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A Phenomenological Examination of Latina Mother's Perceptions About Academic Success for their Kindergarten Children

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF LATINA MOTHERS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR THEIR KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

by

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological qualitative study aspired to learn from the personal stories of three Latina mothers regarding their perceptions of academic success for their young kindergarten-aged children and what they do to foster and encourage that success. Each of the participants was a Spanish-speaking, first-generation immigrant from Mexico. Their Spanish-speaking children were English learners who attended Kindergarten at the same Title I elementary school and who scored higher than their English-speaking peers on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in the areas of in the areas of self-regulation and interpersonal skills. This study used in-depth interviews to explore the mothers' lived experiences around their children' academic success and shared findings through assertions, vignettes, and supporting detail. Four major findings surfaced through analysis of the data: a) the mothers prioritized early learning opportunities to help prepare their children with skills needed for kindergarten, b) the mothers valued literacy in English and Spanish while maintaining Spanish as the language of the family, c) maintaining routines was a key part of parenting for the mothers, and d) the mothers faced obstacles in facilitating success for their children. Implications from the study suggest the importance of early learning opportunities, highlight the need for educational leaders to identify and remove barriers for immigrant families who speak languages other than English, and call for culturally responsive communication practices and equity perspectives to inform educational practice.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

An important goal in education is to provide a solid foundation and prepare each student for life beyond high school. While many students are successful, others are not. Educational professionals have long known that demographics are one way to interpret achievement and marginalization within the K-12 system, particularly as it pertains to test results. State assessment scores for reading and math frequently are used as measures of student academic achievement. Oregon state assessment data reveals a gap in the achievement between students who are economically disadvantaged and/or are learning English, as compared to their peers who are native English speakers in higher socioeconomic income brackets. Not only is this true at the high-school level, it is also true at the kindergarten level when students first enter school (Oregon Department of Education, 2016).

The state-wide statistics for academic achievement that show an achievement gap between the highest and lowest performing student groups based on demographics beginning in the third grade are consistent in the school district where I conducted my research. Students who qualify for English Language Development services through Title III and students who are economically disadvantaged both have lower achievement rates as compared to their English-only, middle- to high-income peers as measured by the Oregon Smarter Balanced Assessment.

Significant to this work is the recognition that barriers to achievement begin well before third-grade, at the youngest ages. When entering school, the academic preparedness of a child directly impacts school success. For instance, a child's vocabulary by age four is one of the leading indicators of future academic success, (Hart & Risely 2003, Howard & Mehhusih, 2017). Moreover, the relationship between the economic levels of a household to a child's vocabulary is

significant. In short, children in the highest income brackets tend to have greater vocabularies compared to students in poverty who tend to have more limited vocabularies (Hart & Risley, 2003; Risley & Hart, 1995). A child's vocabulary is an indicator of his/her knowledge and academic skills, as well as life experiences. This is true for speakers of English as well as for students who are raised in homes where a language other than English is spoken (Sousa, 2011).

Frequently, students experiencing poverty begin with a disadvantage from the very beginning of their formalized education (Sterglin, 2004). Yet early academic success is the foundation for sustained, long-term educational success. According to Sterglin (2004), providing children with the best possible education from the start of their school experience is the most effective way of keeping kids from dropping out. Additionally, the intersectionality of having a lower socioeconomic status, being of a non-dominant race, and also being identified as an English learner are additional factors that have a profound impact on a child's experience in school (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Students who are not white, who are poor, and who do not speak English fluently have lower academic achievement as compared to their white, middle-class, English-speaking peers, (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2011). This is the achievement gap - the disproportionate educational outcomes between student groups. The opportunity gap is the way in which race, culture, language, socioeconomics, gender, and disability contribute to or serve to perpetuate lower educational aspirations, expectations, and achievement for certain students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Education Reform, 2013; The Saguaro Project, Harvard Kennedy School, 2016).

Statement of the Problem

There are a significant number of students who are English Learners and those in poverty who are not meeting state academic benchmarks as compared to students of those backgrounds

who do succeed academically. In Oregon, Spanish is the language most spoken in the home for students who are classified as English Learners (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). While English learners generally achieve at lower rates than their English-speaking peers on state assessments, there are some Spanish-speaking English learners who are academically at or beyond grade level (Oregon Department of Education, 2016) as compared to their English-speaking peers. Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (OKA) results reveal this interesting disparity between the achievement of English-speaking kindergarten students and those who are Spanish-speaking English learners. School districts often attribute this difference in data at the earliest grade to be a result of the impacts of poverty or English Language deficits (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Reardon, 2013). However, there are some cases where Spanish-speaking kindergarten students outperform their English-speaking peers on components of the OKA. This test does not offer insights into this phenomenon or why it may occur. This leaves school districts unaware of possible factors that may contribute to this variance, ones that could be useful to districts seeking to foster achievement for Spanish-speaking kindergarteners across their system.

Research suggests that when schools embrace the families of Spanish-speaking students as assets, the students have a higher rate of school success (Olivos & Mendoza 2009). But at the start of kindergarten, this level of connectedness between the school and family would have had little time to develop. This unexpected early school success for some Spanish-speaking English learners was a significant organizational point for this study, and as a researcher, I turned to the parents of these children for some insight. This led me to ask, "what do Latina mothers regard as school success for their kindergarten-aged children who have demonstrated early school achievement as native Spanish-speakers?" This is a complex and worthwhile question. Although a phenomenological study would not allow me to examine this issue from a large-scale

perspective, I believed that a handful of Latina mothers could provide insight to the larger issue. I therefore designed a phenomenological study utilizing personal interviews with a small sample of native Spanish-speaking mothers of kindergarten students at a Title I elementary school in the Pacific Northwest to further investigate this phenomenon.

The purpose of this study was to document the lived experience of native Spanish-speaking mothers to better understand their perceptions of academic success for their kindergarten-aged children in a Title1 elementary school. I conducted a focus group interview and personal interviews of three native Spanish-speaking mothers of children who scored at or above the average test scores of their kindergarten peers on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in the areas of Self-regulation and Interpersonal skills at Forrest Glen Elementary School (pseudonym) in the West Valley School District (pseudonym).

Research Questions

As a phenomenological study, the research objective was to document the lived experiences of individuals who share a common experience (Van Manen, 1990). In this case, the common lived experience amongst the mothers was having a kindergarten-aged child who was an unusually-high scorer on the OKA as native Spanish-speaking student. I wanted to gain deeper understanding of the nature and features of the perceptions of academic success these mothers held for their kindergarten-aged children. Phenomenological researchers rely on a few "grand tour" questions in their investigations on a common lived experience (Creswell, 2007). That is, typically phenomenology begins with a small number of key global questions and allows the research to organically grow from those queries (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). I employed two key "grand tour" research questions as a means to initiate the investigation:

Question #1

What do the participating mothers regard as academic success for their kindergarten-aged children?

Question #2

How do the participating mothers encourage and facilitate academic success for their kindergarten-aged children?

While these two "grand tour" research questions structured and guided the research, I added additional interview questions that emerged during the interview process, which helped clarify my understanding of the mothers' perspectives on academic success for their young learners.

Key Terms

As with any research study, a number of key terms are important. The list below identifies some of the significant terms relevant to this investigation.

English Learner: Term used by educators to identify students who are learning English as a second or other language (Crawford, 2004).

Free and Reduced Meal Program: A student may qualify for Free and Reduced Meal prices when the family annual income for the number of persons in a household is at or below the federal income guideline. For example, a family of two with a household annual income of $30,044 would qualify (Oregon Department of Education, 2017).

Hispanic: Term used by persons who are from or are descended from a Spanish-speaking country of origin who now are living in the United States. The term has roots in Colonialism from the Spanish who colonized vast areas of Central and South America and whose language influence is still dominant today (Garcia, 2000).

Kindergarten Academic Success: A general term used by educators to describe a student who is making gains towards academic standards in reading and math.

Latino/a/x: Term used by persons who are from or are descended from a country in Central or South America who now are living in the United States. The term has roots in Colonialism from the French who coined Latin America in reference to the lands colonized by Europeans who spoke Latin-based languages (Garcia, 2000).

Limited English Proficient (LEP): Term used by the Federal Government to classify students who have not acquired proficiency in English based on national English Language Proficiency standards as measured by a federally-approved language assessment such as the ELPA 21. The ELPA 21 is the measure used in the school district where I conducted my study.

Low Socioeconomic Status (SES): A term used to describe the status of an individual or group of people in relative terms of advantage or disadvantage with respect to household income, parent occupation, and parent education (Buckingham, Wheldall, & Beaman-Weldall, 2013). It is a term often associated with poverty (Jensen, 2009). Schools with higher percentages of students in poverty can receive Title I federal funding. In order for a school to qualify for Title I services, at least 40% of the students attending that school must qualify for Free and Reduced priced meals. To qualify for Free and Reduced meals, a family's income must be at or below two times that of the federal poverty level for the number of persons in the household. Therefore, schools with a Title I designation have more students experiencing poverty than schools who do not have a Title I designation.

Non-Native English Speaker: One whose first or primary language is not English.

The Use of Labels

While the terms Latino and Hispanic are often used to classify people who are from or are descended from a country in Central or South America by race and ethnicity (Ennis, Ríos-Vargus & Albert, 2010), current research shows a preference of the term Hispanic to Latino at a 2 to 1 ratio. However, if given the choice, most persons would choose neither Hispanic nor Latino, but would instead identify by country of origin, (Taylor, Hugo Lopez, Martinez & Velasco 2012). For this research study, I used the term Latino when describing people, the term most commonly used within this population in my school district to describe families of Latin American descent. However, I used Hispanic when discussing state demographics and state data as Hispanic is the term used by the state.

Limitations and Delimitations

One of the inherent limitations in any qualitative research investigations is that key research terms may hold different meanings for different participants. This is especially important to consider in phenomenological research as the focus is on lived experiences (Patton, 2002). In this study, kindergarten success is a general term used by educators that encompasses academic and behavioral skills. Parents often rely on the school report card and parent teacher conferences to gain information on their child's kindergarten academic success. Thus, participants may regard what constitutes academic success in their small children in varied ways. That is why I began my research with grand tour questions regarding the perception of what academic success means to the participating mothers and how they encourage and foster that success.

This study looked at how a small number of Spanish-speaking Latina mothers of kindergarten-aged children encouraged and facilitated academic success as well as their

perceptions of their children's academic success. All of the children attended Forrest Glen Elementary School, a Title I school in the West Valley School District located in the Pacific Northwest. Therefore, the study cannot be generalized to all elementary schools in the area. This is a common limitation for qualitative research. Qualitative researchers rely upon nonprobability samples; a strict generalization from the findings of the sample to the larger population of Latina mothers cannot be inferred (Patton, 2002). However, that limitation is balanced with the advantage of greater and more nuanced insight that can be gleaned from qualitative research with a small, nonprobability sample (Patton, 2002).

I anticipated that some of my participants might not be fluent in English and have childcare challenges related to their participation in the study. I am a monolingual English speaker and I worked with a fluent Spanish-speaking interpreter to communicate with participants. This fact does represent a significant limitation. However, with careful attention to research approaches that are culturally responsive, this limitation was somewhat ameliorated. I employed culturally responsive practices to understand familiar cultural information and create conditions for working effectively with these mothers. These practices emphasize a relationship-based communal perspective that is focused on critical social awareness (Hammond, 2015). As a result, I recognized the need to honor participants' linguistic and cultural heritage and sought to do that by working with a fluent Spanish speaker who is a trusted member of the school community. I also sought to honor the participants by meeting in a time and place of their choosing and by offering childcare support during out-of-school meeting times.

An important delimitation of the study is that I elected to focus on native Spanish-speaking mothers, as opposed to including other family members. Traditional gender roles in Latino families dictate the strong role mothers have in raising children and taking responsibility

for the home and education of the children (Andrade, 1982). Thus, this research had both an ethnic and gender target and intentionally did not include other racial/ethnic groups or Latino fathers. This delimitation made sense primarily because the native Spanish-speaking population in the West Valley School District where I conducted this study was one of the largest and most important stakeholders within the district and represented the largest language group other than English within the district. Thus, the shared lived experiences of these mothers held tremendous intrinsic interest.

Bracketing

I have held my current role as a Director of English Language Development in the West Valley School District for the past eight years and have learned a great deal about meeting the educational needs of children who are learning English. I chose this research topic, done in accordance with the Doctor of Education requirements at George Fox University, in order to expand my professional knowledge and contribute to the existing knowledge base in this area.

It is important to note that my position has allowed me multiple opportunities to meet and interact with many parents of English learners in a variety of school contexts and so there was potential that I may have met some of my participants in the past. I considered these previous interactions as a way for families to know who I am and to further foster the advocacy role I play in the school district on behalf of English learners and their families.

I have been an educator in public schools for the past 24 years, first as a teacher, then as a middle-school assistant principal. Later, I was an elementary-school principal and now I am a district office administrator. During my time as the Director of English Language Development programs, I have met with a number of parents of English learners who were advocating for the needs of their students and looking to the school district for guidance and support. I have heard

family stories of immigration, their hopes and fears for their children, and their desire to be a part of their children's education. Each parent's story is different. My own family has firsthand experience with immigration and English language acquisition, but my family story is as unique as any other story.

My mother left Vietnam and immigrated to the United States as a married woman and a mother. She was in her late 20's during a time when this country's immigration policies were intertwined with international military conflict, growing xenophobia, and economic uncertainty. Her primary language was Vietnamese, and she married into a family of English-only speakers and immigrated to a state and community with little racial and language diversity.

As a child, I did not fully understand the complexities of immigration, school systems, and the English language. I remember my mother going to school conferences when I was in early elementary school and her telling me frequently to work hard in school. I enjoyed school, but as I grew, I found I had to do school work on my own without guidance from my parents. My father worked multiple jobs and my mother was the primary caregiver for me and my brother.

My mother's accounts of her treatment as an immigrant were varied. Some people she met held admiration of her for her struggle and determination. Others perceived her as ignorant due to her limited English proficiency and occasional inability to communicate her basic needs to people within our community. Even as her command of English grew, the predominantly white, middle-class community in which we lived presented her with barriers to supporting my older brother and me in school. We were one of very few mixed-race families in the community. There were only a handful of people of color in our town, and there was no one else who spoke the same language as my mother.

I remember as a young child being the one who needed to explain to my mother the school papers she needed to sign and writing the notes for absences that were questioned as invalid or deemed forgeries because they were in a child's handwriting. My father worked multiple jobs to make ends meet and as a result was frequently not home due to his work schedule. My mother was the parent my brother and I relied most upon for our needs growing up and she was our primary caregiver. I recall that the interactions my mom had with my school became less frequent the older I became. She consistently told me to do well in school and expected good grades, the grades that were highly valued and were the only indicator of school success that mattered most to my mom. She knew that school would help me become more than she had opportunity to become; she frequently gave that message explicitly and implicitly. Her experiences as a mom, an immigrant, and as a person whose native language was not English shaped her worldview, her beliefs about education, of hard work, and of achievement. Her experiences shaped her parenting and therefore helped shape the person I became.

As an adult, I know more about how immigration and language have affected my life experiences and it has given me great empathy for others who are immigrants and who are learning English. I still do not fully understand the complexities of immigration as it affects each person differently. Yet, in my professional role, I see firsthand the impact immigration has on families and the needs school-aged children have when they enter the school system, especially for children who are from families where English is not the primary language. There is a growing body of research (Vernon-Feagans, Willoughby, & Garrett-Peters, 2016) that speaks to the early learning needs of students and the social and emotional factors that affect student achievement and to the role of schools in connecting with immigrant families who do not speak English, (Valdéz, 1996). However, the personal stories are not well represented. As people, we

empathize with and learn the most from each other and connect at deeper levels when we hear one another's stories and perspectives (Wheatley, 2009). It was my hope that this research brings additional knowledge to the field of English Language Development and contributes to greater insights about the needs of Spanish-speaking early learners.

CHAPTER 2

Review of the Literature

According to Ortman and Shin (2011), between 1980 and 2009, the United States experienced a growth of 148% of families whose primary home was a Language Other than English (LOTE). By 2011, 1 in 5 persons ages 5 and older spoke a primary language other than English, and of non-native English speakers, two-thirds spoke Spanish as their native language (Ryan, 2013). With over 41 million speakers of Spanish, the United States is the second largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world, second only to Mexico (Burgen, 2015). The Oregon Department of Education reports that in 2015, students of color in Oregon were 36% of the kindergarten through 12th grade student population, and of that, 22% were Hispanic, the fastest growing subgroup of students in the state.

Certainly not all students who are Hispanic are English learners, and not all English Learners are Hispanic. Nevertheless, the intersectionality of student identity with components of being both Hispanic and an English learner are important to recognize. Generally, in Oregon, both Hispanic students and English Learners underperform academically compared to their white, English-speaking peers in high school four-year cohort graduation rates. Further, more than 77% of English learners have Spanish as their first language (Oregon Education Investment Board, 2014). In addition, Oregon students who are Hispanic are twice as likely to be economically disadvantaged than their white peers (ERCO Northwest, 2009). Considering these statistics, it is easy to understand how limited English proficiency, race, and poverty can easily be identified as challenges to a student's success in school. Still, the promise of academic success and the importance of schooling for English learners who have Spanish as their native language is a passion that drives many educators and makes research like this study worthwhile.

This review of the literature focuses on social issues that influence English learners in low socioeconomic communities whose first and primary language is Spanish. First, literature regarding early learning and its relationship to later academic success is explored. Second, this review examines the academic experiences of immigrants from Spanish-speaking nations to articulate how race and language intersect with the U. S. educational experience. Finally, the review discusses the impact poverty has on early learning, along with what is presently known about the literature related to overcoming barriers to academic success for Spanish-speaking and poverty-affected students.

Early Learning and Academic Success

Early learning (birth to age 5) takes place in many forms from a formal preschool or childcare center environment to a home environment where a parent, family member, or consistent adult is the primary caregiver. The foundations of early learning surround oral language development skills of phonemic awareness and vocabulary building as well as listening skills, all of which serve as a foundation for later reading and academic success (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walploe, 2010; Business Roundtable, 2009; McKenna & Millen, 2011).

Whether in a preschool classroom or a home care environment, caregivers' interactions with children are the groundwork for language acquisition and oral language development (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walpole, 2010). Language learning first takes place in infancy through interactions with an infant's caregiver. The quality and consistency of interactions helps the infant's brain development. These interactions, known as *serve-and-return learning*, (Council on the Developing Child, 2007), begin in infancy when a baby babbles, gestures, cries, or regards objects and the adult caregiver responds in turn through sensory input and language by talking to the baby, soothing cries, talking about items the baby gestures towards or which the baby has

interest. These serve-and-return behaviors create the foundation for learning (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). Over time, the serve-and-return experiences reinforced through relationship and positive tone help young children aged birth to five develop vocabulary, create the association of specific sounds to people, objects, and pictures, and later specific sounds to printed words (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). According to the National Dropout Prevention Center/ Network (2009), the fundamental skills children need to be a good reader are learned before kindergarten. By the time a child is of age to enter kindergarten, her acquired oral language skills will be a key indicator of her later academic reading success in third grade and are even connected to school performance in seventh grade as well as the tenth grade (Hart & Risley, 2003; Risley & Hart, 1995; Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007).

Early learning is the time for the developing child to build capacity for learning through interactions with others while using language to make personal expressions, offer opinions, listen to others, recall information, and form one's own ideas (Beuchat et al., 2010). For children entering school with a native language other than English (L1), language acquisition in English (L2) takes place at a different rate than children in English-only environments. This can leave English Learners at a disadvantage when entering English-only schools, as they may not have acquired ample speaking and listening skills in English to learn at the same rate as their English-only peers, even though they have often acquired them in their first language. English learners must first acquire receptive language skills of listening before they can use expressive language such as speaking (Sousa, 2011; Collier & Thomas 2006). However, for children in non-native Spanish-speaking homes, they still enjoy serve-and-return experiences, language modeling and interactions, and stories read in the native language of the home; these are rich language

experiences that provide children with a strong literacy and learning foundation in any language. Research is clear that non-native English-speaking parents should interact with their child in the language they are most comfortable, as time spent with skills learned in the native language, L1, are transferable to English (L2), and are ultimately predictors of language success (Social Policy Report, 2013).

Academic Experiences of Spanish-Speaking Immigrant Families

Engaging in one's child's school experience can be a significant challenge for immigrant families, especially when the school staff does not speak the language of the family or have a cultural understanding of the family's social experience. Immigrants who come to the United States in order to find a better life often face isolation and loneliness in their new country (Hurtado-de-Mendoza, Serrano, Gonzales, & Kaltman, 2017), and can lack the social network to assist them with interacting with public schools that are English-only in instruction and communication to families (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

Without language-specific navigational support, non-English speaking immigrant families may have limited access to school and community services and programs such as preschool and before- and after-school extensions to support their child's learning (Social Policy Report, 2013; Olivo & Mendoza, 2009). While there is no official language in the United States, English by cultural convention is the language of public education and with it comes a long history of discrimination against those who speak a different first language (Adair, 2015)

The interconnectedness of the American identity and the English language is as longstanding as is the Americanization of immigrants (Salomone, 2010). Prior to the Supreme Court decisions of Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, the systematic segregation of Native Americans, Latin Americans, Asians, African Americans and speakers of languages other than

English existed and was supported by law. This began to change with the Federal passing of *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954 (Crawford, 2004). Prior to Brown vs. Board of Education and for the next twenty years, public schools in the United States had a long history of systematic cultural and linguistic depravation of non-white and non-English speaking students (Crawford, 2004; Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). It was not until 1974 with the Supreme Court Case of *Lau v. Nichols* that education rights were granted to children learning English in public schools. It is important to note that the enforcement of these civil rights was slow to start and it was not until additional court cases such as *Casteñada v. Pickard* and Federal Title regulations that public schools were held accountable to serving the English language acquisition needs of students learning English (Crawford, 2004).

How Educators View Families

Many educators hold a deficit view about fluency in a language other than English, viewing it as problematic for the school setting. In essence, not being fluent in English, regardless of fluency in one's native language, is seen as a negative (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). This is likely because students who do not have a strong command of English do not perform as well in school compared to those who have strong academic English fluency. Specifically, for children of immigrants in public schools, immigrant students' native culture and language is often held in a lower status than that of English-speaking Americans, along with the perception that these children are often less engaged in school and have less social status inside of their school context (Sousa, 2011). This puts them at a disadvantage, particularly when their parents do not have the social and linguistic capital to navigate the American school system at the same level of success as dominant culture families.

Traditional values of how parents interact with school and "should" support their children's educations also affect the way teachers and school administrators see and value parents (Lowenhaupt, 2014). Limited English fluency can impede a parent's ability to interact with the school in traditional ways such as conferences, volunteering in classrooms, or phone calls. School staff often view parents who do not participate in traditional school-parent interactions as disinterested or uninvolved (Delgado Gaitan, 2102). These views, paired with a belief that immigrants do not have the skills or ability to support kids in schools, create a wider gap between school personnel and the immigrant family in meeting students' needs. As Lowenhaupt (2014) asserts, schools do better to focus on the strengths of the child and family, rather than attempting to "fix" what is "broken." What is considered limited parent participation in schools by immigrant, non-English speaking families is evidence that schools have not addressed the social barriers that impede families from fully engaging in their child's education (Olivo & Mendoza, 2009).

Cultural Norms of Schools and of Families

The cultural norms of public school define parent engagement through a lens of the dominant middle class, English-speaking, people of Northern European decent. By not taking into account the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of families from non-dominant cultures, schools do not tap into the rich cultural resources diverse families have (Orozco, 2008). Dominant culture refers to the mainstream culture that is shared or accepted without any opposition by the majority of a population (Hammond, 2015). Dominant culture is so normalized in school systems that it is difficult for members of the dominant culture to even perceive, which adds to its power. In many ways, the dominant culture in this country and its norms are not distinguishable from what people refer to as "American culture" (Gulati-Partee & Potapchuk,

2014). Also known as “white culture,” the dominant culture defines standards and norms in the U.S. for what is considered normal, professional, of quality, traditional, and good, as well as what is abnormal, unprofessional, of poor quality, non-traditional, and bad.

As a result, Spanish-speaking immigrants from Latin American countries face multiple forms of discrimination in schools, some overt and others subtle. Even the term non-English speaking indicates the societal dominance or preference for English over other languages. The same is true regarding the race descriptor “non-white” in comparison to white categories used by public schools to classify students (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

C. Suárez-Orozco and M.M. Suárez-Orozco (2001) noted the attitudes and beliefs teachers held about students of immigrant families largely influenced the school experience of those students. For immigrant parents who do not have English skills, school staff may overlook their assets leaving parents feeling unwelcomed and uniformed. By not engaging with non-English speaking families in their native language, educational decision-making lies heavily in the school’s hands, leaving parents pushed to the side (Adair, 2015). This is an example of the marginalization of a bilingual asset seen primarily as a deficit. The lack of social status and ability to navigate the dominant culture of the school system puts immigrant children at risk for low educational performance (Adair, 2015). Immigrant parents and students not raised in the culture of U.S. schools and middle-class norms do not have the cultural experience or capital to navigate school systems on their own (Rodela, 2013) and often lack established immigrant community resources to assist them (Potochnick, 2014). In addition, the stereotypes educators hold about immigrant families impede families from being seen for their assets (Suárez-Orozco, C. & Suárez-Orozco, M.M, 2001).

Stereotype Threat

When children perceive they have less competence or ability than their peers in a group that holds more status, they are less likely to perform well (Stegerlin, 2004). Steele and Aronson (1995) refer to this situation as stereotype threat. These facets or contingencies of one's identity, when seen as a negative, become a stigma or threat, making the individual or groups with the identity more aware of the impact this identity has on their interactions with society. The piece of one's social identity that can hold this threat can be anything held by the dominant culture as being less then optimal; minority race, language, gender, sexuality, disability, immigration status, etc. The threat exists when one believes that something bad could possibly happen as a result of having that piece of identity: discrimination, physical harm, social exclusion, rejection or legislation against their way of life. Recognizing history and present social and political context, the threat may not have to be actualized in the present for the holder to feel its full power (Pennington, Heim, Levy & Larkin, 2016).

Steele's (2010) work recognizes that there are positive, negative, and neutral contingencies or components of one's identity such as gender, race, immigration status, or age. The positive and neutral contingencies do not necessarily make one identity-aware (Steele, 2010) or conscientious of the advantage or neutral treatment one has in society as a direct result of an identity. It is the pieces of one's identity that are seen as negative that pose the threat. The threat of not wanting to confirm a stereotype about a component of one's identity becomes a lived threat. An example of Steele's research was his testing of women in higher-level math and science. When gender was an emphasized component of the testing women performed significantly lower than their male counterparts. When gender was not included as a component of the test, women performed at a similar or better rate as compared to their male counterparts.

Steele's theory was that women performed lower on high-level math assessments when gender was emphasized as a component of the testing due to cultural stereotypes that women are less able to perform higher levels of math than men. Bias also plays a role in reinforcing stereotype threat, (Steele, 2010). People hold a bias or preference subconsciously or consciously, for those with whom they share an identity. Students of non-dominant culture groups may begin to internalize prevailing stereotypes and become at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about the race, culture, gender or language group to which he or she belongs when it comes to school and achievement (Pennington et. al, 2016).

As noted above, low expectations held by educators for Spanish-speaking English learners and their families combined with bias and stereotype threat can have a significant impact on a child's educational experience and outcomes. Presently, one in five students in U.S. schools are of Hispanic descent, (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). While graduation rates between Hispanic and White students have narrowed nationally over the last five years, there still exists an 11% gap between them (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). English learners are graduating from high schools across the nation at a rate of 25% lower than English speakers, regardless if the student was born inside or outside of the United States. 80% of Hispanic students classified as English Learners were born in the United States (Gándara & Hopkins, 2010). Being a native Spanish-speaker and an English learner are two components of a student's identity that have an impact on a child's experience.

The Role of Poverty in Early Learning

The U.S. Government calculated the overall poverty rate in 2015 at 13.1% across all population groups (U.S. Census, 2015). There are multiple, complex components that impact poverty including family make-up, parental education level, gender, marital status, health of

adults in the home, and concentration of poverty in one's neighborhood. Absolute poverty is defined by the income of a family and is established by the Department of Commerce (U.S. Census, 2015). The concept of absolute poverty refers to the income necessary for a family to maintain a standard of living adequate for health and nutrition. The minimal income level is adjusted depending on the number of people in the family unit. Thus in 2015, a family of four with two children under the age of 18 was considered in poverty with a yearly income less than $24,036 per year (U.S. Census, 2015).

However, poverty relates to more than just income. One's race, age, immigration, and citizenship status are factors that contribute to poverty in the United States, as well. In 2015, for example, persons who were White experienced poverty at a rate of 10.1% while Hispanic people experienced poverty at a rate of 23.6%, more than two times that of their White counterparts. Immigrants in 2015 experienced poverty at 18% and non-U.S. citizens experienced poverty at 24.4%. Children across the nation experienced poverty at a rate of 21.1%, twice that of the adult rate, (U.S. Census, 2015), while children who are Hispanic and non-English speaking experience poverty at a rate of 63% (Garcia & Weiss, 2015).

Researchers have established that the impact of sustained poverty that children experience from birth to age five can have a significant impact on early educational achievement largely due to the sensitive and impressionable nature of children's rapidly developing brain (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walploe, 2010; Magnuson, 2013). According to the National Scientific Council Center on the Developing Child (2007) toxic stressors on the developing brain can have lifelong impacts on social, emotional, behavioral, physical and mental health development. Researchers note that the causal relationship between financial poverty and characteristics often associated with poverty such as low parental education, marital status, and even neighborhood in

which a child is raised all directly and empirically relate to early childhood outcomes (Magnuson, 2013). Additionally, researchers like Hart & Risley (2003) have established the direct correlation of family income to the language level of children entering kindergarten. In their seminal research involving 42 English-speaking families over a two-and-a-half-year period conducted in 1995 and again in 2003, Hart and Risley measured the amount of language exposure infant children were exposed to at the start of the study. These children were ages seven months to nine months when the study began. Dividing families into three income categories, High Socio-Economic Status Professionals; Middle/Low Socio-Economic Status Working Class; and Families on Welfare, Hart and Risley concluded that by age four, a child from a family on welfare would experience 13 million words, a child from a family in the middle to low income group would experience 26 million words, and a child from the professional income group would experience 45 million words (Hart & Risley, 1995; 2003). This represents a gap of 32 million experienced words for children in families between the highest and lowest socio-economic income levels. In addition, Hart and Risley noted a significant difference in the number of encouragements and discouragements children from the highest and lowest income groups experienced. Namely, children in the professional income group experienced 560,000 more encouragements than discouragements or prohibitions of their behavior, while a child in the welfare income class experienced 150,000 more prohibitions of their behavior than encouragements (Hart & Risley, 1995; 2003). Research also emphasize the notable language abilities of children experiencing poverty as early as 9 to 24 months of age as less then children in home not experiencing poverty (Halle, et al., 2009) and has lasting impact on a child's reading ability later in the child's education (Beauchat, Blamey & Walpole, 2010, Goldin-Meadow, Levine, Branson Thayer, Hernandez, 2013).

In summary, research confirms that poverty impacts a child's early brain development and children who experience sustained poverty in the first five years of life have disproportionate opportunity gaps of positive language exposure as compared to children from wealthier families who experience a substantially larger vocabulary exposure and positive tone. Children raised in poverty are at a language disadvantage at the start of schooling as compared to their wealthier peers, having lower stored vocabulary and language skills to communicate and interact with teachers and peers (Garcia & Weiss, 2015). Socio-economic class is one of the most significant factors in a child's readiness for school with race as it is associated with social class as another substantial compounding factor (Garcia & Weiss 2015).

While the achievement gap exists between wealthy and poor children at the start of school, recent research suggests school-based interventions in the early grades can interrupt the widening of the gap (Reardon, 2013). More time in school and early intervention starting at the preschool age are two interventions that can help interrupt the influence of poverty on early academic achievement at the start of school (Reardon, 2013). Poverty exists in multiple races and places within the United States (Beagle, Ellis & Akkary, 2007). And while programs such as Head Start, the federally-funded preschool program for low-income families, are a way to impede and influence the impacts of poverty on a child's education, fewer than 42% of those eligible for Head Start are actually enrolled and served (Blair, 2013). A lack of access to quality preschool education exists as a significant barrier for families facing poverty. Additionally, Beagle argues that eliminating educational barriers is only one piece of interrupting poverty. Children not only face the effects of poverty in school. Housing, food security, access to health care, and safe neighborhoods are issues children facing poverty experience (Beagle, Ellis & Akkary, 2007).

Poverty, although based in economic deprivation, comes in different varieties, each of which impacts people experiencing poverty differently. Generational poverty is defined as a situation where families have not owned property for generations and whose work has been unstable, which created conditions where the adults were unable to provide for their basic human needs of consistent food and shelter over long periods of time (Beagle, Ellis & Akkary, 2007). The lack of education and access to trusted people with an education put those in generational poverty at a deep disadvantage. There are not role models for how to leave poverty and few role models of norms and behaviors for interacting with the middle class; schools, social services, medical and police. Society views those in generational poverty at a deficit, as if their poverty conditions are a choice (Jensen, 2009). The long-term effects of generational poverty can perpetuate environments where children see one way of being in their larger society, and therefore challenge their ability to have self-efficacy and determination (Jensen, 2009).

Situational poverty occurs on a temporary basis and can be experienced when a significant event occurs such as the death of family member who is the income provider, sudden illness/inability of the income provider to work, divorce of the income provider, or other sudden onset of a financial crisis. Often, those experiencing situational poverty still have access to housing, food, and access school and their social networks of support (Jensen, 2009). Those in the dominant culture do not see situational poverty as one's fault. As such, persons facing situational poverty often do not experience the same societal shame about poverty in the same way as those who live in generational poverty (Beagle, Ellis & Akkary, 2007).

Immigrant poverty in the United States is experienced by those who immigrate to the U.S. with few resources including both spoken and written proficiency in English, financial resources, and cultural knowledge (Beagle, Ellis & Akkary, 2007). Migrant families, day

laborers, and those who do not have the education to access skilled labor jobs face the uncertainty of daily survival. The dominant social and political culture in the United States has views and opinions about immigrants, including legislation that limits one's access to social services designed those help those most in need. First generation immigrants make up nearly 25% of those in poverty in the United States, (Rector, 2006).

The impacts of poverty on young children before school age continue to play out in the classroom once school begins. Deficit views held by teachers and administrators of children and families in poverty are fueled by the behaviors of children and families in school who might not adhere to traditional middle-class norm of school such as taking turns while speaking, using a calm voice to articulate one's needs, timeliness, planning, and/or emotional regulation (Jensen, 2009). Poor academic success can perpetuate the cycle of low expectations and low self-efficacy and achievement.

Overcoming the Barriers to Academic Success

Being a non-English speaker or living in poverty represent major obstacles for academic achievement in mainstream educational settings. When the two are combined, it is even more challenging for young students. This is the case for many Spanish-speaking students. And within this group of students, there are those who academically succeed and scholars have examined the reasons for their success.

Learning Academic English takes between 5 and 7 years (Sousa, 2011). As immigrant, non-English speaking children enter schools, teachers who are equipped to teach students with language acquisition needs will be far better able to meet students' needs (Calderon, Slavin, & Sánchez, 2011; Crawford, 2004). Teachers who have effective training in making academic content accessible to students are essential for English learners (Olson, 1997). For students,

language learning cannot be separate from the learning of content (DelliCarpini & Alonso, 2013). Students cannot learn what they cannot access. English learners succeed when content is fully accessible and when teachers focus on the cognitive and communication skills of their students making it possible for them to connect to their own learning (Zwiers, O'Hara & Pritchard, 2013).

One of the most the significant components in overcoming the barriers to academic success for immigrant, non-English speaking children is recognizing the role of parents and community in the child's education (Dearing, Walsh, Sibley, Lee-St. John, Foley, & Raczek, 2016). Immigrant children who attend schools with a population impacted by poverty have shown greater academic success when the schools implemented intervention systems that engaged the family and meet both the academic and social needs of the child from a strengths-based approach (Olivos & Mendoza 2009). These approaches that focus on meeting the child's academic growth along with his/her social, emotional needs while embracing the family as a resource. Children learn self-efficacy and self-worth from first their families as they learn about their culture and heritage (Olivos & Mendoza 2009). When the school and the family are in partnership, children have a higher rate of success.

This focus on the academic and social needs of children and their families is also one of the main factors for success for schools working with children facing poverty (Jensen, 2009). High expectations, high support for academics, and support for physical and emotional and mental health are all components of success for high-poverty schools (Jensen, 2009). This unrelenting expectation of success is what has led schools to close the achievement gap for students facing poverty. A strengths-based focus on the child, where schools build relationships with children and families, provide resources to staff, and support staff and maintaining high

standards (Jensen, 2009). Schools with high poverty and high racial diversity rates experience this success, but as Jensen writes, it is not because of business as usual, but because of a high set of standards and embracing a mindset of growth and change that starts with seeing each student and teaching to their needs.

Conclusion

A child's success in school should not be predicted or predetermined by native language, immigration status, race, ethnicity, or family income. Yet the research in this literature review indicates that Spanish-speaking, low-income immigrant families face significant challenges in assuring their children's academic needs are met when engaging with schools that operate with dominant culture norms.

The strengths and assets of Spanish-speaking immigrant families on the academic success of their children has been overlooked by public schools who over time, have not been either willing or able to change practices to meet the needs of this growing population (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). Spanish-speaking immigrant families have been met with negative attitudes, biases, and discrimination in U.S. schools over time. While there are pockets of success and hope where schools with high racial diversity and high poverty have had high academic success, U.S. schools as a whole have not responded to the needs of a diverse student population facing the crisis of poverty. As the Spanish-speaking Latino population grows within the Pacific Northwest and across the United States, the need for educators to understand the assess and strengths of Spanish-speaking immigrant families and their role in their children's academic success is essential in closing the academic achievement gap between Spanish-speaking English learners and their native English-speaking peers (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). For many immigrants, the social connection to family and a deep desire for a better life and education for one's children are

reasons for immigration (Hurtado-de-Mendoza, Serrano, Gonzales, & Kaltman, 2017). Overcoming barriers in the face of adversity while striving to improve the quality of life for one's children and family speaks to the resilient nature of immigrant parents and the hopes they have for their children in their new country, (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017).

CHAPTER 3

Methods

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of mothers of Spanish-speaking kindergarten students who have indicated early academic success on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment and who are native-Spanish speakers attending a Title I school. I used personal interviews with the mothers to gain deeper understanding of the nature and features of the home/parenting dynamics that have fostered the early academic success of their children. An objective of this study was to articulate mothers' perceptions of academic success. Subsequently, I used two grand tour questions to investigate their common lived experiences around this topic.

Question #1

What do the participating mothers regard as academic success for their kindergarten-aged children?

Question #2

How do the participating mothers encourage and facilitate academic success for their kindergarten-aged children?

Kindergarten students who are Hispanic are the lowest performers on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). The Oregon Kindegarten Assessment (OKA) measures three areas of early learning that are considered to be strongly linked to a child's third-grade reading and future academic success (Oregon Department of Education, 2016). These measures are: English letter name recognition and English letter sound recognition, early math skills measured by EasyCBM, a benchmarking and progress monitoring assessment developed by the University of Oregon, and approaches to learning in their

interpersonal and self-regulating skills as measured by teacher observations using a valid child behavior rating scale. While all three measures of the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment are linked to third-grade reading and future academic success, student scores using a child behavior rating scale alone are considered themselves to be highly predictive of future reading and math success, (Howard, S. & Melhuish, E., 2017). The Oregon Kindergarten Assessment is given within the first six weeks of school and is intended to provide schools and communities with "snapshot" information about the skills children have upon kindergarten entry (Oregon Department of Education, 2016).

While Hispanic students across the state matched the total state average scores in the areas of self-regulation and interpersonal skills, Hispanic students at Forrest Glen Elementary scored higher than their English-only peers on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in the areas of self-regulation and interpersonal skills at the school, (3.5 as compared to 3.1 in the area of self-regulation on a scoring scale of 1 – 5, and 3.8 on interpersonal skills as compared to 3.6 on a scoring scale of 1-5). Thus, the investigative goal of this research was to explore within a phenomenological framework the possible explanation for these unexpectedly high scores by understanding how the participating mothers regarded academic success.

Setting

Participants in this study were three Spanish-speaking mothers whose children were English Learners who attended Forrest Glen, a K – 5 public elementary Title 1 school in West Valley School District (WSSD). West Valley is in the Pacific Northwest and serves students in grades kindergarten through 12th grade. Eleven percent of all students in West Valley are identified as current English learners and an additional 10% are former English learners. The most commonly-spoken language other than English in the district is Spanish. Thirty-eight

percent of the district's total population participates in the Free Meal program. Additionally, Spanish-speaking English learners are two times more likely than their white, English-speaking, peers to qualify for free and reduced meals.

For this study, the three participants were mothers who were Spanish-speaking and whose kindergarten-aged, Spanish-speaking children performed at a higher level than their English-only peers on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in the areas of self-regulation and interpersonal skills. The children attended Forrest Glen Elementary School in West Valley where more than 90% of the students at this school participate in the Free Meal program and where Spanish is the most commonly-spoken language spoken other than English by students and families.

Participants, Sampling Strategy, and Research Design

I used a purposive sampling strategy for this research. Purposive sampling was appropriate for this study because I had a specific type of participant in mind. The mothers shared the common experience of having a kindergarten-aged child in the same school, each of whom scored unexpectedly high on the OKA. These mothers had similar access to school events, staff, and resources, and similar experiences with school norms for their kindergarten-aged children. As such, when discussing school and their perceptions of academic success, the mothers had a framework of understanding that was more alike than if their children had attended different elementary schools.

The mothers did not know one another through previous experiences at the school site This is possibly because two of the mothers worked during school hours and could not volunteer or participate in the parent meetings that were typically held during the school day. However,

they had a shared experience in their role as Latina mothers of kindergarten students who are English learners who scored above average on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment.

Phenomenology

My objective for this study was to better understand the perceptions of academic success of the mothers, their relationship with the school, and any insights they may have about their children's educational experiences. Therefore, I chose to conduct a phenomenological research study. Phenomenological study was best-suited for this study because it was important to understand the lived experiences of a set of mothers. This study matters because immigrant and non-English dominant families do not have the same level of voice, status, and participation in public education as compared to English-speaking families who know the norms of school, (Adair, 2015; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Hearing first-hand from parents is important in my work as an educator. By finding the core and nature of these mothers' own educational experiences, perceptions of success, and lived experiences, I have learned from them about what they believe they do to contribute to and support their children's academic success.

Phenomenology is a form of qualitative research inquiry that aims to describe and make meaning from the lived experiences of others (Creswell, 2007). Different from grounded theory where a researcher is attempting to form a theory that explains why something has happened, and different from ethnography, the study of a whole culture of people (Patton, 2002), the phenomenological form of qualitative research focuses on the exploration of how people make meaning from the experiences in their lives. As a researcher committed to this branch of research, I sought to understand how others perceive, feel, and are impacted by their lived experiences, and in turn how they make their own meaning from those experiences (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon is the shared human experience of a group of individuals. I carefully

listened to and captured the first-hand accounts of participants to report on composite or synthesized common experiences (Patton 2002). It is a philosophy that begins with questions, not judgments or pre-formed opinions about why things are, taking a fresh approach to examining the phenomenon and seeing it through a new lens (Creswell, 2007).

Edmund Husserl is credited as an early founder of phenomenology (Patton, 2002). Although his early work was in the area of mathematics, Husserl was influenced by Franz Brentano, a philosopher and psychologist, and turned his focus towards philosophy (Cerbone 2006). Husserl held a philosophical assumption that people have consciousness and beliefs about things and events in their lives and that the event or object has its meaning only through one's conscious experiences with it (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Husserl's form of phenomenology was based in his work studying how people discussed their lived experiences through their senses: seeing, hearing, feeling. His belief was that one's feelings form an understanding of an experience and that becomes part of one's consciousness (Patton, 2002). A person's feelings about experiences and the interpretation of those experiences shape and form their reality. Husserl called these experiences *essential content* or *essences* and believed that through thorough interview and analysis of essences, and setting aside biases, the researcher finds new understanding of the experience (Kaufer & Chemero, 2015). Husserl's phenomenology does not focus on the facts of what happened, but rather how one experienced and interpreted what happened. The acknowledgement of and setting aside of assumptions and biases are a fundamental part of Husserl's work; he called this the epoch, (Moustakas, 1994). This is the first step in the approach of phenomenological analysis (Patton 2002).

The second step is phenomenological reduction, the suspending of personal judgment so as to focus on the experience (Patton 2002). The researcher combs through interview data to find

the key elements that are directly related to the phenomenon and carefully examines them looking for the core statements and phrases. The researcher may also ask the participant to review the analysis. The point is to look for meaning in what continues a common thread in the phenomenon, also called horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994). Once the data are bracketed, the researcher organizes the data "into meaningful clusters" (Patton, 2002, p. 468), and begins to form themes (Cresswell, 2007).

In the third step, the researcher forms a textural description; a written description of what the participants experienced (Cresswell, 2007) and uses that to conduct an imaginative variation. This is where the researcher examines the textural description from multiple angles and perspectives, allowing for a deeper understanding of the participants' experience of the phenomenon (Patton, 2002). If each participant's personal story were like a verse in a song, it is only when each verse is sung, and they are sung together in a cohesive way that the listener can understand what they are hearing.

In the final step of analysis, the researcher brings the data together to form a written synthesis of the participants' experiences, (Moustakas, 1994). In this combined statement, the "underlying structures" and essences are synthesized into a single written description of shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Using the analogy of song, the researcher is able to describe the song, interpret the pieces of the song, and share it for readers to gain deeper understanding.

I sought the first-person point of view voices of the mothers in this study. Hearing their stories helped me better understand the phenomenon of early school success for their children. Creswell (2007) states, "It would be important to understand these common experiences in order to develop practices or policies, or to develop a deeper understanding about the features of the phenomenon" (p. 60). As a district administrator who works directly with programs supporting

students experiencing poverty and students who are native-Spanish speakers who are learning English, it was my hope to learn more about the perceptions of school success from a group of mothers.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

Data was collected in two key ways. First, in the form of a focus group of Spanish-speaking mothers, and secondly, through individual follow-up interviews. First, I identified each current first grade student at Forrest Glen Elementary who is a native Spanish-speaker and English learner and who attended Forrest Glen Elementary as a Kindergarten student. This group of students scored above the school average on the Oregon Kindergarten Assessment in the areas of Self-regulation and interpersonal skills. All of the mothers of these students, eleven in total, were invited to participate in a focus group by email and personal phone call from a Spanish-speaking interpreter. Participating mothers were given a letter that was written in both English and Spanish that told them about the study and invited them to participate in the focus group as well as a follow-up interview. (see Appendix A - C).

I conducted the focus group interview at Forest Glen Elementary School (pseudonym) in the school's library, a room designated for parent meetings during non-instructional hours. The library is a family-friendly environment where parents can meet while younger children play with books and toys in a neighboring room. I provided childcare during the focus group and follow-up interviews. Since the library is a familiar place for families to gather, the focus group served as a place for me to gather data from the mothers in a non-threatening environment (Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, Zoran, 2009). Children who attended the interviews with their mothers were welcome in the space or could choose to play in the supervised childcare room next door.

After the focus group experience, I invited the two mothers who attended to participate in individual interviews to be conducted within the following two weeks at a location of their choosing. Additionally, through the Spanish-speaking interpreter, I sent another email invitation to all of the other mothers on the initial invitation list and made bilingual Spanish – English phone calls inviting additional participation. One additional mother was able to participate.

For each interview, I used a digital recording device to record the interviews. At each interview session, I was accompanied by Kennedy, (pseudonym), a Spanish-speaking interpreter, who brokered conversation for both myself and the mother throughout our conversation. I asked the interview questions in English and Kennedy translated. I also field noted during the personal interviews to add to and supplement the digitally-recorded data. A professional transcribed the interviews; I then listened and re-listened to the recordings myself throughout the data analysis process along with carefully reading the transcriptions. I used my field notes to add to and supplement the recorded data. Upon completion of the interviews, I coded the data and looked for emerging themes using the four-part method noted above.

Research Ethics

I obtained permission for this study from the George Fox University International Review Board and the school district where the participants' children attended school. I gathered informed consent from each of the participants through a signed letter. Confidentiality of the participants was kept through the process. Participants and their children were each assigned a pseudonym and their identities will be kept confidential. The data and analysis presented in this study is presented in a manner that maintains participants' confidentiality. Throughout the research process, I kept all interview recordings and field notes in a secure, locked file in a private office in an area where I am the only one who can access them. The signed letter,

recordings, transcripts and field notes will be part of the documents I securely keep for five years after which time I will personally destroy them.

Although I have a role with the school district, I had not encountered any of the participating mothers prior to the interviews. The focus group and individual interviews were my first encounters with each of them.

Potential Contributions of the Research

As an educator and district administrator, understanding the lived experiences of these mothers held the potential to help me and other educators create and reshape district policies and practices that support children and families entering school who are native Spanish-speakers, acquiring English, and who live in a community affected by poverty. The existing research on the school experience of Spanish-speaking English learners who are affected by poverty details common misconceptions and biases school staff have about them and their families, particularly when it comes to school engagement (Dearing et al., 2016). Spanish-speaking families who cannot access English and who do not have the cultural capital to navigate the U.S. public school system are at a disadvantage in supporting their children (Lowenhaupt, 2014). Despite these challenges, when schools create partnerships with families and honor the home language and culture, Spanish-speaking English Learners experiencing poverty can experience academic achievement in the early years of elementary school (Dearing et al., 2016; Jensen, 2009; Lowenhaupt: 2014; Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). It was my hope that this study will support English-dominant educators in meeting the needs of Spanish-speaking families experiencing poverty by hearing the first-hand experiences of mothers and their perceptions of educational success. This could begin to change some of the biases and prejudicial attitudes these families experience in schools. Additionally, it is my hope that this study may provide educators an

opportunity to learn how to better create collaborative relationships that remove barriers to educational access and academic achievement for Spanish-speaking families of English learners experiencing poverty.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis and Process

The purpose of this study was to document the lived experience of native Spanish-speaking mothers to better understand their perceptions of academic success for their kindergarten-aged children in a Title 1 elementary school. The results of this study reflect interview data of three Latina mothers whose children were in kindergarten during the 2016-2017 school year. In this chapter, I first share a profile of each participant, which notes her educational background and family composition. Secondly, I explain themes resulting from analysis of the interviews, using assertions, vignettes, quotes, and supporting documentation to illustrate the mothers' experiences. Four clear themes or assertions were evident across the data. These are as follows:

Assertion 1: The mothers prioritized early learning opportunities in pre-kindergarten settings to help their children learn foundational skills,

Assertion 2: The mothers valued literacy and maintained Spanish as the family's language in their homes,

Assertion 3: Maintaining routines was a key part of parenting for the mothers, and

Assertion 4: The mothers faced obstacles in facilitating success for their children.

Gathering Participants

My first step in identifying participants was to find out which of the Spanish-speaking kindergarten students who were English learners from the 2016-2017 cohort still attended Forest Glen Elementary as first graders. I used the district electronic student information system to determine which students were still enrolled as first graders and made a list of their mothers' names and phone numbers, 11 in total. All but one of the mothers were native Spanish-speakers

and I needed help from Kennedy, a Spanish-speaking interpreter, to reach out and make contact with them. I crafted a phone script and an email for Kennedy to translate. He made phone calls and sent emails to each of the prospective participants. We set a date for the first focus-group interview for early December 2017. Several of the invitees responded that they would attend; I made plans to secure childcare and provide refreshments.

The Focus Group Interview

The day of the focus group interview, I awoke early and made a trip to the local coffee shop to purchase a portable coffee carafe and some juice and then drove to the local pandaria or Mexican bakery. There is only one pandaria in our town and I wanted to buy pan dulce, traditional Mexican baked goods, to serve as refreshments to welcome the participants and their children. After buying a dozen pan dulce, I drove to the elementary school and set up in the library where I would be meeting the participants. This was a non-school day for kids, and the building was strangely quiet. I set up the coffee and pan dulce on a table near our seating arrangement and put the tables in a circle so the participants and I could see one another with ease.

Kennedy arrived and we discussed how we would begin the conversation with the participants. I nervously awaited their arrival, fiddling with final arrangements and fretting about the space. Forrest Glen is an 80-year old school building with a design and layout from a bygone era. The library is a large rectangular space, with bookcases lining the walls and student tables in the center. The old heating system maintained a constant humming sound in the background. I wanted the interview space to feel comfortable and welcoming. As a cultural outsider to these mothers, it was important that I was welcoming and humble. I wanted to be sure the participants knew I was grateful for their willingness to share their experiences with me. I hoped that sitting

in a circle, without a distinct head and foot of the table, would help create a space of welcome and of community.

The interview was to start at 9:00 am and the first adult and two children arrived at 8:50 am. The woman, about 60 years in age, politely introduced herself as Maria (pseudonym). I offered Maria and the children some refreshments. The kids looked at Maria who gave an approving smile and they each took a pan dulce. Val, the childcare provider I had arranged for, offered to take the children to the childcare room in the classroom next to the library. The children chattered with one another as they left with Val, pan dulce in hand. Maria walked with me to the tables where we would be seated for the interview and then shared that she was not the parent of the children. She was their god-mother, la madrina, who took care of the kids for their mother, Luz (pseudonym). She said Luz had to work that morning but had told Kennedy she would come, so Maria came in her place. Maria spoke with knowing confidence and sat at the table with Kennedy and me.

A moment or two later, a young woman about 30 years in age came into the library. She did not have children with her. She had short black hair that was nicely styled, a short red winter coat and a purse she kept under her arm. I greeted her when she arrived and she introduced herself as Susie (pseudonym). I offered her some coffee and pan dulce and we sat at the table with Kennedy and Maria.

A moment or two past 9:00 am, I decided should get things started to honor participants' time. I was really hoping more mothers would have come, especially since six of the invited eleven mothers had said they would be there. I began the interview and let the women know we would welcome anyone else who joined later. I began with a formal introduction of myself, my role in the school district, and then focused on the purpose of the study. As I was speaking, a

small woman, about 40 years old, entered the library. She wore a long green, puffy winter coat. She was no more than 4 feet, 10 inches tall, and the green coat she wore covered most of her, all the way to the toes of her rain boots. She had on a bright pink scarf and a very soft smile. I stopped and welcomed her and offered her some coffee and pan dulce. I introduced myself and she said her name was Luz; she was unexpectedly able to join us because her shift at work was going to start later. Maria pulled out a chair next to her and Luz settled in between Maria and Susie. Luz apologized for being late and thanked Maria for coming and bringing the kids. Luz explained that Maria was like a second mother, "she became my godmother when I came to the United States. She lives near me and she helps me with my kids. I don't know what I would do without her."

Maria responded they were like family, and family steps in for each other, giving Luz a shoulder hug.

I began again with the purpose of the study and shared the interview questions and consent to participate. I wanted the interview questions to serve as a guide as we went through the conversation. Both Luz and Susie signed and I started the digital recorder. I set the recorder in the middle of the table so it would pick up all of our voices. Maria stayed next to Luz through the interview. Although she did not answer questions or interject during the interview, she listened intently to the conversations and nodded her approval of responses both Luz and Susie gave to the questions.

More Participants Needed

In my original design, I hoped to have four to five participants. After the first focus group interview, Kennedy and I set a second focus group interview date with two prospective participants, both of whom did not come. I still felt there was more I could do. I thought perhaps

the time I had set might have been a barrier for the prospective participants, so with the next outreach, I offered to meet each mom at a location and time of her choice. Kennedy and I conducted phone calls with two mothers who did not show up previously, as well as to the remaining moms on the list. Some went to voicemail immediately. On one call with a woman who was speaking with us, a man who identified himself as her husband abruptly took the phone from the woman, asked what we wanted, and then hung up on us when Kennedy was explaining the purpose of our call in Spanish. The last call I made was to a mom who was bilingual in English and Spanish. About two sentences into the call, she also hung up.

Kennedy and I talked about this for some time afterwards. From his perspective as a bilingual translator and community agent for the school district, Spanish-speaking families have begun to pull away from district events since November of 2016, after the most recent Presidential election. He has seen a steady drop-off of community participation from our Spanish-speaking families since then. Our school district has also seen a drop in the number of Spanish-speaking English learners since last year. Kennedy spoke openly with me about the fear some families have shared with him. For some, the fear is related to their documentation status or the status of a family member. Others have expressed a fear of being targeted for illegal immigration investigations simply because of their race.

After consulting with my chair, I decided to do background interviews with the school counselor and school social worker to better understand what these mothers were facing. Mrs. Zimmerman, (pseudonym), affectionately known as Mrs. Z to the students and families at Forrest Glen, has been the school counselor for almost 20 years. She and the school social worker, Ms. Regis, (pseudonym), support the Spanish-speaking mothers at the school by hosting the weekly Madres, or mothers, parenting group and the weekly intercambio, which is a weekly time for

parents to practice conversation skills in English and Spanish. Mrs. Z shared with me that the Madres have been an active group in the school and community for the past five years. However, recently she had to change the structure of their meetings. Usually, the Madres would walk the school track or walk in the surrounding neighborhood as a group and then meet at the school while having lunch together. After the election, a handful of the Madres were walking in the community when two white, middle-aged, English-speaking men yelled obscenities at them and told them they do not belong in this country. After that, the Madres group felt it would be best to just meet inside the school and have lunch together. They no longer took the group walks.

There is a subtle feeling in our Spanish-speaking community of being on guard. Since the election, I have helped my school district craft letters to families acknowledging the political climate yet assuring them of all children's right to go to school free of intimidation and harassment. I have helped Kennedy organize community meetings supporting families who fear separation due to deportation. I have listened to the worries of teachers who work with newcomers and have heard the concern of students who want to know if and how the school will protect them if immigration law enforcement comes to the school. These circumstances may indicate why some of the mothers did not return our calls. While none of the prospective participants said their lack of participation was due to fear of speaking with a school official, I sense this could have been related to these larger issues for those in our Spanish-speaking community.

In the end, I was able to interview three mothers, Luz and Susie, who came to the focus group interview, and who agreed to let me interview them each one additional time, and Daphne, a mom Kennedy contacted during our last round of phone call invitations. I am grateful to each of them for trusting me with their stories and for allowing me to share their experiences.

Data Collection and Analysis Process

The interviews were conducted between December 2017 and February 2018. Each interview lasted between 70 and 90 minutes and was conducted at West Valley Elementary School in the school library when students were not present or in a private school office. In each interview I asked the questions in English and Kennedy translated the questions into Spanish. He then translated the responses from the mothers back to me in English.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice-recording device. All recording files were professionally transcribed in English. I used the following steps to analyze the data.

1. The Epoch - I listened to each recording and then read and re-read each transcript separately. Then I read the transcripts in the order of the interviews. With each reading, I referenced my field notes, making notes of participants' emotions, along with the tone and intensity of their voices as they answered the questions. This close listening helped me work to understand their experiences through their lens.
2. Bracketing/Reduction - I highlighted the significant phrases and quotes of participants' experiences that helped bring to light the phenomena. I assigned a separate code to each of the meaningful statements and clustered the meaningful statements into themes (Creswell, 2007). Next, I created a visual map of each interview as a graphic way to see the data and the clustered themes. I then re-read each transcript while referencing the visual map as a way to assure I captured each meaningful cluster.
3. Textual Descriptions – I wrote a textual description of each participant's experience with the phenomenon for each theme and identified the sub-themes within each of the main themes. This allowed me to identify what each mother experienced regarding her efforts

at supporting her child's success and listen closely to the ways their definitions of academic success varied.

4. Vignettes – I used single narrative vignettes to provide an interpretive commentary (Erickson, 1986) of the experiences. Vignettes along with quotes and supporting summaries of the participants' experiences with the phenomena illuminate the significance of each assertion from the data. Along the way, I shared and processed ideas with a peer and with my chair.
5. Assertions – From these interviews and resulting analysis and vignettes, I identified four assertions that encompassed these mothers' perspectives on their young children's academic success. I organized findings around assertions to make the findings clear, supporting them with vignettes and quotes.

General Demographic Background Information

Table 1 provides demographic information about the three participating mothers in this study.

Table 1. Demographic information about the participants

Pseudonym	Home Country	Age	Years in U.S.	Children
Susie	Mexico	Early 30s	12	Anna (F) 8 Ginessa (F) 6
Luz	Mexico	Early 40s	18	Veronica (F) 19 Luis (M) 15 Roberto (M) 9 Alicia (F) 6
Daphne	Mexico	Early 40s	14	Marco (M) 20 Isabel (F) 17 Adam (M) 6

The following section introduces each participant through a synthesized accounting of her personal educational story, her family make-up, and her personality. Each mother had unique perspectives embedded in her conception of school, academic success, and the future she wanted for her kindergarten-aged child.

Susie

Susie was a married mother of two elementary school-aged girls, Anna, who was a third grader, and Ginessa, who was a first grader. Susie was in her early 30s and emigrated from Mexico to the United States twelve years ago. In the first interview, Susie said her goal in coming to the United States was to learn English. School and education was very important to Susie. She shared that as a child, she liked school in Mexico and did well as a student. In our interviews, Susie was very matter-of-fact. She did not add a lot of colorful detail to her answers, and while she did not show much emotion, she spoke with confidence.

Susie had an older sister and both attended school as young girls. As Susie and I spoke of her childhood and education in Mexico, she became more quiet and introspective. She looked down at her hands she had folded on the table, fingers interlaced. It was as though she was having a conversation with me while replaying the memories in her mind. Susie's voice became firm, almost business-like as she described her mother's involvement in her education, different from her quiet voice earlier in the interview. She did not give many details other than that she was a good mother, but she had to work a great deal outside of the home and therefore could not be a part of Susie's and her sister's schooling experience. Susie stared at her hands as she spoke of her mother's absence in her education and how she and her sister were on their own with schooling. Looking up from the table, she said that she knew her mother cared, but she just was not there. She just could not be there. I could feel the hurt in her voice and I could sense Susie

was working hard not to show emotion in the interview while she spoke of something so important to her. While her words were even-toned and without much description, her body language betrayed her disappointment in her mother's absence. Susie pointed to her own experiences as a student whose mother could not be involved in school as the reason it is important for Susie to be involved in her girls' education. This was of great importance to her.

As Susie spoke about her girls, her words were confident. She knew what she wanted her role to be as their mother in their education from doing their hair and getting them ready for school each day to supporting them with their homework and knowing what is happening at the school. Knowing what is happening at the school and being involved is really important to Susie. She presently does not work outside of the home and spends several hours a week at Forrest Glen Elementary as a volunteer or as an active participant in several of the parent groups. In scheduling interview times with Susie, I worked around her volunteer times and scheduled the interviews at the elementary school when she had finished with her volunteer work or participation in a parent group. *Strong* and *empowered* are two words I would use to describe Susie and her efforts to make a difference for her girls. Even without fluency in English, Susie has not been shy in her efforts to make social change within the school and community. Along with other Madres and Mrs. Z. from Forrest Glen, Susie has marched two times this school year at the state capitol advocating for the right to legally drive for members of the Latino community.

> I did not understand why this state wants to criminalize parents who want to take their kids to school, go to work, and buy groceries. These are the basics of life, they are fundamental. It does not make sense. (Susie, 1/25/2018).

Susie smiled when she spoke of taking her husband to the political activities she has participated in. Her being involved in her girls' education was important to her; she extended this expectation for involvement to her husband, as well. Susie looked at me intently and spoke with conviction as she said, "Both of my girls need to see both parents involved in their school. It matters."

Luz

Luz was in her early 40s and a mother of four children whose ages ranged from six years old to 19 years old. Luz described her children to me in our first interview. Luz's melodical voice was slowly-paced. She spoke softly and with pride as she talked about her children, all of who have attended school in the West Valley school district. Veronica, age 19, graduated last year. Luis is 15 and is in high school. Luz paused and took a breath as she began to talk about her oldest son. She said Luis had special needs as a young child and school is still difficult for him. For many of his younger years, he did not speak.

> There was an accident when he was little. He was just two years old when the accident happened. He spent several weeks in the hospital in the city. After that, he just didn't speak. For years he had to have special services at school with special teachers to help him learn to speak again. He's doing better now and does not have to have the special support from a speech teacher. School is still difficult for him though. (Luz, 1/30/2018).

Luz's two youngest children attend Forrest Glen Elementary School; Roberto is in fourth grade and Alicia was in kindergarten during the previous year.

Luz discussed her immigration to the United States at age 16. She described her life in Mexico as a happy time. Her father owned a ranch and she and her siblings each were a part of the family ranch work. She was the second of five children and the oldest girl. Each day, as soon

as she was old enough, she and one of her female family members would take the family donkeys to the river to do the laundry. Laundry was a woman's chore.

> We would pack the donkeys with all of the dirty clothes and walk a mile down to the river. It was so beautiful there. I loved the ranch, but the walk to the river was long and doing the wash was hard. One we got to the river we would find a large rock and begin to scrub the clothes. (Luz, 12/7/2017).

Luz demonstrated on the table how she would put the clothes onto a rock and scrub them with a brush. Making the scrubbing motion, she moved her arm back and forth, repeating the motion of scrubbing, an activity that was a part of her daily life for many years. Luz then paused, looked at her hands, and returned them to her lap. Taking a breath, she went on to tell how she would bring the clean laundry home on the donkeys, careful to not let the clothes fall off and become soiled again. To dry the clothes, Luz used the family's ladder. She described an old wooden ladder that she would set out in the sun and use it as a clothes dryer. Even as she described this, there was a happy smile on her face as though she were recalling an important or proud memory in her life.

Education for Luz stopped at about the second or third grade. She remembered clearly that her older brother was in sixth grade, the end of primary school, when formal schooling stopped in her family. Although her parents valued education, the kids needed to work on the ranch.

At 16, Luz came to the United States. She was matter-of-fact in her conversation about leaving Mexico, her melodic voice becoming less expressive in tone. I wondered if that was a self-protection mechanism because she spoke of her home country with so much admiration. She has not been back to Mexico since immigrating. She remains in contact with her father and he has visited her three times since she arrived in the U.S. but has not seen him in three years.

Luz told me with pride that she has a work permit and residency in the U.S. She wanted me to know that she has the legal ability to travel, but finances keep her from visiting her home country.

My one-on-one interview with Luz occurred in the late afternoon, once she was done with work. It was raining outside and Luz was dressed in the same big green coat, pink scarf, and rain boots she wore to our first meeting in December, but this time she also had on a winter hat, the knit type with a pompom on the top. Her 4-foot 10-inch frame was almost fully covered except for her smiling face. She greeted me warmly when she entered, reaching to shake my hand. I tried my best Spanish greeting and Luz greeted me back in English. I was happy it seemed we had formed a good connection.

She had just come from her job at a local laundry and dry-cleaning business where she is in charge of pressing all of the clothes. "I press dresses, shirts, blouses, pants, suits, skits. I do it all. There is just me at the shop," she said. Luz took off her jacket and sat down as she spoke. She began to massage and wring her hands.

> I press hundreds of garments per day. I'm so tired at the end of the day. My hands are tired, and they're so red. The heat from the pressing is so hot and my hands really hurt. (Luz, 1/30/2018).

Luz rode the bus from her work to the interview. She laughed when she told me she never learned how to drive and probably never will. She relies on public transportation to get to and from work, to the store, and anywhere else she needs to go. As the primary caregiver of her children, she is the one who gets them ready for school each day and must be there to greet them when the bus brings them home. Meeting at the school worked for Luz because it was near her home and she could walk from the bus line to meet me. Both of her elementary-aged children

attend Forrest Glen's after-school enrichment program, Actividades Para Niños, (pseudonym) a grant-funded program that provides free educational enrichment activities and instruction to students at Title 1-funded school sites in the district. Meeting at the school allowed Luz to participate without worrying about childcare. For our first meeting, I provided childcare and the second meeting was held after school when Luz's children were in Actividaes Para Niños.

Daphne

Kennedy and I contacted Daphne after the first focus group interview and invited her to participate. I was excited to meet her and hoped that she would not cancel as many of the other prospective candidates had. Daphne arrived at our interview with her son Adam close behind, walking behind his mom, with his eyes focused on an electronic tablet. It was 6 pm in the evening and she had chosen the office at Forrest Glen for our meeting place. I introduced myself and Daphne and I shook hands. Adam was not far behind. With a brilliant smile, a healthy dose of energy, he introduced himself to me and to Kennedy. Nervously, Daphne asked if it was okay if Adam joined us and she said she brought a tablet for him. I assured her it was fine and offered some books and toys for him to play with. Adam was far more interested in sitting at the table with his mom, but with some persuasion from his mother, he sat by the books in the office and began to play.

I began explaining the purpose of the project and shared with Daphne the list of potential questions. When I asked if she would sign for her consent to interview and record, she became embarrassed. In a little bit of a giggle she said that she didn't have good handwriting. She signed the forms and we began our conversation.

Throughout our interview, Adam was either watching his mom from the play area a few feet away, or directly at the table with us for a few moments at a time. His curiosity was very evident. When Daphne began discussing Adam, she described him as an only child.

"No, I'm not. I have an older brother!" Adam chimed in using English. Daphne said that she has three children: an adult son, Marco, a 17-year-old daughter Isabel, and six-year-old Adam. Marco and Isabel live in Mexico. Adam is her only child in the United States. And Daphne was quick to add that he acts like an only child, the center of attention in her life. Daphne spoke with pride about Marco who attends a university in Mexico and Isabelle who will be graduating from high school this year. Adam was born in the United States after Daphne immigrated.

There was a natural grace that Daphne showed as she went from question to question. She was not shy about elaborating and readily provided personal details. I wrote in my field journal as she spoke, trying to note the emotion she shared, how she displayed an openness I usually do not see when I work with white, English-speaking moms. Daphne was open and transparent. She spoke through stories, answering questions by telling me of an event in her life or in Adam's. I felt as though she was sharing her life scrapbook with me.

Daphne is one of the youngest of eleven siblings in her family. She had only limited opportunities for education in her home country of Mexico. When Daphne was very young, her father passed away.

> My mother was left to raise the 11 children on her own. She had to do the work of a mother in taking care of the house, cooking, cleaning, and taking care of the children and she had to take on the role of my father, earning money for the family. It was a tragedy. I was very young at the time and had not begun school. As a result of my father's death,

> education stopped for all of the kids. When I was young, in Mexico, it was okay if parents didn't send their kids to school. It is different now. Now, the government doesn't let that happen. (Daphne, 1/30/2018).

Daphne only had limited educational exposure, less than two years of schooling. She never picked it back up, even after coming to the United States.

Daphne immigrated to the U.S. fourteen years ago and works full time as a housekeeper for a local hotel. She politely described her job and said that she likes her it, but says it is very physical and exhausting. It takes a lot of energy to do her work, and she often is tired. Her goal in coming to the United States was to save up enough money to eventually bring her two older children to U.S. to live with her, to help her children live their dreams.

"I want to be a policeman, a fireman or work at the restaurant with my dad. Maybe I will be the President!" Adam said when I asked Daphne more about her children. Adam bounced up and down next to his mom wanting to answer the interview questions for her. He liked hearing us talk about him. At one point, he crawled into his mom's lap and began speaking into the electronic recording device that I had in the middle of the table. He seemed to enjoy the attention and his smile never stopped. He eventually lost interest in the questions and returned to his play, but every now and again would give us a response to one of the questions I asked his mom.

Although Adam is the youngest of three children in the family, he has never met his older siblings and Daphne says he acts more like an only child and she pays a lot of attention to him. Daphne dotes on Adam and has high hopes for him. She said that was a challenge for her because Adam is so active. He has the full attention of both of his parents at home and Daphne says it is tiring to try and keep up with Adam.

When I asked Daphne about her children who live in Mexico, she spoke about them in a way that led me to believe she is in frequent contact with them. The pride she has for their accomplishments was evident in her words and her facial expressions. Adam crawled into his mom's lap when she spoke longingly about them. She paused mid-sentence and put her chin to her chest. Tear filled her eyes, and her voice became soft and distant. Tears began to stream down her face as she spoke with emotion in her voice.

> I have not seen them in 14 years. I have not seen them. My goal was to make enough money for them to come here one day. I have the money now, but they are grown. They have their lives now in Mexico and they don't want to come. (Daphne 1/30/2018).

Adam leaned into his mom and she hugged him tightly. Daphne then got out her phone and showed me pictures of her grown children in Mexico. The pride again showing on her face, she flipped through pictures of them in their city, in their home, a home far away from her community in West Valley.

Assertions

Each participant told her story candidly and openly. As they spoke, they shared their personal histories, their experiences, the barriers they have faced, and their hopes for their children's education. From these interviews and resulting analysis, I identified the following four assertions that encompass these mothers' perspectives on their young children's academic success, along with the ways they supported it. The following assertions represent major findings in this study. Assertion 1: The mothers prioritized early learning opportunities in pre-kindergarten settings to help their children learn foundational skills, Assertion 2: The mothers valued literacy and maintained Spanish as the family's language in their homes, Assertion 3:

Maintaining routines was a key part of parenting for the mothers, and Assertion 4: The mothers faced obstacles in facilitating success for their children.

These assertions lay the foundation for an explanation of the data that includes both vignettes and supporting documentation, along with quotes from the interviews. Vignettes served to narratively illustrate the assertion and bring it to life. The supporting documentation further elaborates on the finding and shared the mothers' varied views related to each particular theme.

Assertion: The mothers prioritized early learning opportunities in pre-kindergarten settings to help their children learn foundational skills.

The first week of kindergarten at Forrest Glen Elementary is usually a busy time, especially in the kindergarten classrooms. For many students, this is their first school experience. Forrest Glen instituted gradual kindergarten start a couple of years ago so the classroom teachers could get to know the kindergarten students in small groups before they were all together. Adam attended kindergarten the first two days with seven of his classmates, none of whom he had met before. Daphne walked him to the classroom. Adam was excited and curious as he approached the classroom. Once inside, Daphne gave him a hug and kiss on the top of his head. Daphne introduced herself to the teacher and spoke with her in Spanish through a Spanish-speaking instructional assistant. The kindergarten class Adam was assigned to had been assigned the Spanish-speaking instructional assistant, the only one in the school. The other parents of the small group of kindergarteners lingered in the room as did Daphne until the teacher thanked the parents in English and Spanish and invited them to join the principal in the community room for a parent orientation. Daphne waved goodbye to Adam and left the room. While some children clung to their parent and had a difficult time separating, Adam continued in

his exploration of the room. He investigated the different learning stations his teacher had set up in the room. He and two other students were drawn to the play kitchen. Adam put on an apron and began playing with the child-sized play cooking equipment. Adam gave the other two students an apron and made space for them at the stove and sink.

Skills learned in pre-kindergarten programs. Adam's vignette indicates how readily he transferred the social skills he developed in his pre-kindergarten program. In fact, each of the mothers' youngest children participated in a year-long, pre-kindergarten educational program before attending Forrest Glen Elementary as a kindergarten student. Two of the children attended a Head Start program and one attended a structured pre-kinder program called We're Ready! (pseudonym). While interviewing the mothers, each spoke of the educational programing focus of the pre-k program their children attended.

> Adam attended Head Start in a neighboring town before we moved here. I learned about it from some of the staff at my church. The two teachers at Head Start spoke both English and Spanish, and they treated Adam very well. They taught him well in both languages. He learned letters and numbers. Head Start helped Adam get ready for Kindergarten. In Head Start, they really focused on socialization, making friends, and harmony. Convivo. They taught him to be independent. There was a time when I couldn't even take a shower without him being in the same room. And now, he can do things alone and knows and how to play with others. Most importantly, at Head Start, they taught him how to share. (Daphne, 1/30/2018).

Each participant discussed socialization with a specific emphasis on sharing and getting along with others as a pre-K focus. Daphne smiled when she used the word "*convivo*" in her interview with me. This was a Spanish word I had not heard before. Kennedy, the Spanish-

speaking interpreter who accompanied me on each of the interviews, met with me after Daphne's interview. I asked him to help me understand the meaning of convivo and the context of how Daphne used it. Kennedy shared that convivo is often used to describe a potluck get-together. When people get together for a convivo, it is a time of sharing, a time of enjoying one another's company, and a time for socializing in a comfortable way. In the context of a pre-Kindergarten experience, each participant described sharing, turn-taking, respectful friendships, and getting along as key learnings for their children. Convivo is much more descriptive than the English word "socialize" and captures what the mothers described in terms of their children getting along, being socially appropriate with other kids, taking turns, and being independent and self-sufficient.

In addition to the strong social skills their children gained, each mother identified that her child learned letters, numbers, colors, and how to write his/her name as important preparatory measures for kindergarten. Each of the pre-Kindergarten programs the children attended had an academic focus on early English literacy skills and numeracy.

Connection to bilingual staff. At each pre-K site, the teaching staff was bilingual in English and Spanish. The mothers were able to fully participate in conferences with the teachers in their native language in real time without the need of an interpreter. Additionally, the focus of the instruction was in English, but the mothers described how Spanish was used side-by-side with English and their children learned both languages effectively. At both Head Start locations and the We're Ready! program, parenting classes and parent support classes were conducted in Spanish. The mothers described their connection to the staff and to the program and their ability to speak and connect with the Spanish-speaking teaching staff.

"Before I got my present job, I volunteered so much the teacher, Carola, (pseudonym), called me her second daughter," Luz said with a smile. "I loved being at the school, and everyone there was like family. Carola mentored me and taught me a lot." Luz was able to connect by volunteering while Susie and Daphne connected with the bilingual staff in the parenting classes and conferences.

Frequent interactions with staff on student growth. The mothers spoke of meeting with the pre-Kindergarten school staff at least three times a year on their child's specific academic accomplishments and areas for growth in the schedule conferences, all of which were conducted in Spanish. This cultural and linguistic connection to the school staff was critical in understanding the learning needs of their children. The mothers described how in these school conferences, they would make a connection with the teachers and learn about the academic and social standards set for their children, standards they could also work on at home.

> When I went to the conferences, I was informed about how Ginessa did in school. I knew the benchmarks and what I needed to do at home to help her reach the next benchmark. The reason she was so successful there was because she was learning in class, but she also did it at home. It reinforced what she learned in class. When I went to conferences, the teachers would ask what I wanted for Ginessa and I would pick a goal and at the following conference, she had always met her goal. I knew she was successful because her grades showed she was reaching the standards. (Susie, 1/25/18).

The mothers looked forward to the conferences and never missed one. Additionally, the Head Start programs Daphne and Susie's children attended had home visits built into the conferencing schedule. At least two times during the year, bilingual staff would come to their homes to talk about the children's growth and goals.

Learning through play. Learning while playing was one of the ways the mothers reinforced skills for their children while at home. Playing both formal and informal games as a family helped with turn taking, social skill interaction, and family bonds. Some of the games were ones the children learned at school like tag and hide-and-seek and some were academic language games they children shared with their parents. The mothers also taught their children games from their own childhoods. Susie described the interactions she and her husband have with their two girls this way:

> We play lots of games. Sometimes we play the games in English and sometimes we play them in Spanish. We take turns. When we play in Spanish, I teach, and when we play in English, the girls teach. It helps them learn, and they love playing with their parents. (Susie, 1/25/2018).

Susie's approach to games were more academically focused, Luz and Daphne spoke of a traditional card games or electronic games as well as games played outside that were physical in nature. Regardless of the type of game, each one was intended to be fun, and involved family members taking turns and interacting with one another.

The participating mothers prioritized early learning opportunities in pre-kindergarten settings to help their children learn foundational academic and social skills. They each made a connection to bilingual staff at the pre-Kindergarten programs their children attended and they found value in the frequent interactions with bilingual staff regarding their students' academic and social growth goals. Additionally, learning through play happened in different ways in each of their homes and the games reinforced social skills and connections to family.

Assertion – The mothers valued literacy and maintained Spanish as the family's language in their homes.

Each Saturday afternoon, Luz ad her children took the bus to the local public library. It was their family routine to go and visit the library once and check out a week's worth of books. On a particularly rainy Saturday in November, Luz and her two youngest children, Roberto and Alicia, put on their jackets and boots and walked to the bus stop. Going to the library used to be much simpler. Located in an old strip mall, the library used to be only five stops from the stop closest to Luz's home. A little more than a year before, the county moved it to larger building next to a neighborhood playground and park, now several miles and one bus transfer away. Luz did not mind the time on the bus, because she talked with her children about the books they would return and about the ones the kids hoped to check out. Reading was one of the family's most cherished activities they do together. Luz has been taking her children to the library since her oldest ones were very little.

Once off the bus, they walked swiftly to get out of the rain; the kids raced up the wooden steps in the middle of the tall brightly-lit library to the children's section. Paper kites with long rainbow-colored tails hang from the celling leading the way to the stacks of children's books. Immediately, Alicia and Roberto found their favorite book sections. Roberto loved the nature books and Alicia was drawn to the art books. After placing last week's book in the return bin, Luz climbed the stairs to the children's section and sat comfortably on an oversized, padded bench. Not soon after, Roberto and Alicia joined their mom with several books, some in English and some in Spanish. Luz sorted through the stack and picked out one of the books written in Spanish and began to read aloud to the kids, one seated on each side of her. As she read, she used her index finger to help the kids track the words she was reading in Spanish to them. When

that book was finished, she read the other ones written in Spanish. Next, it was Roberto and Alicia's turn to read. They each selected a book in English to read to their mom. They spent almost two hours reading to each other, talking about the books, and deciding which ones to check out this week. Once they decided, they used the automated book check out and proceeded to the park. The rain had stopped enough for the kids to play on the teeter-totter for a few minutes before making their way back to the bus stop. Each one clutched their canvas bag of books, chattering away with their mom while they rode the bus home.

Value of literacy. Each of the mothers in the study spoke proudly of their children's ability to read and talked specifically about the reading skills their children learned in their preschool experience. Early reading skills were taught in both of the Head Start programs and the We're Ready! program the children had attended, and the value of reading was commonly held by each mom, even though their children did not attend the same pre-school.

> I want Adam to be strong in reading and writing and reinforce what he is learning. I support him with Spanish and my husband supports his reading in English. He's a good reader. That's how I know he'll succeed. (Daphne, 1/30/2018).

Story time was a common activity in each of the mother's homes. Reading with their children was a similar activity each does in their household routines with their children. "We read each night before bed. I read to her in Spanish and then she reads to me in English," Luz said about her nighttime routine with Alicia. Whether it is at bedtime or at homework time, reading is a priority.

Speaking Spanish in an English-dominant community. Keeping Spanish alive in the house takes work and time. Forrest Glen Elementary has a high Spanish-speaking student population but is not a bilingual school. Maintaining Spanish as a spoken language and Spanish

literacy falls to the parents. All three mothers indicated the importance of maintaining Spanish in the home, and this was particularly evident in Susie's explanation of their purposeful language choices:

> My husband and I only speak to each other in Spanish. I only know Spanish, but my husband knows some English. We speak to the girls in Spanish, and I am teaching them to read in Spanish. It is not easy to teach them. There are so many grammar rules! I hope my girls will be good enough in Spanish to go to the bilingual middle school when they are old enough. I know they cannot just learn English and they cannot just learn Spanish. Learning in both languages is really important to me. The girls need to dominate both languages. They are growing up in a Spanish-speaking family and an English-speaking society. I teach the girls Spanish and they help teach me English. It is better for them to be bilingual. We are learning together. (Susie 1/25/2018).

Each of the moms shared they communicate with their children in Spanish and Spanish is the language between them and their spouses. Their children are both Spanish and English speakers, and this requires balance in their homes.

> I'm Latina. I want my son to know Spanish. This is his culture and his family all speaks Spanish. This is the language of his home. I have a friend who lost his Spanish after he went to school. He is grown now and has no way of communicating with his parents and his family. I don't want that for my Adam. I want him to know his family. (Daphne, 1/30/2018).

The mothers discussed the need to keep Spanish alive in their homes. Both Susie and Luz want their children to learn both English and Spanish for academic reasons, while Daphne expressed

the connection to Spanish is most strongly for her the way she can assure Adam can stay connected to his family.

"I am learning, too." In the individual interviews, each mother spoke of her own English skills and her recognition of the need to learn more. "I came here with the goal of learning English," Suzie said in our second interview. "I've taken classes offered by the school district, but it is hard. I started late, and did not get my certificate, but I am taking the classes again this year." Susie is enrolled in a series of classes offered by the school district that assists Spanish-speaking adults on a pathway to earn an U.S. high school diploma or GED equivalent. The classes happen two nights a week at Forrest Glen Elementary and take place over several months. It is a commitment to attend. "It's a sacrifice to come," Susie said about the adult education classes. She furrowed her brow as she spoke; emotion was present in her voice. "I have to be away from my family on Mondays and Thursdays a week for couple of hours. I also take the adult English class that is here on Tuesdays. This is hard. I need to be there for my family."

The children take a role in helping their mothers with English. Each of the children in the study was born in the U.S. and has spent all of their years in the Northwest region of the United States, surrounded by a society of English-speakers. From the grocery store, friends in the neighborhood, to others at school, the children have heard English around them all of their lives. As such, they assist their mothers in learning the correct pronunciation of words and the understanding of phrases. "Adam is my teacher," Daphne said with a smile as she looked at Adam in our interview. She affectionately placed her hand on the top of his head. "If I don't know how to say something, he tells me." Susie and Luz too are open to their children reading to them in English. For each, there was no embarrassment about their children taking on a teaching

role for them when it came to English. The mothers were the teachers of Spanish and allowed their children to take a lead with English.

Communication with the school. In each interview, the mothers shared the need for school staff to have Spanish language skills. Forrest Glen Elementary has limited Spanish-speaking staff: only one teacher, two office assistants, and one assistant work in the entire school. The luxury of calling or meeting with a teacher and speaking with her in Spanish the same way as when their children were in preschool, only now happens for those lucky enough to be enrolled in the third-grade class with the single bilingual teacher. The process for Spanish-speaking parents to communicate with classroom teachers and with the principal almost always has to be facilitated through an interpreter.

> I trust my child's teacher. It is hard to talk with her, though. I don't speak English and the teacher does not speak Spanish. When I go to school conferences, I have to schedule time with an interpreter. I can't just call and ask the teacher questions or ask about homework. For Spanish-speaking parents, this is really hard. There are times when I really want to talk to the teacher and I want to help with the homework. She is a good person and I know she wants good things for my daughter. When I really need to talk to her, I call Cynthia or Christina. If I really need to talk, they interpret for me. I don't know what I would do if they weren't there." (Luz, 1/30/2018).

While each mother knew how to get her urgent needs met, awareness of and frustration with the language barrier they experienced with school staff was something each mother expressed. They each wanted a fluid communication between themselves and the school and felt frustration of having to be the one to always initiate the communication.

> The communication between the teacher and me I think is going pretty well. However, the communication from the school could really use some improvement. Like two weeks ago there was an incident where my daughter got hurt at school. I was never informed by the school of what happened! It was my own daughter who had to tell me about the incident. And when it's something when a child is injured, I believe the school should notify the parents! They should have called me. (Susie, 1/25/2018).

Even with the lack of fluid communication, each of the mothers was not shy about asking the school for the information they needed to help their children and know what was happening in the school.

Each of the Spanish-speaking mothers valued literacy for their young primary grade children. They each worked in different ways to find balance with speaking and maintaining Spanish in their homes while being immersed in an English-speaking society. They too were learners, and as Spanish-speakers in an English-speaking school, they had many communication challenges with the English-speaking staff. With so few Spanish-speaking staff, the mothers had to navigate how to be sure their children's needs were met.

Assertion – Maintaining routines was a key part of parenting for the mothers.

School begins at 8:45 am at Forrest Glen Elementary. To be sure her daughters are ready for school, Susie begins the day in the same way each morning. Up before 7:00 am, Susie assists her girls in washing their faces, brushing their teeth, and getting dressed. Anna is 8 years old and dresses herself. Ginessa, 6 years old, still needs a little assistance from Susie. Being nicely dressed for school is a cultural tradition Susie brought with her from Mexico. It is a sign of good upbringing, pride, and self-respect to be clean and dressed in nice clothing for school. Not in the Sunday-best dresses saved for church and special occasions, but nicely pressed

coordinating blouses and pants without obvious wear and tear. She never understood why American schools would have special days at school where the children would wear their pajamas for fun. That would never happen in her home country and it seemed counter to her cultural upbringing to intentionally allow her girls to go to school looking a mess.

After dressing, the girls have a warm breakfast at the counter in the kitchen before Susie does their hair. Each of the girls has silky, long dark brown hair. Ready with a large brush and several hair elastics and ribbons, Susie carefully and gently brushes each girl's long hair assuring all tangles have been brushed out. With each daughter, she parts her hair down the center and braids each side, tying the end of each braid with a hair elastic and a ribbon to match their clothing. The process for both girls takes a total of 20 minutes, but it is time well-spent. Susie uses this time each morning to talk her daughters about what will be happening in school, encouraging them to do their best and preparing them for their school day. Grabbing the backpacks that are ready at the front door, the girls put on their coats and shoes and walk hand-in-hand with Susie to the bus stop for the 10-minute ride to school.

After school each day, Susie checks the girls' backpacks for homework and lays out their materials on the kitchen counter where they do their studies. While they work, Susie is across the counter preparing them a snack and interacting with them as they talk through math problems and read their take-home reading books aloud. Monitoring and assisting them as they complete their homework is one of the ways Susie assures her girls are making progress in school at the rate they should be. She checks their work when it is complete and helps them repack their backpacks. Susie sets the backpacks by the front door so they are ready the next morning.

Routines support success. Maintaining a daily routine is something each of the mothers spoke about working hard to keep in place for their children. These routines are one of key ways

they help their children stay ready for learning and stay focused on doing well in school. For Daphne, keeping Adam in a routine helps assure he is focused and not getting into something he should not be. Luz described one of her strategies for helping keep her kids successful in school, "I make it a point to get the kids ready for bed so they are well-rested and their brains are refreshed in the morning to go to school. I cannot battle with them to get them up in the morning from bed." The bedtime routine for Luz and her children also includes silent reading for the oldest children while Luz reads aloud to Alicia. Just like at the library, Luz reads to her in Spanish, and Alicia reads to Luz in English. Even after a full day of work, making the effort to keep children in their routine is a priority.

The school district has been a long-time partner with the county's summer free meal program and since Forrest Glen is a Title I school, a free breakfast and free lunch is offered to any neighborhood child ages zero to 18 years throughout the summer months. This is a welcomed support for families like Luz's whose children received free meals during the school year. The summer before Alicia started Kindergarten, Luz took Alicia to the school at least three days a week so she could familiarize herself with the school. She changed her work schedule to make sure she could do this with Alicia. Luz made it a routine of taking the bus, entering the school, and going to the cafeteria for the free lunch for kids. Afterwards, Luz would walk Alicia to the playground for playtime before returning home again.

> I wanted Alicia to know what to do. She learned how to ride the bus, go into the school and get her lunch. When school started, she was not afraid and she didn't cry. We had practiced so much in the summer and she knew what to do and where to go. (Luz - January 30, 2018).

Regular routines were practiced by each of the moms as a component of their parenting that helped them reinforce their expectation of doing well in school. What Luz expressed told of how the summer routine helped Alicia start kindergarten with schema and without fear. She could get to school and find where to go and be ready to learn which was a mark of success for Luz.

The right path. Keeping their children in school and making sure they graduate was an expectation for each of the mothers. In their own ways, they supported their children in being self-motivated and on top of their studies. This included talking with their children and learning what interests them. "I am on top of my girls to see how their studies are going. I volunteer at the school and I learn what they are doing there. That motivates them," commented Susie when talking about her daughters' interests. "They want to be challenged in school. Ginessa starts things on her own with little prompting. She loves math and writing and wants more of that as homework."

From keeping their children engaged in homework, art projects, and other activities, each of the mothers spoke of the importance of being sure they were doing things with their children to keep them active and focused. Luz and Susie mostly spoke of parenting as being the routines they had in place alongside of their expectations for their children while Daphne spoke of how parenting is sometimes challenging.

> I have to keep Adam active, and sports can be helpful. He is always busy and loves to run. I'm proud of him and take a lot of pride. I still have to help him work on his behaviors. I just learned that there is a separate YouTube channel for children. I didn't know that before and he was watching the YouTube for adults. Adam loves his electronics. When de doesn't behave, I have to take away his tablet. I always want him to improve his behavior. (Daphne, 1/30/2018).

Each of the mothers talked about wanting their children to behave well, be respectful of teachers, and follow the rules. Home routines, expectations of behavior, and expectations of school performance that lead to high school graduation were shared by each of the mothers. “I am proud of my kids…they are doing well. I think that what I’m really most proud of is that my kids are going down the right path,” said Luz. None of the mothers had graduated from a U.S. school or had attended college, yet they spoke of high school graduation and college as a mark of success for their children. Luz specifically called this the “right path.”

For these mothers, parenting involved listening not just to their children’s interests, but also to their needs. Two of the moms told me instances of their children being bullied by other children at school and the need to be on top of that. Seen as a responsibility both of the parent and the school, the mothers spoke of listening to their children to be sure things like bullying were not in the way of their learning. Susie spoke of the need to find out what might be happening if her child is not progressing or if it seemed hard for her to learn. “There might be something in the background that is making them unhappy. It is the responsibility of the parent but also for the teacher to find that out.”

Beyond high school graduation, conversations about future careers were already happening with their primary grade children. Talk of college, and professional or technical jobs were tied to the want for their children to do well in school. “My wish for them is to do well in school, go to college, and get her degree,” said Luz with a smile as she spoke of her youngest child, Alicia. “She wants to be a teacher and an artist.”

> I’ve noticed my girls have a lot of skills and abilities. Right now, I want them to meet their grade level standards, and that’s my goal for them. I know they will go on to careers. They have some careers in mind and they will have many options. I want them to

> have many different skills and not learn to do just one skill. Ginessa has two careers in mind. She wants to be a police officer or a teacher. Those are a long ways away and she is so little, it changes and bounces back and forth. (Susie 1/25/2018).

The mothers each had routines in place in their homes that helped their children maintain structure. Homework and a focus on future academic success was valued in each of their interviews. With the goal of high school graduation, college and a good career for their children, keeping them on the right behavioral and academic path was important. Although the mothers did not have their own personal experience with graduating from a U.S. high school or college, they knew that achieving those things meant a child was successful and they each wanted that for their child.

Assertion – The mothers faced obstacles in facilitating success for their children.

Autumn is particularly beautiful in the Pacific Northwest. Moderately warm and sunny days lead to crisp evenings. Autumn also brings a start back to school. For children whose families struggle with after school childcare and affordable enrichment programs, the start of school is a difficult time. Luz knows this all too well. Her youngest son Luis participated in Actividades Para Niños, the after-school enrichment program at Forrest Glen. This is a welcomed support for families like Luz's whose children received free afternoon meals and additional academic enrichment during the school year. As part of registering Alicia for Kindergarten, Luz needed to be sure to enroll her in the Actividades Para Niños programs along with Luis.

It was ltet August of the summer before Alicia was to start kindergarten. Luz went to the school to fill out registration papers for Alicia to start school. Christina, one of the two Spanish-speaking office staff members was there and Luz felt a sense of relief when she saw her. The

week before when Luz first went to turn in the registration papers, only English-speaking staff were present and Luz could not ask questions or learn about how to enroll Alicia in the program. She left with a familiar sense of frustration, the same feeling she had whenever she needed to communicate with the school when no Spanish-speaking staff were available or when she was trying to make sense of notes sent home by the school in her son's backpack that were in English only. Sadly, this happened frequently. Luz relied on public transportation and having to come back a second time in hopes of being able to speak to someone in Spanish was stressful. Speaking with Christina in her native language helped Luz feel she could get her questions answered.

Luz gave Christina the registration packet and asked about enrolling both Alicia and Luis in the Actividades Para Niños program. Christina found the paperwork but told Luz that since Alicia was a kindergartener, she could only participate in the after-school program if Luz could provide the transportation. Seeing Luz was confused as to why Luis could ride the bus but Alicia could not, Christina said that the school district has a policy of only dropping off kindergarten students from the bus at their doorstep. Christina explained the after-school bus could not drop off children at their doorstep, so kindergarteners could not ride the bus. Luz was crestfallen. She knew she could not provide the transportation and now understood she would have to find childcare for Alicia, as well. Another roadblock was in front of her, one that now was going to keep Alicia from the after-school services she needed.

Transportation is a privilege. For Luz, requesting a change in her work schedule so she could take Alicia to the elementary school during the summer months to access the summer food program and learn to navigate the school she would attend was a logical move. She was also able to prepare Alicia to navigate riding the bus, a skill she needed to be independent as a student. "I

never learned to drive," said Luz with a smile. "I have the ability to get a license, but I never learned." Luz relies on the school bus as a lifeline to getting her kids to and from the school and the services offered there.

When the school year started and Luz learned Alicia could not participate in the after-school program, Luz was left without access to affordable after-school care and an important enrichment option for her youngest child, all because of a district policy. "I want to keep pushing my kids forward," said Luz with concern in her voice. "I would have liked the school (district) to help with transportation for Alicia so I could keep pushing them." Both of Luz's elementary-aged children are now able to participate in the after-school enrichment program, but Alicia lost a full year of after-school enrichment as a kindergarten student because of the bus policy.

Education is a partnership between the school and the family and the mothers actively seek communication and support from the school. As Spanish-speakers, there are barriers to being able to be a full participant in a school that only uses English. They each learned to navigate the English-only school system and make connections with the few Spanish-speakers at the school who support them in meeting the needs of their children. Even though barriers existed, what was consistent was the mothers' ability to recognize and not shy away from addressing those barriers on behalf of their children.

Partnership to prepare their children. Each of the mothers wanted me to know how hard they worked to prepare their children to be ready for school and what they are still doing to be sure their children were successful. At the same time, there was a recognition that they could not do it all on their own. Daphne shared that she felt limited in how she can keep helping Adam due to her lack of English. "I can help him with math, but I need strong teachers to help him with reading in English," she said. She was contemplating what else to say and stopped to reflect on

her own thinking. A moment later she finished her thought, "Adam needs strong teachers who know him, who know how to help him continue his love for learning. He needs to be a good reader in order to have a good career." She continued by telling me that while she appreciates what the school has to offer, Adam needs more choices to help him stay focused. She recognized that she could not do everything for him or teach him all he needs to know in English. A strong partnership with the school is something she knows she needs for her child to be successful.

I am a Spanish speaker. Susie takes pride in preparing her children for school. Unlike the experience with her mother she had as a child, Susie works hard to be involved in the school and her daughters' education. Even though she is learning English herself, she does not let that impede her from being involved at the school. If there is an event her girls are participating in at the school, she is there, and she takes pride in how much she volunteers at the school. English is the biggest barrier to her involvement, although she tries to minimize it by communicating with the office staff members who are bilingual. Still, that is not enough to fully feel like a full participant in the school. "I want the school to know how hard it is for me as a Spanish-speaker," Susie said earnestly. "English is my second language, and it is very hard for me." She is aware she does not say the English words correctly all of the time and often turns to her girls for help with pronunciation. Even still, she is resolute. "I am concerned about their education, I stay on top of things, and I'm also very involved in the school even with the barriers of language." Daphne and Luz too struggled with accessing Spanish-speaking staff when they needed. They each knew who the two Spanish-speaking office staff members were and knew to call one of them if they had questions for teachers they needed translated. However, this process was a limited one-way communication process that did not allow for continuous and natural conversation with the teachers. If the mothers wanted to have a conversation versus asking a

question, they would have to schedule a meeting with an interpreter, something that often took more than a week. The casual conversations parents have with teachers a drop-off and pick-up times primarily happen for those who are English-speakers, and the mothers in this study have not ever been able to do that at Forrest Glen.

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In this chapter, assertions from the data analysis encompassed the skills these mothers' children learned in pre-Kindergarten programs, the value of literacy and communication in Spanish-speaking homes, the parenting and routines in the participating mothers' homes, and the mothers' expressed barriers to success for their children.

Thorough a detailed analysis of the group and personal interviews of the participating mothers, I was able to describe through vignettes, quotes and summaries of the experiences they shared with me what they regard as academic success for their primary grade children and what they have done, and are doing, to encourage and facilitate that success. Based on these findings, the following chapter discusses the significance of these findings and suggests direction for future study.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusions

Hearing firsthand stories allowed me a window into the lived experiences of three Spanish-speaking mothers who participated in this phenomenological study. Their children had shown early and above-average social emotional and self-regulation skills on the state's Kindergarten Assessment given during the first month of their kindergarten year at Forrest Glen Elementary School in the West Valley School District. I used a qualitative approach to examine the stories of the mothers about their perceptions of academic success using semi-structured interviews conducted between December 2017 and January 2018. I conducted a thorough analysis of the group and personal interviews of the participating mothers and was able to describe what they regard as academic success for their primary grade children and what they have done, and are doing, to encourage and facilitate that success.

From their personal stories, assertions emerged that painted a picture of the mothers' intentional involvement in their children's education. Assertions were: Assertion 1: The mothers prioritized early learning opportunities in pre-kindergarten settings to help their children learn foundational skills, Assertion 2: Mothers value literacy and maintain Spanish as the family's language in their homes, Assertion 3: Maintaining routines is a key part of parenting for the mothers, and Assertion 4: Mothers face obstacles in facilitating success for their children. In this chapter, I review the answers to my research questions by discussing the implications of these mothers' stories.

Their stories revealed their commitment to assure their children's academic success in school, their hopes that their children would go to college, and their expectation that they would pursue their dreams. These mothers were aware that their involvement and ways they work

through and around the barriers they face as Spanish-speaking mothers navigating in an English-dominant society could make a significant difference for their young learners.

Academic success

Revealed in the data were the mothers' perceptions of academic success that were tied to standards and skills the children learned in their pre-kindergarten experiences. Positive social interactions such as getting along, sharing, and turn-taking were frequently discussed as key foundational skills the children learned that helped set them up for kindergarten success (Beuchat et al., 2010). The children also learned self-sufficiency and independence, skills that assisted them in learning to be on their own without their mothers in the pre-school, and later, in kindergarten classrooms.

Having grade-level literacy skills was one of the key indicators the mothers used to measure their children's success. They had access to these understandings through both the Head Start and We're Ready! Programs, which held regular conferences with the mothers to inform them about educational standards and the ways their children were progressing towards those standards. The mothers discussed early reading as a valued skill they wanted their children to have and maintain. The mothers perceived that being a good reader was a gateway to later academic success, college, and a desirable career success (Beuchat et al., 2010; Business Roundtable, 2009; McKenna & Millen, 2011).

Bilingualism and biliteracy were also held in high regard by the mothers. While reading in English was viewed as an indicator of success for their children, speaking and reading in Spanish was seen as being of the same importance, even though only the English skills were being taught at school. Speaking and reading in Spanish allowed the mothers to connect with their children in their native language and created pathways for their children to stay connected

to their cultural heritage and other Spanish-speaking family members. Helping their children be bilingual in English and Spanish was a clear desire for these mothers. The school was teaching in English, and they were supporting learning in Spanish (Collier & Thomas 2006).

Both positive social interactions with peers and acquiring early reading skills before kindergarten are foundations for oral language development (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walpole, 2010), and later academic success through high school (Snow, Porche, Tabors, & Harris, 2007). The pre-Kindergarten programs the children attended encouraged the mothers to work on both social interaction skills and reading skills at home, reaffirming the research that parents whose native language is not English should interact with their children in that native language with which they have the most comfort. The skills learned in the native language, L1, are transferable to English (L2), and are ultimately predictors of language success (Social Policy Report, 2013).

Encouraging and Fostering Success at Home

Traditional values of how parents interact with school and "should" support their children's education often affect the way teachers and school administrators see and value parents (Lowenhaupt, 2014). The dominant culture values parent interaction with students that include homework help, attending conferences, volunteering, and interacting with the child's teacher by phone or in-person. When educators perceive that these things are not happening at home and pair this with unconscious stereotypes about uneducated, non-English speaking immigrant parents, educators can easily perceive parents as unengaged with their child's learning (Delgado Gaitan, 2102).

While I did not explore teachers' perceptions of these mothers, my conversations with the mothers indicated their deep support for their children and value for education in contrast to what I sense they experience from their children's teachers. They knew a strong education meant

prospects of a life with less financial hardship and sacrifice than they had experienced, themselves. Their hopes and dreams for their children included college and career choices. Their support of their children included structured and routine homework support, and they attended conferences; two parent interactions valued by dominant culture education systems (Delgado Gaitan, 2102). However, their participation was not enacted in the same ways as an English-speaking parent with fluid knowledge of U.S. school systems and culture might do. These mothers went through front office staff and resourced every bilingual adult in the school to ensure their communication with teachers would be possible. They understood that they could rely on the front office staff in a pinch if they needed to get a message to the classroom teacher.

These mothers readily contended with the extra challenges of communicating in a second language, all while lacking access to the same communicative privileges available to those in the dominant culture. Parents who speak English communicate with their child's teacher without translation support through all kinds of spontaneous interactions at the school such as drop-off and pick-up times. For the mothers in the study, bi-directional communication was limited to scheduled conferences held one time per year in the fall. Without the ability to fluently read English, navigating the school's English-only website is not much help in trying to learn about their child's assignments and is both challenging and frustrating. Also frustrating is trying to decipher the English-only notes sent home in their children's backpack that advertise school events and enrichment activity opportunities.

Even with the challenges of being native Spanish speakers, the mothers learned to navigate how to get needed resources for their children. From summer extension classes and free summer meals offered at the school, checking out books in the library, and accessing after school-enrichment, the mothers found ways to meet their children's needs. They are absolutely

engaged in their children's education. It just shows up differently than it does for parents who are in the dominant culture.

Implications of the Research

While this phenomenological study cannot be generalized, it offers new understandings about how Spanish-speaking immigrant mothers perceive school success for their young children and what they do to support that success, all while overcoming the inherent barriers embedded in a dominant-culture educational system. The following are recommendations for how school systems might more intentionally remove barriers for immigrant, Spanish-speaking parents of children in their schools.

Provide pre-kindergarten experiences for those without access. Early learning experiences for children birth to age five help support oral language development, vocabulary building, as well as listening skills, social interaction skills, and self-regulation (Beauchat, Blamey, & Walploe, 2010; Howard & Mehhusih, 2017). These social and academic attributes learned in preschool settings help set the foundation for later reading and academic success (Business Roundtable, 2009; McKenna & Millen, 2011). The mothers in this study prioritized early learning opportunities for their children and knew these experiences helped prepare their children for school success. Access to high-quality preschool can be a barrier for immigrant families experiencing poverty who are learning to navigate the U.S. education system. Across all populations, only 42% of those eligible for the federally-funded Head Start program are enrolled (Blair, 2013) leaving many who are eligible without access. School districts can interrupt the barrier of limited access to preschool for immigrant families who do not speak English by investing in and partnering with pre-kindergarten programs and providers that meet the needs of this population. Research shows preschool is a more cost-effective way to meet the needs of

early learners and close opportunity gaps compared to spending resources later on to close the achievement gap (Heckman, 2012).

Implement culturally responsive communication practices. This research clearly illustrated the difficulty non-English speaking parents have in trying to communicate with schools that do not engage in culturally-responsive communication practices. Parental engagement can be a significant challenge for immigrant families, especially when the school staff does not speak the language of the family or have a cultural understanding of the family's social experience. In addition to language, immigrants face barriers such as a lack of connection in their new country, lack of transportation and childcare, and they deal with intimidation and racism (Adair, 2015; Sibley & Brabeck, 2017; Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). They also do not necessarily have social networks to assist them with interacting with public schools that are English-only. Without language-specific navigational support, non-English speaking immigrant families have limited access to school and the resources parents need to academically support their children (Adair, 2015).

For mothers in this study, access to bilingual staff was critical in meeting the needs of their children. However, very few staff met this criterion, and only one of those persons was a classroom teacher. The mothers wanted to partner with the school and teachers in helping their children be successful. When schools do not engage with non-English speaking families in their native language, educational decision-making lies almost entirely in the school's hands, leaving parents pushed to the side (Adair, 2015; Olivos & Mendoza, 2007). Hiring culturally competent staff who support the cultural and linguistic needs of the school community would be a beneficial step in making parents from non-dominant cultures more equal partners (Jensen, 2009) in their children's education.

Similarly, approaching parent communication and engagement from a strengths-based approach (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009) would embrace families' linguistic and cultural diversity as an asset. English-only print and electronic communication marginalizes non-English speaking families (Adair, 2015) and continues to perpetuate the status of English as the standard for communication in public schools (Sousa, 2011). English-only practices in parent communication not only privileges the students and families in the dominant culture, it continues to allow social barriers to dominate school systems that impede non-English speaking families from fully engaging in their child's education (Ngounou & Gutierrez, 2017; Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). Ensuring bilingual school communication in all forms, including print, electronic, and voice-to-voice is a culturally-responsive way to mitigate the marginalization non-English speaking families and their children experience in public school.

Support immigrant parents with cultural navigation opportunities. Since school norms have historically been based on the practices of those in the dominant culture (Hammond, 2015), immigrant parents who do not speak English are at a disadvantage in navigating the U.S. school system (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). In order to change this narrative, schools must create spaces and opportunities for immigrant parents to increase their knowledge of school culture, school functions, and grow their social networks while building relationships with school personnel (Carreón, Drake & Barton, 2005). These networking opportunities allow immigrant parents to better understand the school's structure and meaningfully participate in the school culture. They also provide intentional spaces for school staff to hear the experiences of immigrant parents and create paths for those stories to influence and change power dynamics within schools (Ganz, 2009). Culturally responsive school staff who serve as cultural navigators create cultural and linguistic bridges to the school and its systems for non-English speaking

families (Sibley & Brabeck, 2007). Cultural navigators act as advocates and mentors for families to maintain native culture while navigating how and when to access the dominant culture systems (Andrade 1984; Carter, 2005).

In creating these intentional networks for non-English speaking immigrant families to fully participate in their children's education, school officials must also recognize the need to confront and change school personnel's beliefs about immigrant parents and their involvement in school (Ngounou & Gutierrez, 2017). To do this in a way that is meaningful and effective, school leaders must recognize the complexity of confronting issues of bias and race and persist in the difficult conversations to enact change (Ngounou & Gutierrez 2017; Singleton, 2014).

Examine policies through an equity lens. Historically, schools in the West Valley School District have a 9-month school calendar and do not have summer or after-school enrichment programs for economically disadvantaged students or students who are learning English. Children across the nation experience poverty at a rate of 21.1%, twice that of the adult rate, (U.S. Census, 2015), while children who are Hispanic and non-English speaking experience poverty at a rate of 63% (Garcia & Weiss, 2015). In the West Valley School District, a student who is an English learner is more than two times as likely to experience poverty as compared to English-speaking peers. Given that acquisition of academic English takes between 5 and 7 years (Sousa, 2011) summer breaks and after-school time without academic enrichment leave children learning English at an even bigger disadvantage than their English-speaking peers. Seeking affordable enrichment programing for their school-aged children is how mothers are able to help foster success for their children, especially when a meal is included as part of the programing. As schools seek to close educational gaps for English learners and those experiencing poverty,

prioritizing funding for summer and out-of-school time, along with extending the free meal program offerings, would significantly help families experiencing poverty.

Schools and school systems have historically been built on the norms and traditions of the dominant culture in the U.S. (Hammond, 2015). These cultural norms become so instantiated that they are often shared or accepted without any opposition by the majority of a population. When school systems do not analyze their practices through a culturally responsive lens of equity, perpetuation of disproportionality continues unchecked. An equity lens is a set of questions designed to help uncover hidden bias that prevents organizations from addressing inequities within their system (Sommer, 2017). However, merely having a lens does not help school systems analyze their practices. School systems that do not systematically use a lens to guide their decision-making continue to operate, whether consciously or unconsciously, in ways that do not respond to the needs of the community. As previously noted, public schools in the U.S. over time have either not been willing to or able to change practices that meet the needs of a growing immigrant population (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). Committing to use a culturally responsive equity lens could help school district leaders and decision makers become more cognizant of the barriers, hidden biases, and systemic oppression to make decisions that counteract these often-unconscious forces. An equity lens tool is made up of reflective questions designed to open conversation where issues can be considered from multiple perspectives. There may not be a simple "yes" or "no" answer, and the lens is not intended to be a flow chart of responses. It is however, intended to help decision-makers check their assumptions, biases, and barriers in order to consciously eliminate practices that perpetuate disproportionate educational results and injustices for those who are not members of the majority culture. Appendix D is a sample Equity Lens tool with guidance for use.

Out-of-school time enrichment programming and transportation policies were identified in this research as barriers to accessing services. Even in a district with summer and extended-day programming, it was evident how one small transportation policy barred access for some of the children who needed it most. Examining this policy through an equity lens with questions such as, "Who does this decision affect, both positively and negatively?" and "Does the decision being made ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?" could help decision-makers uncover and address the barrier of transportation working families face. Without consistently questioning policies and practices through an equity lens, districts are at risk of perpetuating the same practices that historically prevented families in underserved groups from fully benefiting from school.

Contributions to the Research

This research contributes to the field's knowledge regarding the academic success of kindergarten-aged children who come from Spanish-speaking homes. There is a growing body of research regarding immigrant children in public schools suggesting complex issues facing families who are mixed status households and immigrants with U.S. born children, (Olivos & Mendoza, 2009). And yet, there is still a need for educators to better understand how the instersectionality of race, poverty, and language impact children from Spanish-speaking homes in their early years of school. Meeting the needs of Spanish-speaking immigrant families whose children are learning English has not been a critical focus of education in the U.S. (Olson, 1997). Institutional biased practices and policies that prevent Spanish-speaking families from authentically engaging in their children's education remain a social outcome of a system that privileges those in the majority culture.

The mothers in this study contradict the stereotypic beliefs that educators hold about parents of immigrant children as being unengaged and non-participants in their children's education (Suárez-Orozco, C. & Suárez-Orozco, M.M., 2001). They offer a counter-narrative to the majority culture deficit-belief about Spanish-speaking immigrant parents. The experiences of the mothers tell a rich story of what they perceive success to be for their young children and what they do to facilitate and foster it.

Insights from Looking Back

I considered what it would have been like to conduct this research at Forrest Glen Elementary as a trusted staff member or regularly-seen district administrator who frequently interacts with the parents at the school. I believe this could have yielded both strengths and vulnerabilities in the research. I believe the trust that can be built over time with families through frequent and authentic interactions could have helped me know the perspective participants ahead of time and that could have encouraged their participation. By intentionally placing myself at the school, I could also have shared my research idea at the Madres' meetings that could have helped encourage more participation.

But one potential drawback having an existing relationship with participants is the possibility of participants not disclosing their full experience out of fear of damaging the relationship. The participants could guard their responses or limit the extent to which they share their full experience out of embarrassment or worry that what they had shared would be known by someone with whom they interact on a regular basis. Ultimately, there is no one right approach.

Future Study

Additional study that includes more Spanish-speaking mothers of Kindergarten–aged children who are English learners may be helpful in exploring the research questions in more depth. Additionally, interviewing mothers of Spanish-speakers English learners who did not participate in a pre-Kindergarten program yet who show similar high outcomes on the state's Kindergarten Assessment could provide increased insight. Their stories can grant educators an often-overlooked insight into the daily lives of Spanish-speaking mothers who support their children's education by navigating the dominant culture school system, a system that privileges those who do not look and sound like them.

It is my hope that educators who want to actively engage in closing the opportunity and achievement gap for Spanish-speaking English learners in Title I schools listen to these stories and engage them in addressing the barriers and systems of oppression within their school systems. The mothers in the study seek an active partnership with the school in helping their children stay on the right path, that path of school success that leads to high school graduation, college, and a career.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent for Participating Mothers

Examination of Latina Mothers' Perception about Academic Success for their Kindergarten Children.

Dear Parent,

My name is Shelly Reggiani and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also the Executive Director of Equity and Instructional Services for the Vest Valley School District (pseudonym). As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine Latina mothers' perceptions of academic success of their kindergarten-aged children. You are invited to share your story with me in a focus group and an interview, telling your experiences as a parent whose child was in kindergarten last year.

Details of the Study
This study consists of two interviews. The first will be a focus group interview with several mothers meeting together for about an hour and a half. The second would be an individual interview. That interview would also be about one hour in length. If you choose to participate, you would meet with me two times for interviews lasting approximately 90 minutes each.

Both interviews will consist of open-ended questions designed to help me understand your experiences. The first interview will happen in a group setting and the second interview will be one-on-one with an interpreter. The questions are related to you as a parent and your involvement with your experience with school and how you define academic success for your child. The interview questions will include topics such as: (a) how you define academic success for your child (b) what are your hopes for your child regarding their education, and (c) what you do to help your student be successful in school.

Benefits
I hope the findings of my interviews will help me understand the experience of Latina mothers who have children who attend kindergarten and how these Latina mothers contribute to their children's success in school. Participants will remain anonymous in this study. While the personal identities of the participating mothers will be concealed, their voice and their personal experiences will be shared as a way for educators to hear first-hand how Latina mothers have contributed to their children's success in school. This is a way for educators to hear the voices of Latina mothers.

Compensation
You will not receive any compensation (pay) in my study. However, if you have any transportation costs associated with your participation, I will reimburse you. District-funded childcare will be offered during each of the interview sessions.

Confidentiality
Your identity will be protected in the study. I will use pseudonyms (fake names) to maintain confidentiality in the writing of any results of this study. You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym and a pseudonym for your child(ren) and those names will appear in the study. I will make a digital recording of the interviews, that I will later transcribe (type up) so I can better understand what was said in the interview. I will be the only one who knows your identity, which will be stored in a secure location that I only have access to. The interpreter who will be present in the interviews will not know your pseudonym and will have also signed a confidentiality form. The signed confidentiality forms, as all recordings, and the meeting records will be destroyed within two years of the end of the study. The specific location of the school, the city, or the school district will not be disclosed in the study.

Risks
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer if you feel uncomfortable. The risks associated with this research are minimal as the interview questions are to help me as the research better understand the experience of Latina mothers and their perceptions of academic success. If at any time in the interview you do not feel comfortable to respond, you are not required to do so.

Arranging Interviews/Location
The first interview that will be conducted in a group setting will be held at the school. The second interview that is done one on one with an interpreter present can be conducted at a place of your choosing. I will need to communicate with you in order to arrange the location and time of the second interview. We can make arrangements for this after the first interview. The location of the one-on-one interviews will be a safe, public place like the library, the school, the school district office, or one's home.

Use of Study
The results of this study will be used for my research and dissertation as part of my study with George Fox University. If you would like a copy of the final result, I would be happy to share a copy with you upon its completion.

Other Information
The matters relating to this study can be directed to Shelly Reggiani at reggianis@nclack.k12.or.us or the faculty advisor, Susanna Thornhill at sthornhill@georgefox.edu.

Assent/Consent
If you are interested in participating in this study, please sign your name next to the following items:

Name:_____
Signature:_____ Date:_____

I agree to be digitally recorded:

Name: _____
Signature: _____ Date:_____

Possible Interview Questions

Below are some possible questions I will ask during the focus group interview.

What does being successful in school mean to you?
Tell me about a time when your child was successful in school.
What is your wish for your child in school?
What do you want schools to know from your role as a mom?

Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. Tell me about a time when you were successful in school.
2. Tell me about a time when your child was successful in school.
3. What does being successful in school mean to you?
4. What is your wish for your child in school?
5. What do you want schools to know from your role as a mom?

Appendix C

Individual Interview Questions

Language

What languages do you speak at home?

What languages do you speak with your child?

Your child does not attend a bilingual school. How do you balance Spanish and English at home?

School experiences when you were a child

What was your school experience like as a child?

How is your school experience similar or different to that of your child?

How does your child's school communicate with you (one way, two-way, English only, bilingually)?

Do you feel you receive the information you need from the school and teacher?

Do you feel you can communicate with your child's school and teacher about the needs of your child?

Your Role as a Mother

What it is like for you as a parent of a child in an elementary school?

What is your role in helping your child be successful in school?

Successes & Barriers

What helps your child be successful in school?

What do you see as barriers to your child being successful in school?

Appendix D

Equity Lens Tool with Guidance for Use

The following has been modified from the West Valley School District Equity Lens and Guidance for Use.

Equity Lens Tool
When making decisions and taking action, utilize the following questions:
• Does this decision align with the District mission/ vision? • Whom does this decision affect both positively and negatively? • Does the decision being made ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? • Are those being affected by the decision included in the process? • What systems of oppression might be at play within this situation? • What other possibilities were explored? • Is the decision/ outcome sustainable?

Guidance for Use

Questions 1: Does this decision align with the organization's mission/ vision?
This question asks decision maker(s) to check for alignment with the organization's mission and vision. Decision maker(s) should also consider if the organization has and actively uses their mission and vision to drive the organization and shape its culture.

Question 2: Whom does this decision affect both positively and negatively?
This question asks decision maker(s) to analyze which groups will be affected by the decision or action. This includes groups in the dominant culture and those who are not as well as students in the highest achieving groups and the lowest achieving groups.

Question 3: Does the decision being made ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?

This question asks decision maker(s) to consider the existing disparities between dominant culture and non-dominant culture groups as well as students in the highest achieving groups and the lowest achieving groups and the impact on the decision or action may have on those disparities.

Question 4: Are those being affected by the decision included in the process?
This question asks the decision maker(s) to consider the voices of those being impacted by the decision or action, including those who traditionally are not represented in decision-making processes and those who are traditionally underserved by decisions and actions.

Question 5: What systems of oppression might be at play within this situation?
This question asks the decision maker(s) to consider the norms and culture of the organization and look intentionally for systems of oppressions that may be influencing how this situation came to be and how those systems affect the decision maker(s) ability to act. Traditional dominant culture gender and sexuality roles, rank, and positional power of the decision maker(s) are examples of systems that may be adding to the spoken or unspoken oppression of individuals or groups within the organization and those for whom they are wanting to support.

Question 6: What other possibilities were explored?
This question asks the decision maker(s) to examine past decisions, actions and results as well as new ideas in order to assure "business as usual" or the perpetuation of disparities is not the intended or unintended outcome.

Question 7: Is the decision/ outcome sustainable?
This question asks the decision maker(s) to examine the extent to which the decision and outcome can be sustainable, including examining the need for resources and ongoing support.