning and then one in the afternoon for those parents that couldn't or that can't make it in the morning."

**Research question four.** Are there differences in parent involvement practices in their own country that have contributed to the ways in which they view how they involve themselves in their child's school experiences? The parents' response to this question was laced with passion. Parents had strong feelings about instilling or reinforcing cultural values into their children. Parents readily admitted reprimanding their children but would not openly acknowledge that they use corporal punishment. One parent in the over five year group openly acknowledged that she will not use corporal punishment with her son, as it was done to her growing up in Mexico. The constructs of *respeto* was highlighted greatly and the constructs *machismo* and *marianismo* were mentioned when parents were clarifying their roles or that of their own parents. Themes for this question are shown in Table 4.18.

In response to this question, A4 from the over five year group said, "I have learned one thing, you can come to the classroom with them and learn with them, go on trips and that is something that would not happen in my country." Participant A4 continued to say, "I am strict with my children and I always tell them respect your elders. Respect your teachers." For example, A4 gave this illustration, "I saw a group of children, two boys, and two girls. They were play fighting, pushing each other. I told my oldest daughter, 'You see'? Please you need to respect so they can respect you. That kind of behavior will take you nowhere. This play fighting can turn real and someone can fall on the train track." She said that is why she is strict.



Table 4.18

*Parents Views on How Cultural Practices Contribute to the Ways Latino Parents Are Involved in School*

Themes	Sub-Themes
Respect	<p>Parent stress to children they must to listen and to be respectful/follow rules and to be good for teachers. Teacher is held in high esteem. Parents reinforce and instill Latino values - ‘roots’ in order that their offspring do not forget their upbringing.</p>
Positive Discipline	<p>Parents rarely spank children but will if necessary. Parents reprimand and are firm with children about what is expected of them in terms of good behavior. Parents take away electronic games, TV or a favorite toy. Different between home country culture and here is how much control a parent has with their child (fear getting in trouble with authorities if they were to spank).</p>
Self-Control	<p>Parent will not hit child because she was beaten as a child (i.e., “Don’t have to hit my child because he/she spills, or misbehaves”). Can talk with child about the behavior.</p>
Parenting	<p>Parents says in home country family functioned to support basic needs and send children to school. In home country education was not high priority for at least two parents’ family. No parent involvement in country Parent learned the difference in school culture between home – country and USA from other parents. Parent seeks to fuse the support in terms of basic need received in childhood with the American culture of more involvement in education here. A parent and child relationship is not an equal one; parents must set limits and care for child.</p>

Participant S3 from the over five year group said, “As a child in Mexico, my parents used to take me to school or I walk by myself. There were no trips. I am from a little country, a country that is real poor. My parents just go home.” She continued to say there was no real involvement. Her parents are uneducated and did all they could for her

and siblings. Participant S3 added that she has never been involved before with her other six children.

In response to question four, which asks about the differences in parent involvement in their country and how they are involved, participant Y5 who has lived in the United States fewer than three years stated, “My mom never took me to school. The only one that used to take me was my grandmother because my mom was never available. She was working. She was the matriarch of the family.” The researcher asked about Y5’s father and what role he played in her upbringing. Participant Y5 said, “They separated when I was a year old. He was not part of the picture.” Y5 continued to say, “My mother, when I would go to school, warned me to be respectful. With my daughter, I want to give my child confidence and trust like it was given to me.”

The researcher asked whether she discussed with her children the importance of respect. Y5 responded, “Yes. I know she is young, but I still sit with her and talk to her. I have certain time that I talk with both.” The researcher asked what role her mate plays in encouraging the same values. Y5 responded, “He cooperates but goes overboard with the child. He wants to give her everything she wants. He wants to spoil her. I see that as wrong because you can’t give everything to a child when they say, ‘I want it’. My grandmother used to say, ‘When it can be done, not when you desire it’ .” In addition, in talking to her mate about setting limits for the children, Y5 said, “I talk with him privately and confront him and say we have to be on the same level. I don’t take away your authority (*machismo*) and you don’t take mine away either (*marianismo*). We have to be united.”

Participant A2 was also asked this question and she responded,

“Okay, well, I come from a family of nine. Four brothers, four sisters. I am the ninth. My parents they don’t involve 100%. They just involve maybe 20% because I always say everything is depends about your education. But the only thing that I know they provide me security to go to the school, transport to the school, make sure how do you say...? Yes. Is, I have a good note [meaning good grades]. I just want to make sure they never asked me, ‘You have to do your homework or you have to,’ - Not, never. I always knew what I have to do when I went to the school. I don’t know why, but I always work like that. I think some, my four brothers, the first four kids, we act like that. Our parents never asked, ‘Do your homework, do this.’ No. We know what we have to do.”

The question was also raised at the interview as to the level of education of the parents and whether the parents instilled the idea in their children that school is their responsibility, not the parents’ responsibility. A2 responded, “No. No, no, no. They never put pressure on us. No. No. My mother, she just went two years to school. I think some of my father, six. But, no.” A2 went on to say that, “My father just elementary, but, no. But I think so they gave us economic they support us economically--also it’s important. It’s important you are sure you have shoes, you can pay the transportation. Yes.”

The parents were then asked whether their own parents participated in school. A2 responded that in her native country of Mexico they don’t get involved. They just send the kids to the school. “But as I repeat is depend of the education because I am for sure, maybe, the parents that went to the college or they have a degree, they are going to get more involved. I think so in every country it is like that. But if you, if your father, he didn’t go to school. He doesn’t know how...what he has to ask or something like that.”

The researcher continued to ask the parents how their cultural background has shaped how they parent their children in this country. Participants from Mexico were asked if they utilized some of their own school experiences and ideas from this country in the United States. Participant A2 said, “Well, I, I think I’m going to do the same thing like my parents did with me. I have to give him the support all the time. And I also have to do extra, about his education. Yes. I don’t know what else. Get involved in the school. Even, sometimes I get complained when he goes to the daycare, they don’t tell me, “[name], is doing this and that. And I say, Okay, maybe everything is good, is fine.” They don’t say anything (the teachers).”

The parents were asked whether they felt the teachers were open and honest with them about their child. A2 said, “Well, maybe, it’s just the age they don’t do too much, but the only thing I don’t expect about him, he get mean or he hurt the other kids by hitting.” When the child gets dropped off in the morning, parent A2 said that he tells her son, “Okay, you have to be good. You have to be a good listener with Miss [name] and Miss [name].”

To get a sense of how A2’s culture has shaped the way she disciplines her son the researcher asked about this in relation to their country of origin (Mexico). Participant A2 said, “Well, I sometimes my son, I don’t know, but...the only thing I don’t want about him is I think so he cries too much. I don’t know I can, how can I manage that thing? Because in my home, in Mexico, we never cry but not for that reason.” The researcher asked whether A2 was spanked, she replied, “Some, yes, yes. Because we need it. That’s true.” When A2 was asked about the reasons used in Mexico for spanking as a form of discipline, she replied, “Well, I understand my mother got nine kids. It’s a very difficult

life. You have to do laundry every single day. You have to cook. It's too much, yeah. It's too much work. And I think so, she was stressed. She was stressed and that's the reason we asked for something and we have an accident. She is the only way she thinks he can fix the things, but now I know it's not the way we have to fix the things."

A2 implied that because her mother spanked her and siblings out of frustration and stress it does not mean she has to do the same. A2 continued saying, "I don't have to spank because if he spilled something, it's like was an accident, it's not like I sometimes they do by purpose, but it's not because they are bad. It's like it was an accident and that's it. And the only thing I have to tell him, "Please don't do that again. You see, I have to clean." Or sometimes I ask him, "Clean it, please. Okay?" And he understand, don't do it the next time."

The researcher asked if A2 felt she had to be aggressive with her child, and how her education has helped her learn from what her parents did so she doesn't repeat those same mistakes. A2 said, "That's right. You, you say something very important. Maybe I was forgetting. Now I know I don't want to do the same mistake my parents did with me. Not because they did by purpose or something like that, it's because nobody gave them the opportunity to get an education or something like that. When you, when you go to school, when you get an education, when you travel, you change your mind. Yes, is different. Is different. I don't agree about what they did, but now I know why they did, yes."

The question of how education has broadened their perspective on involvement was posed again to the parents. Participant O6 stated, "I want to be involved. I see how important it is for parents to be involved in their child's education because that shapes

them to be who they are, who they will be in the future. My mom involvement was ok, I want to do more. I feel you need to be more involved and I think I am better prepared to understand what she is working on in her assignments.”

The researcher asked whether education, being more educated, going beyond how your parents were involved will make a difference in helping their child. Participant O7 said, “Yes. I believe so. I agree to a certain extent. I don’t feel as though you have to be educated 100%. Education is very important. I think the important part is the upbringing, the kind of roots and the way you teach the child what is right and wrong. Obviously the child must do the right thing. Education comes hand--in hand with empowering the kid--Empowering by showing them the good and the wrong so they know which path to go.”

Participant O6 went on to say it was never too early to begin to provide the important values that will help them succeed. “Yeah, off course, at this point is where you groom them to who they are going to be. It goes back to the difference in culture for a parent to be able to have control of the child. Obviously the parent has to be doing the right thing for the child to emulate. I feel like my parents instill in me-like. ‘Listen - be respectful.’ I can never even till this day, when I meet my parents; I have to greet them with respect. I have to ask them for their blessings. I say, *Cio* (mommy) or *Cio* (Poppy), *Bendicio* Mommy. *Bendicio* Poppy (give me your blessing) even to this age. That’s an understanding who they are to me, that’s what I want you to know based on my upbringing. I want my daughter and my son and the other three coming to be able to do the same things for them and their kids. So again, I am not saying education is not unimportant. It is 100% but I think upbringing is important and it is where you actually

put the "roots" and the foundation, that you put into the child's brain- an understanding what is right and wrong."

Participant O7 concurred with her husband and said, "Education do play a major part, my parents, especially my father, he had opportunities but remained where he is (he grew up in the campo (farm) helping his siblings). He played the role of father, he was a provider. He wanted to work hard to feed us. To this day, he still comes to the house and he brings platanos (traditional dish) mangoes and stuff. He is used to doing that. My mom is the supporter. She was my advisor. She left school to be a stay- at- home mom so she can be more involved. She became a housewife."

The researcher asked the parent couple to speak about the constructs of *machismo* and *marianismo* and their role as husband and wife with their parents and their relationship. Participant wife O7 stated, "My mother decides to give up her career to care for me and my sister. She sacrifices herself. It is like she is still in DR. The man is the provider, head of the house; he runs the family and looks for the food. The woman takes care of the house, takes care of the kids, and makes sure the kids are ok. In this country there is a little more of a balance."

The researcher asked if she thought that in the United States there is more of an individuality/independence of views, and the husband, participant O6 said, "Right, You have to be more all together, the wife or husband can be the provider or the one that takes care of the kids. For us, we have to work together. We both work. She is a provider too. I clean and she cleans. If I need to go buy stuff, clean, change pampers I do it." Participant wife O7 responded by saying, "My husband is all hands on with everything." When the

researcher asked if they felt that they both had acculturated and immersed themselves in the American culture they both responded that they thought that had happened.

### **Chapter Summary**

The research results indicated a wide range of reasons why Latino parents are not involved in their children's school. Teacher and teacher assistant focus groups and parents interviews provided perceptions as to why parents are not engaged. Teacher and teacher assistant focus group revealed that parents lack of education, comfort, language, culture, work and multiple appointments, lack of child care for younger children, and parents needing time to themselves are reasons why parents were not involved.

Much like the teachers and teacher assistants, the parent interviews had similar findings. Parent's interview findings provided some reasons for parent's lack of involvement. Like the answers gleaned from the other data collection, parents also cited inflexible work schedule and their inability to take a day off from work due to a loss of income for food and shelter. In addition, parents cited that they have many appointments for their children on different days, which leaves no time for involvement. Still others cited not speaking English and noted the inflexible time of meetings and workshops that prevents them from volunteering at their children's school.

It was surprising to learn that multiple appointments parents had for either their other children or for government subsidies were part of what hindered their involvement in their children's school. Likewise, it was surprising to learn that the programs' lack of planning meetings and workshops at different times during the day prevented parents from involvement, as well. This will be discussed further in Chapter 5.



During the parent interviews, when discussing differences in their country of origin that contributed to the lack of parent involvement, several themes emerged that were consistent with the research. For example, the idea of cultural constructs (“roots”) such as respect and gender roles (mother stays home and takes care of children, father goes out to work) were integral values that parents instilled in their children and shaped the ways in which they viewed their involvement and the ways in which they were raising their children. In addition, the idea that involvement in their native country meant “dropping children off to school” was echoed throughout the interviews. Latinos noted that in their country, “teachers take care of school business and parents take care of home businesses.”

One last interesting finding worth noting was the differences in discipline practices. Since the Latino parents have been in the United States, many said they have altered their views on corporal punishment as a mode of reprimand for their child, since “...there are laws in the U.S. – they take your child away...” While Latinos’ perceptions on disciplinary practices are consistent with the research, based on this study it appears that they have been acculturated into mainstream America by the altering of their practices.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The research study investigates the reasons why there is a reluctance of Latino parents to engage in their children's school. Furthermore, the study investigates barriers and challenges of parent involvement practices of preschool Latino parents.

The study provides valuable information from teachers, teacher assistants, and parents on reasons why Latino parents are not involved in their children's schooling. The findings are consistent with previous research (Crispeels & Rivero, 2001; Robles, 2011). This chapter discusses the implications of the findings, limitations of the research, thoughts on future research studies, and recommendations. A number of researchers have acknowledged the benefits and the importance of parent involvement for the success of children's schooling, beginning in early childhood (Arnold et al., 2008; Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Chang et al., 2009; Dearing, et al., 2006; Gayl, 2007; Gonzalez-Ramos et al., 1998; Guliamos-Ramos et al., 2007; Tang et al., 2012).

In addition, through this research at a Head Start program, the findings validate, that despite the importance of parent involvement, there are many barriers that Latino parents face in becoming involved. These barriers include issues such as little or no knowledge of the American educational system, inflexible work schedules, lack of childcare and time constraints on the family, language barriers, and low levels of education and English proficiency (Crispeels & Rivero, 2002; Robles, 2011). Despite the knowledge that parent involvement is critical for Latino parents with preschoolers (Gayl,

2007) the dissertation study acknowledges that the many factors outlined above are reasons why parents are not involved in the program. As such, a new approach to engaging parents must be explored to motivate and entice Latino parents to participate in their children's education.

The guiding theoretical perspectives of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), and Weiss et al. (2006) direct the dissertation research, and the results further validates a number of their claims. The insights gained from the dissertation research can offer new direction to programs engaging families and children of Latino parents.

### **Implications of Findings**

The findings from this research study lead to implications that can be used in Head Start and/or Childcare or Early Childhood programs in looking at how parents are engaged in their children's learning process. There are implications for how administrators, teachers, and teacher assistants can begin dialogue with parents, begin to identify the needs of parents and their children, and how to work with parents regarding issues related to cultural and educational differences. Other implications include benefits for government/policy makers looking how to craft policies to meet the burgeoning educational needs of the Latino population and the ever increasing numbers of children in the 0 to 5 age group.

This study is guided by four research questions. All four questions were answered by teachers, teacher assistants and parents. When the question was posed to these constituents on how they define parent involvement and what it means to them there was an overarching theme from teachers and teacher assistants that there remains a lack understanding/comfort in the school environment for Latino parents. In the Latino

culture, parents perceive that teachers are generally in charge of school. There is also a cultural element in which parents do not have background knowledge of the American education system. The findings from this dissertation is consistent with previous research, that found Latino parent's inability to understand and express themselves in English causes major obstacles to effective communication with the school, and that low levels of education and English proficiency can preclude involvement (Quezada et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2008).

The Latino parents who were interviewed were asked the same question about how they define parent involvement and what it means to them. For the Latino parents who are educated, parent involvement was identified as participating in school activities (volunteering in the classroom, going on trips, and reading to children in their classrooms) whenever a request is made or when their schedule permits. In addition, the parents believe that doing educational activities in the home with the child, as well as taking the child out to family events, museums and park, and engaging in active parenting, such as helping the child with everyday development and providing support, defines involvement in developing their intellectual skills.

Likewise, the interviewed parents who have a high school education (up to twelfth grade) or less believe that involvement means volunteering in the school to help the teachers, or helping the child by going to meetings or workshops. Parents with college education were better able to articulate the many ways they can help their children. One parent spoke about using technology such as a computer to engage the child with multiple activities. Another stated that through her education, travel, and work experiences, she

understands the value of preparing the child, even with conversations about going to college at the age of three.

Studies by Alomar (2006) and Kaplan et al. (2001) have shown that the parents' level of educational attainment has both direct and indirect effects on student achievement and that the mother's educational attainment significantly affected the achievement of the child and provided a more positive education experience. The findings from the two studies supports the dissertation study's finding that those parents who had college education were more involved in exposing their children to other cultural experiences as part of their involvement. For example, in the interviews, the parents with little or no education reveal they were fearful of taking their child out and the indicated that they only took their child out when they were visiting relatives. In addition, research indicates that parents with higher levels of educational attainment are more involved at school, more likely to discuss educational issues at home, and have higher educational expectations for their children than parents with lower levels of educational attainment (Lee & Bowen, 2006; Sy, 2007).

When the question was asked about the factors that affect parent involvement practices of Latino children, the reoccurring themes that emerged from the teachers and teacher assistants focus groups were that parents indicated that time constraints and cultural differences inhibited them from being more involved. The primary cultural difference named is that involvement in their country of origin means to "drop off their child and leave." School staff and parents from the focus groups and the interviews both indicate that they directly or indirectly perceive that the lack of involvement for parents is due to the fact that parent have to work, have family/medical appointments, display

cultural difference relating to education, and show a lack of familiarity with being involved in their child's school, as well as language barriers. In addition, data analysis reveals that parents in the school work for an hourly wage and cannot afford to miss work—"no work, no pay."

The issue of needing to work is supported by authors Lahie, (2008); Patrikakou, (2008); Zoppi, (2006); Zarate (2007) who indicate that many Latino parents work for hourly wages and have households with large families, which typically require at least two wage earners. What also was evident in the data analysis was the theme that in order to attend school events such as meetings or to volunteer during school hours, parents would have to lose the wages of at least one parent. In most cases, the parents felt their employment would be at risk if they frequently asked for time-off. The issue of parents' need to work to meet basic needs for survival conflicts with the need for parents to connect with their children's school. This conflict aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) third level, the exosystem. The exosystem level can be applied to these findings in that the child's ability to be an active participant is directly related to external events, such as the parents' work schedule. The findings with the parents in the study echo this theme; their need to work precludes their ability in establishing a home/school connection.

In addition, the study reveals that time constraints is another barrier to involvement. Parents have multiple family appointments for themselves and for their other children, which precludes involvement in their children's school. Due to language barriers and their inability to understand the system, they do not know how to tell medical

personnel that they need to change their appointment or they do not know how to manage their time with date calendars.

The findings also reveal that language is a major obstacle to Latino parent involvement. This finding aligns with the research of Quezada et al. (2003) and Smith et al. (2008) wherein the authors note that the parents' inability to understand and express themselves in English causes major obstacles to effective communication. The findings from the focus groups indicate teachers' efforts to communicate with parents are challenging. However, it is critical that teaching staff effectively communicate and connect with parents.

It is especially troubling that the findings from the dissertation research indicate that there is a barrier to interpersonal connections between teachers and parents, since the researcher is a Director in a neighboring CBO and has a vested interest in improving the organization. All too often, during the focus groups of both teachers and teacher assistants, the attitudes and the tone perceived by the researcher was judgmental and culture-centric about the Latinos lack of involvement. This attitude can translate to parents, who will in turn show a loss of respect to the teacher. Rather than generating solutions to the problem, this can lead to a further disconnect, which often can transfer to the children; the most important part of the process. Furthermore, the negative attitude can lead to a loss of teachable opportunities. Rather than being critical of the problem, it behooves those in charge of the schools to find ways to reach out more effectively. As Weiss et al. (2006) notes, family involvement processes are critical for children's learning and positive attitudes create positive outcomes.

Cultural differences and lack of knowledge about school involvement surface in this study. Teachers, teacher assistants and parents report that school involvement for Latino parents is markedly different in their country of origin. Quezada et al. (2003), notes that parents are unfamiliar with being in the classroom with teachers and express reluctance to question authority or become advocates for their children. In the data analysis and as supported in current research, it was discovered that immigrant parents view the educational school system as the authority and do not question decisions made by school personnel because this is how education operates in their home country (Mexican American Legal Defense Educational Fund, 2010).

Conversely, Trumbull (2011) aptly notes that in the United States, families and schools are expected to be a team and that family is the biggest influence on a child's life, and the school is the next biggest influence. Schools expect parents to get involved, both at home and at school. However, for parents from Latin countries their experiences with schools are different in that they grew up with the idea that school business stays in school and home business stays within the home.

Another finding from the dissertation research is that parents' personal fears either related to their own school experiences or of the American educational system keeps them from getting involved. Lightfoot-Lawrence (2003) notes that historically, teachers and parents have a love/hate relationship and that society tends to assume that parents and teachers should be natural allies and partners. However, this was not what came out of the research with Latino parents and was a surprising finding in that the researcher works with a Latino population and believed that there was a natural alliance and partnership between staff and parents.



In reviewing the findings from the question about what preschools can do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents, the main theme is that schools need to do a better job to encourage involvement (for example, adjust meeting/workshops, etc). What was clear from the parent interviews is that parents want to connect with school for direction and for opportunities to interface so that they can learn to better help their children. Teachers and parents alike conveyed ways they feel that the school can be helpful to the parents.

According to Weiss et al. (2006), there are three categories in which positive outcomes can be garnered: Parenting, Home-School Relationships, and Learning Outcomes. In looking at these areas, it can be noted that Parenting and Home-School Relationships is applicable to the Head Start program studied. Specifically, within this context, schools can meet parents at their level of understanding and develop involvement strategies that will raise parents' level of engagement. Presently, most activities in the program, such as workshops/meetings and other activities are planned without surveying parents to learn their needs so that they can tailor a program with the parents' input. For example, the data revealed there is an ESL class offered designed to teach parents English, how to complete applications, and how to express their needs.

However, teaching parents English is not sufficient for parents to navigate and find solutions. One of the main themes in the study speaks to parents' inability to be involved because they have multiple appointments. Many parents do not know how to use a calendar to organize scheduled appoints or to feel empowered to say to a receptionist that they need to revise a scheduled appointment based on their own needs. Therefore, schools need to provide more flexibility in scheduling activities at various

times during the day and in the evening and communicating with parents through various mediums like email, flyers, phone calls and home visits. This finding relates to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) second layer, known as the mesosystem, which speaks to the need for all stakeholders in the home and in the school to collaborate to strengthen relationships within families. In addition, in the category of Home-School Relationships, the second theory by Weiss et al. (2006), responds to this finding and speaks to the need for formal and informal connections between families and young children's early education programs.

When the question was asked about whether there are differences in parent involvement practices in the Latino culture that has contributed to the ways in which Latino parents involve themselves in their child's school experiences, the overarching theme is one of respect. Latino parents reinforce to their children that they are to be respectful to their teachers and adults. The need for parents to adhere to cultural values and practices aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) fourth level, the macrosystem. The fourth level incorporates familial cultural beliefs and values, which is the cornerstone of the Latino families interviewed.

During the interviews of parents, all indicated that they speak to their children about being respectful at all times and that they remind them daily at home, en-route to school, and upon getting to the school. Six out of seven parents interviewed conveyed that they stress respect and listening to adults. In the focus groups it was also noted that the staff hears these warnings on a regular basis. Guilamos-Ramos et al. (2007) notes that within the Latino culture, *respect (o)* describes the importance of adhering to authority. Parents interviewed echo this finding in that their expectation is that their Latino children

conduct themselves accordingly. Furthermore, Calzada and Eyeberg (2002) report in their study of Latino parenting practices that Latino parents' value respect and believe it is important to teach their (preschool) children.

It is noteworthy to add that while parents stress to their children to listen and respect, they are not against assigning punishment when necessary. They do not see teachers punishing their children through spanking as showing a lack of respect, because many said it was done in their country when they were children. However, in many instances punishment means taking away a favorite toy or electronic game from the child, which is different from the way they were disciplined in their country or origin. Overall, parents indicate that they use corporal punishment minimally because in some cases they had a stern upbringing and did not necessarily want to repeat the cycle of hitting (though they would not characterize their childhood as abusive). In addition, parents spoke about the serious consequences that can result in corporal punishment in the U.S., which inhibits them from using this type of discipline ("They take your child away").

In reviewing some of the research on discipline practices of Latino parents, Calzada and Eyeberg (2002) corroborate these findings in that they found that Latino parents show high levels of positive parenting, which are consistent with authoritarian parenting patterns (directing and speaking to the child) and avoiding punitive practices. In their research, they note that in their sample, parent-child relationships were characterized with a high degree of warmth and rarely use corporal punishments.

As gleaned from the teachers, the Latino parents are passionate in their belief that in order for children to get ahead and make it in the U.S., they must be disciplined and respectful in order to be successful in life. In addition, the same information was gleaned

from the parent interviews. Parents had strong feelings about children being good listeners and perceive respect as a bridge to success not only in education, but in life.

Another theme that emerged under the umbrella of culture is the parents' low level of education and low English proficiency. The findings from the focus group participants and parents reveal that parents are embarrassed to enter the classroom because of low education. Likewise, parents are reluctant to engage with their children in the classroom because they feel it is not their role, as indicated in the research (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995). Latino parents believe that it is the school's responsibility to instill knowledge, and parents have the role of teaching morals and values (Hill & Taylor, 2004).

### **Limitations**

One limitation of the study is the relatively small number of families in the sample size. The small sample size made it difficult to gather a wide range of perspectives on the topic. A larger sample size may garner a greater outcome or other findings. Furthermore, data was gathered from one Head Start program. Using several Head Start programs in the same area would have provided more responses and could have continued to validate or to refute some of the findings. Also, the responses from the Director of the CBO were not included in the design. Expanding the study to include that stakeholder could have yielded other results.

Another limitation of the study is the qualitative design. Had there been a mixed-method approach or a quantitative design in several Community Based Organizations (CBO's) in the South Bronx, there may have been varying results. With a quantitative

design and a survey administered to the teachers, teacher assistants, and the parents, different data could have been gleaned since there would be no face-to-face contact.

### **Recommendations**

There are numerous recommendations for enhancing parent involvement practices in early education programs with Latino parents. Additional research studies would be useful in further exploring ways in which early childhood programs can bridge the gap in preschool for Latino parents and their children and reasons why parent orientations, workshops/meetings are based on program needs rather than parent needs. Expansion of research sites, such as other Head Start Programs or nationally accredited early childhood programs, would be beneficial. A similar qualitative method used to investigate other programs would provide greater access to a larger population. The study was conducted at a single location in the Bronx with a large minority population with budget constraints for operation. A similar study at a private early childhood program with a large Latino population might provide a different perspective on parent engagement.

**Build parents knowledge of involvement.** For many of the families interviewed in the study, economic survival is tantamount. As such, spending time in their children's school is not the most pressing thought. However, for parents who do not fully grasp the significance of parent involvement, schools administrators might offer opportunities for teachers to meet with families prior to the start of school to get to know parents. At the initial meetings, teachers can take time to learn what parents know about being involved, ascertain what parents want to learn, and provide events where parents can learn about the American educational system (such as parent orientations, school fairs, parent child-activities). To also improve parent knowledge of the importance of taking an active role

in their children education, teachers need to take time to understand the Latino culture so they are aware of specific cultural differences that keep parents from engaging. Providing the teachers with staff development prior to the beginning of school would be helpful in this area, which will be further discussed later in this chapter.

In addition, ESL classes should not only focus on Latino parents learning English but should target instruction about teaching parents how to organize themselves (maintaining a calendar to document scheduled appointments and other personal items). In addition, workshops offered at the school may include teaching parents how to request dates and times that are least likely to conflict with school activities or their work. Likewise, it is recommended that the school plan at least two Open Houses twice a year to keep parents up-to-date on what is happening in the school. It is strongly recommended that schools also plan meetings with more flexibility in schedules and checking with parents for the best meeting times. Doing so may enhance parent participation during morning and afternoon hours by accommodating parents' work schedules. It is further advised that schools hire bilingual teachers and staff to better engage children and their parents.

Communication is essential in relaying information to parents. It is recommended that schools incorporate a phone-connect system that will help to address issues with parent literacy in receiving information on curriculum and weekly events on a regular basis. In addition, speaking to parents directly (face-to-face) provides teachers, parents, and caregivers opportunities to ask questions that are more effective in reaching/providing families with information. The data indicate that written notes and flyers alone are not effective for families with literacy issues. Lastly, it is recommended that schools translate

documents, newsletters and flyers to Spanish to better meet the needs of families served at the center.

**Teacher/parent roles.** The use of role reversal techniques in teacher training sessions should be used as a means for teachers to better understand the experience of parents. Furthermore, schools should ask college educated Latino parents to be mentors for those parents who are less educated or who have been in the country for fewer than three years as a way to involve those. Help parents to understand what is meant by high expectations for their children at parent meetings, workshops and training sessions. Use field trips and multicultural events to motivate parents to become involved in their child's school. Broaden and share the idea of respect (which Latino parents hold in high regard) to include the teachers' slant on respect as self-respect when they use the word 'no' minimally and when they allow the children to create for themselves and to become more independent in their thoughts and their actions. Include high expectations in parenting. Broaden and share idea of respect for self and self advocacy for children and parents with staff.

The Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF, 2010) offers a comprehensive guide of recommendations that might help schools build positive relationships with parents.

1. Provide classes and training that will help parents and staff improve communication between schools and parents.
2. Provide parents with information about school decisions, school meetings, and student success in a timely manner.

3. Designate a person to provide more information or explanation on communications that the school sends home.
4. Invest in parent outreach. Learn what days, times, and methods of communication are preferred by parents. For many communities of color, the best strategy is person-to person communication. Designating a staff person or volunteer to call parents is time-consuming but effective in yielding higher turnout for meetings.
5. Develop processes and systems where any and all parents' voices are heard. Do not just provide information at meetings, but mail home notes, make them available through a website, or send a message about the results of a meeting through an automated phone service.
6. Host community-school meetings where constructive dialogue happens between parents, teachers, and administrators on issues affecting children and the schools they attend (budget cuts, safety problems, evaluation of after-school programs or other services).
7. Include parents as full partners in decision-making about these issues. Be transparent about the decision-making process and do not over-promise positive results.

**Professional development for staff in cultural competency.** During the focus groups the researcher noted that the staff was judgmental in their manner and attitude in the way they responded to certain questions. Providing professional development training at the beginning of the school year and during the year on the cultural competency as it relates to the Latino families would provide the staff with a better



knowledge of the cultural differences so there is a greater understanding of why parents may not be involved with their child. This would alleviate biases and help teachers to be the role models for the parents.

In addition, the National Education Association (2008) provides four areas of cultural competency which apply to individual teachers, to the schools in which they are employed, and to the educational system at large (King, Sims, & Osher as cited in NEA, 2008). These four areas can serve as a teaching guide.

1. Valuing diversity: Accepting and respecting different cultural backgrounds and customs, different ways of communicating, and different traditions and values.
  2. Being culturally self-aware: Understanding that educators' own cultures all of their experiences, background, knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, and interests shape their sense of who they are, where they fit into their family, school, community, and society, and how they interact with students.
  3. Understanding the dynamics of cultural interactions: Knowing that there are many factors that can affect interactions across cultures including historical cultural experiences and relationships between cultures in a local community.
  4. Institutionalizing cultural knowledge and adapting to diversity: Designing educational services based on an understanding of students' cultures and institutionalizing that knowledge so that educators and the learning environments they work in can adapt to and better serve diverse populations.
- In addition, the use role reversal techniques in teacher training sessions may potentially ameliorate criticism of parents.

**Latino cultural practices in the classroom.** As noted in the literature review and in the data analysis, Latino parents value respect. Parental authority and respect are held in high regard and considered a form of endearment. Children are expected to take instructions from adults without questioning. Questioning parental authority is sometimes considered disrespectful (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Based on this premise, teachers should continue to make an effort to incorporate the cultural practices of the Latino culture into the classroom by teaching the value of respect. It was noted in the focus group that teachers permit children to freely express themselves (for instance, children can say no), which is in stark contrast to what children can do at home. However, by doing this in the classroom, teachers are teaching the students self-respect, which is an important component to helping each child reach his/her potential.

It is also recommended that parents are informed about the discipline practices allowed and used in the school so that they understand that they cannot tell a teacher to use corporal punishment to discipline their child. While there is a commonality of cultures between Latino teachers and Latino parents on how they view this issue, there needs to be boundaries in place in terms of the teacher-parent relationship on what a teacher of Latino decent can do in the classroom in following the law and the school guidelines. While greater rapport occurs when the teacher and the parent are of the same ethnic background, teachers must remain professional and cannot go against the law and the school policy where discipline is concerned. Teachers who are of the same ethnicity have an even greater advantage in instructing parents and in seizing teachable opportunities to inculcate them into the American educational system.

It is also recommended that non-Spanish speaking teachers are provided with support in working with Latino parents. It is not enough to have a Latino teacher assistant working with a teacher. All too often, the assistant can take over the role of teacher during interactions with parents because they speak the same language. The CBO could provide a course in conversational Spanish for English-dominant teachers to help them communicate or can provide a list of the most asked questions by the Latino parents so teachers have prior knowledge of what their Latino parents need, rather than always getting the information second-hand from the teaching assistant.

Smith et al. (2008) and Robles (2011) state that if communication is to occur and be effective, schools will need to translate written materials into Spanish. However, computer translation programs produce unintelligible results. Therefore, all materials need to be checked by someone fluent in Spanish. The research also says that when parents express a willingness to learn English, schools should offer English language instruction during non-traditional times, such as late evening or Saturdays, which is not now occurring in the CBO. Robles (2011) documented that holding ESL and other programs on Saturday has proven to be successful with Latino families.

Lastly, Latino parents are often fearful of questioning school authority (Smith et al., 2008). With a greater emphasis on education for all school stakeholders in understanding the differences and the commonalities of working with the Latino population, this fear of speaking out can be diminished.

## **Conclusion**

The dissertation study was conducted to find out why Latino parents are not engaged in their child's schooling despite research that shows the importance and

benefits of parent involvement. Focus groups with teachers and with teacher assistants and interviews with six Latino families (two who have been in the country for less than three years, and four who have been in the U.S. over five years) provided various insights about the parent involvement practices of Latino families.

The dissertation includes a discussion of the historical perspective of parent involvement, starting with an edict in 1642 in Massachusetts that said that children should learn to read and learn a trade (Brenner, 1970). By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, education of young children became a joint venture between families and schools (Hill & Taylor, 2004). The research on the historical perspective of Latino parent involvement in education is sparse. However, parent involvement of Latino parents builds on the concept of cultural constructs, with values like respect, and gender roles playing a significant role in providing a historical perspective on how Latino culture views involvement (Calzada & Eyberg, 2002; Guilamo-Ramos et al., 2007).

The influences of parent involvement are well supported by the two theories used in this study. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), and Weiss et al. (2006) believe that family involvement and home school processes are critical for children's learning success. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner (1979) argues it is critical for teachers and all stakeholders to collaborate for the purpose of strengthening relationships within families. Through his analogy of the layers of a child's development being like a set of Russian Dolls embedded within each other, his theory captures the essence of the central role parents play in their children's educational trajectories.

Similarly, the other theory in used in the dissertation study is the Integrative Model of Family Involvement by Weiss et al. (2006). This evidence-based model has

been widely used as a template for family involvement. The model encompasses three important categories that are integral to an effective home-school partnership: (a) Parenting (imparting values and practices of child-rearing), (b) Home-School Relationships (the formal and informal linkages between family and school settings), and (c) Responsibility for Learning Outcomes (aspects of parenting in the home and in the school that fosters learning outcomes).

The importance and benefits of parent involvement and preschool education are well documented and serve to support the dissertation study (Arnold et al., 2007; Chang et al., 2009; Dearing et al., 2006; Gonzalez-Ramos et al., 1998; Gayl, 2007; Strayhorn, 2010; Tang et al., 2012). Parent involvement has been linked in these studies to increased academic achievement and school success.

Despite the importance and benefits of involvement, Latino parents are reluctant to become involved in their children's education (Robles, 2011). However, there are many reasons for this reluctance. Turney and Kao (2009) and Zopi (2006) find that minority immigrants encounter more barriers. Among the barriers are little or no knowledge of the American education system, inflexible work schedule and childcare issues. Quezada et al. (2003) finds that language and low education is a barrier to involvement. Patrikakou (2008), Zoppi (2006) and Zarate (2007) find that barriers such as parents working for hourly wages make it difficult for parents to take off time to engage in school to attend school events such as meetings or to volunteer. Doing so would require them to forgo wages and risk losing their jobs. Despite the barriers, it is imperative that Latino parents engage with their children's school to order to improve the

education of their children. According to Cotton and Wilkelund (1989), the sooner parent involvement begins in a child's educational process, the stronger the effects.

The data analysis reveals several themes about why there is a lack of involvement on the part of Latino parents. Themes such as time constraints, communication about involvement and what it means, differences in cultural norms and values, no knowledge of the American educational system, and school organization of opportunities for involvement are all areas which surface from the research. In addition, there remains a lack understanding/comfort in the school environment for Latino parents, which occurs with the lack of understanding from faculty and staff about the Latino culture.

Cultural differences and lack of knowledge about school involvement surface in this study. School experiences for those parents who grew up in Latin America are different from their child's school experience (parents were dropped off, not asked to stay and participate). Trumbull (2011) notes that in the United States, families and schools are expected to be a team, and family still remains a significant part of a child's life. However, for parents from Latin countries their experiences with school cause them to react as they were raised.

In reviewing the findings about ways schools can help Latino parents bridge the gap between home and school, teachers and parents alike suggest specialized meetings for fathers and mothers separately, provide more Open Houses and interactive events, and hold special meetings with parents for discussions about their needs, as well as building a knowledge base for parents about what involvement in the schools is all about.

The overarching theme related to the differences in culture norms is the idea of respect. Latino parents reinforce that their children are to be respectful to their teachers

and adults. During the interviews of parents all indicated that they speak to their children daily at home, en-route to school and upon getting to school about being respectful at all times. Guilamos-Ramos et al. (2007) conveys that within the Latino culture, *respect (o)* describes the importance of adhering to authority. As such, it is the expectation that Latino children conduct themselves accordingly. In addition, Calzada and Eyeberg (2002) report in their study that Latino parents' values respect and believe it is most important to teach their preschool children. Their study reveals that *Latino* parents show high levels of positive parenting, which is consistent with authoritarian parenting patterns (directing and speaking to the child- respect) and avoiding punitive practices. The theme of cultural norms, which was integral to the study of Latinos, aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 2005) fourth level, the macrosystem, which incorporates familial cultural beliefs and values, which presented itself as the cornerstone of Latino families during the interviews.

Another theme that emerged under the umbrella of culture is the low level of parents' education and limited English proficiency. Likewise, parents are reluctant to engage with their children in the classroom because they feel it is not their role. Chavkin and Gonzalez (1995) indicate that Latino parents believe that it is the school's responsibility to instill knowledge and the parents' role to teach morals and values (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Immigrant children have the opportunity to advance within the American educational system (Crosnoe, 2005); however, for this to happen, home and school must form alliances to secure Latino children's future.

The findings from the dissertation study help bring greater understanding of what Latino parents know or do not know about parent involvement, barriers to involvement, ways in which schools can bridge the gap for Latino parents, and cultural practices Latino

parents use to rear their children, which must be understood within the context of the American educational system. The findings also shed light on the reasons why parents are not engaged. The findings provide learning and implications for current and future early childhood programs that work with Latino families. The home and school must work together as a system in order for children to reach their full potential for they continually affect each other over time and are ultimately working towards the same goal—the success of the students and the success of our nation.



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## Appendix A

### A Study of Latino Parent Involvement Practices in the United States

#### Demographic Fact Sheet

1. Name: \_\_\_\_\_
2. What is your gender?  Male  Female.
3. What is your age  16-18  20-29  30-39  40-49?
4. What country are you from?
5. What is your marital status?
6. What is your highest level of education?  
 graduate of elementary school (grade 6);  graduate of middle school (grade 8);  
 graduate of high schools (grade 12);  some college – number of years \_\_\_\_  
 completed four year college;  post graduate
7. Are you employed  YES  NO?
8. Number of years you have been in the United States? \_\_\_\_

**Una investigación acerca de la participación de los padres Latinos en la educación  
de sus hijos en los Estados Unidos.**

**Información demográfica**

1. Nombre
2. ¿Cuál es su género? \_\_\_\_\_ Femenino \_\_\_\_\_ Masculino.
3. ¿Cuál es su edad? \_\_ 16-18 \_\_ 20-29 \_\_ 30-39 \_\_ 40-49?
4. ¿País de origen? \_\_\_\_\_
5. ¿Cuál es su estado civil? \_\_\_\_\_
6. ¿Cuál fue el nivel más alto de su educación? \_\_ graduado de la escuela primaria (grado 6);  
\_\_\_\_ graduado de la escuela media (grado 8); \_\_ graduado de escuela secundaria (grado 12; \_\_  
alguna universidad – número de años \_\_\_\_\_ terminó la universidad; \_\_\_\_\_ Maestría
7. ¿Esta empleado/a? \_\_ SI \_\_ NO
8. ¿Número de años en los Estados Unidos? \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions were used in the focus groups and in the interviews.

The questions are the following:

1. How do the parents of Latino preschool children define parent involvement and what does parent involvement mean to them?
2. What are the factors that affect parent involvement practices of Latino children?
3. What can preschools do to bridge the gap for Latino preschool children and their parents?
4. Are there differences in parent involvement practices in the Latino culture that has contributed to the ways in which Latino parents involve themselves in their child's school experiences?

## Appendix C

### Research Timeline

<b>Plan of Action</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
Defend Dissertation Proposal	September 12, 2012
Complete IRB Forms	October, 2012
Obtain Approval from St. John Fisher	October, 2012
Review SPSS Software	October 2012
Send Initial Letter about Research to Parents & Staff	October, 2012
Parents Complete Demographic Questionnaire	October, 2012
Select Teacher and Teacher Aides (Randomly) For Focus Groups	October, 2012
Select Parent Participant for Interviews (3 & 3)	October, 2012
Arrange & Conduct Focus Groups	October, 2012
Arrange & Plan Parent Interviews	December, 2012
Track Responses- Focus Groups & Interviews	December, 2012
Compile and Analyze Data	December, 2012
Complete Writing Chapters 4 & 5	January, 2013
Defend Dissertation	January 24, 2013



## **Appendix D**

### **INVITATION TO STAFF AND PARENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

October, 2012

Dear Teachers & Teacher Assistants and Parents:

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College in a program housed at the College of New Rochelle (CNR). As part of my responsibilities as a doctoral student, I am conducting Study of Latino Parent Involvement Practices in the United States.

The purpose of this study is to examine why Latino parents are reluctant to become involved in their children's education. Also, I want to learn what barriers exist for Latino parents that hinder their participation. In order to complete my research, I need your help. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in this research study via a focus group with staff and interviews with parents. However, your participation is voluntary and strictly confidential.

The purpose of the focus group is to learn from teachers and teacher assistants about their perceptions of Latino parent involvement practices in their child's school in an Early Childhood Center in New York City. There will be two focus groups conducted; one with teachers and one with teacher assistants. The focus group will take no more than

30-35 minutes. Participants will answer four to five questions related to their perceptions of Latino parent involvement practices.

There will also be interviews conducted with Latino families; three families who have been in the United States for less than three years and three families who have been in the United States for over five years. In this way, I will be able to gain important knowledge about parent involvement practices from various perspectives. In order to determine who meets the above criteria, parents will be asked to complete a demographic fact sheet to determine eligibility.

All names will not appear on any of the documents and a coding system will be used to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. All participation is voluntary and if you decide to participate, you will receive a \$20.00 gift certificate in appreciation for your input.

I anticipate that the data collection will take place in October 2012, which will need to be coordinated with once approval has been received.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Marcia Lawrence

Doctoral Student

Email: [aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com](mailto:aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com)

Cell Phone: 646.334.1789

## **INVITACIÓN PARA PERSONEL Y PADRES PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIÓN**

Octubre, 2012

Maestros, asistentes de maestros, y padres:

Soy una estudiante doctoral del colegio St. John Fisher, localizado en la universidad de New Rochelle (CNR). Como parte de mis responsabilidades como estudiante doctoral, estoy conduciendo una investigación acerca de la participación de los padres Latinos en la educación de sus hijos en los Estados Unidos.

El propósito de este estudio es examinar porqué los padres Latinos son reuuentes a participar en la educación de sus hijos. También, deseo aprender qué barreras existen para los padres Latinos que impiden su participación.

Para terminar mi investigación, necesito su ayuda. Por lo tanto, quisiera invitarlos a que participen en un grupo de discusión para los maestros y asistentes, y entrevistas con los padres. Su participación es voluntaria y confidencial. El propósito del grupo de discusión es para aprender de los maestros y sus asistentes acerca de sus percepciones sobre la participación de padres Latinos en la educación de sus hijos en una escuela de educación temprana en la ciudad de Nueva York.

Se van a conducir dos grupos de discusión; uno con los maestros y otro con los asistentes de los maestros. Cada grupo tomará no más de 30-35 minutos. Los participantes contestarán cuatro a cinco preguntas relacionadas a sus percepciones de la participación de padres Latinos en la educación de sus hijos.

También se haran entrevistas con las familias Latinas: seis familias que han estado en los Estados Unidos por menos de tres años y tres familias que han estado en los Estados Unidos por más de cinco años. De esta manera, podré obtener información acerca de la participación de padres Latinos en la educación de sus hijos de familias con varias perspectivas. Para determinar elegibilidad, pediré que los padres llenen un formulario demográfico.

Anticipo que la colección de datos ocurrirá en Octubre de 2012, y esto será coordinado cuando reciba aprobación.

Gracias por su consideración.

Marcia Lawrence

Estudiante doctoral

Email: [aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com](mailto:aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com)

Teléfono de la célula: 646.334.1789

## Appendix E

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN STUDY

Thank you for agreeing to be part of this doctoral study on, A Study of Latino Parent Involvement Practices. Please sign below which indicates your voluntary participation in this study, which will be conducted at an Early Childhood Head Start Program in New York City.

Your participation and involvement in this study is voluntary and is most appreciated. Upon completion of data collection, you will receive a \$20.00 gift card to once more thank you for your input. You are making a worthwhile and viable contribution to the field of early education!

Sincerely,

Marcia Lawrence

Doctoral Student

Email: aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com

Cell Phone: 646.334.1789

#### **I understand that:**

- (a) My signature indicates that I voluntarily agree to be part of this research study.

(b) By signing this form, I do not waive any legal rights.

Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Circle Constituent Group: (Teacher, Teachers' Assistant, Parent)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date:  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ I would like to receive a copy of this result of this study. Please send results to the address below:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**A copy of this agreement will be given to you for your records.**

FORMULARIO DE CONSENTIMIENTO PARA LA PARTICIPACIÓN EN  
INVESTIGACIÓN

Gracias por participar en esta investigación acerca de la participación de los padres Latinos en la educación de sus hijos en los Estados Unidos. Por favor llene y firme este formulario, indicando su participación voluntaria en esta investigación, que será conducida en un programa de educación temprana en la ciudad de Nueva York.

Su participación en esta investigación es apreciada. Al concluir la investigación y la colección de los datos, usted recibirá un certificado de regalo de \$20.00. Usted está haciendo una contribución de mérito al campo de la educación temprana.

Estudiante doctoral

Email: aniyadj.lawrence@gmail.com

Teléfono de la célula: 646.334.1789

**Yo comprendo que:**

**(a) Mi firma indica mi participación voluntaria**

**(b) Al firmar este formulario, yo no renuncio a mis derechos legales**

Nombre: \_\_\_\_\_

Marque su grupo: (maestro/a, asistente de maestro/a, padre)

Firma: \_\_\_\_\_

Fecha \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Quisiera recibir una copia de los resultados de esta investigación. Envíe por favor los resultados a la dirección abajo:

Nombre

---

Dirección

---

Ciudad, código

postal \_\_\_\_\_

Gracias por su participación. Recibirá una copia de este contrato.