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An Examination of Latina Mothers' Experience with Parental Engagement in Schools

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AN EXAMINATION OF LATINA MOTHERS' EXPERIENCE WITH PARENTAL
ENGAGEMENT IN SCHOOLS

by

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ABSTRACT

This narrative-based qualitative study endeavored to learn from Latina mothers' stories about their experiences with parental involvement in their children's school. Through semi-structured interviews, the research explores the barriers and successes experienced by these mothers as they sought to be involved. Participants were recruited from a culturally-specific parent group, which was formed several years prior to the study as a focused strategy for parental involvement within the school-wide Title I school's improvement process. The mothers were predominately first-generation immigrants from Mexico, working and living in low-income situations. Their stories indicated significant cultural differences in conceptualizations of parental involvement, respect, and communication. These barriers were addressed by stakeholders supporting the parental involvement group, which empowered the mothers to redefine parental involvement in culturally-responsive ways. Findings suggest that these Latina mothers were involved, particularly when offered opportunities inclusive of Latino cultures and reflective of their values. Implications indicate the ways educational leaders need to collaboratively create empowerment models of parental involvement in order to change inequalities within school systems.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Problem Statement

From 2012-2015, I was the principal of a school-wide Title I elementary school. Title I is a federally-funded program that provides supplementary direct educational services for high poverty schools. Qualifications for a Title I school are based on the number of students who receive free or reduced lunch and breakfast. When children register at school, parents or legal guardians are given school meal applications from school officials. Applications are reviewed by local school or district officials for eligibility based on the federal income guidelines provided by the food and nutrition service, USDA. After review, applicants are notified by school officials if they qualify for free or reduced meals to include both breakfast and lunch.

The additional supplemental funds are a federal commitment to closing the achievement gap between low-income students and other students. School-wide Title I programs are supplementary services built on school-wide reform strategies, rather than separate, add-on services. A school-wide program permits a school to use Title I funds to upgrade the entire educational program of the school in order to raise the academic achievement of all students.

The school's student population was 100% free and reduced families in which we served a free breakfast and lunch for each student every school day. The culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse student population consisted of 25 different cultures, with Spanish-speaking Latino children comprising 45% of the student population. With nearly half of the population made up of Latino students, one might assume this school had extensive parental involvement from Latino families, yet this was not the case. This school did not have a single Latino parent "volunteer." As a principal, one of my goals was to investigate why this was our

reality, and to not only involve our Latino parents, but to also empower them in becoming authentic partners with us in making decisions about their children's educational experiences.

As I began this endeavor, it became apparent to me that teachers had a limited understanding of who the mothers of their students were, what their needs were, or what they wanted in order to be able to engage with their children's school. This resulted in the creation of a culturally-specific parent group called Madres Unidas during the 2012-2013 school year, which I helped coordinate with the Schools Uniting Neighbors program. This mothers' group consisted of Latina mothers whose children attended the school. My three years' work as the school principal shaped my desire to explore and understand the stories Latina mothers tell about their experiences with parental involvement as they try to engage in their children's schools.

Historical Context of Educational Policy

As a school-wide Title 1 school in 2002, parental involvement became a federal mandate, whereby all Title 1 schools were required to create a parent and community involvement plan as part of their School Improvement Plan. On January 8, 2002, President George Bush signed into law the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, which specified that parental involvement was a critical component in student achievement. A driving force behind the parental involvement component of NCLB was research indicating a positive correlation between parental involvement and student achievement, which led to the U.S. Department of Education requiring schools to address and report on these phenomena.

Problem of Practice

Despite federal mandates to understand and address the reasons why diverse families do not often get involved in schools, the literature has yet to fully explore how Latino families think about parental involvement in the context of their own life histories (Bernhard, 2010). This

narrative study addressed this gap as it sought to identify and understand Latina mothers' perceptions and definitions of parental involvement. It should be recognized that Latinas are a very diverse group, representing different countries of origin, socioeconomic classes, levels of English language development, and lengths of time being physically present in the United States. One critical distinction is that there may be significant cultural and linguistic differences between those Latinas who identify as immigrants and those whose families have been here for generations. Nonetheless, stereotypes of Latinas exist because there is a lack of acknowledgement regarding these differences and most are taken to represent the stereotype of the poor, non-English speaking immigrant (Capper, 2014; Olivos, 2009).

Also, research findings regarding the impact of parent involvement on education are mixed. While many studies have found important benefits from parental involvement (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Bowen, 2006; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005), others (Bernhard, 2010; De Gaetano, 2007; Forsyth & Stafford, 2008) have found no effect whatsoever on achievement, while yet other studies found a negative relationship. Such studies illuminate tensions that have arisen from unclear and, at times, contradictory perceptions of what involvement is. Inconsistencies are easy to explain as different researchers utilize different definitions of parental involvement. Traditional systems of power and authority in our education system continue to determine the normative definition of parental involvement. With a limited normative definition, it is inconsistent to describe what parents do in the name of involvement. It is much more difficult to establish whether any of these activities make a difference to school outcomes particularly since school outcomes are narrowly measured by academic outcomes that are influenced by so many factors. At the same time, different metrics of parental involvement were used by different researchers even for a given definition. Various metrics included

perceptions from teachers, parents, administrators, community, students, and the researchers themselves (Epstein, 2008; Forsyth & Stafford, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2001).

Typically, parental involvement is largely conceptualized by school leaders as “what parents do” at the school and the extent to which it conforms to the needs of the child or the goals of the school for that child. Numerous parental involvement programs fail to account for the perspectives and potential contributions of parents, and the perceptions of these programs on parents are often based on cultural deficit models (Forsyth & Stafford, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2001). These cultural deficit models allow schools to shift the focus away from what they are failing to do, and instead place blame on parents for not being visibly involved in prescribed ways that often marginalize Latino parents (Alemán, 2004; Alemán & Alemán, 2010). Unfortunately, these cultural deficit models continue to inform the discourse on parental involvement, especially for families of color (Goldenberg, 2014).

Between 85% and 90% of Oregon public schools are learning communities that are predominantly White, led and taught by White educators in a system that unintentionally and intentionally supports institutional racism (Olivos, 2009; Zarate, 2007). Since the passage of the Minority Teacher Act in 1991, Oregon has made efforts to address the gap between the demographics of the state's public K-12 educator workforce and the K-12 public school students they serve. According to reports generated by and provided to Legislature in 2003, 2005, 2011, and 2014, such efforts have had a limited impact on a gap that continues to widen. In 2014-15, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) reported that 8.5% of Oregon's teacher workforce were non-White but 36.4% of Oregon's K-12 students were culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse. This report also indicated the most notable difference exists between Latino teachers (3.95%) and Latino students (22.4%) (Chief Education Office, 2015).

Immigrant children and the U.S.-born children of immigrants are among the fastest-growing population in the United States and account for 20% of the country's total population of children under 18 years of age (Batalova, 2015). Corresponding with this rapid growth are persistent educational disparities between Latino students and their White counterparts, leading to subsequent economic disparities (Lee, 2001). National surveys indicate that Latino youth experience excessive rates of negative educational outcomes (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1990; National Commission on Secondary Education of Hispanics, 1984). This overwhelming epidemic of school failure in the Latino community is evident in the dropout rate, which is at or above 50% in several major urban school districts across the nation.

While most adolescents' educational outcomes are measured in graduation rates, there is strong evidence indicating that the early elementary school years establish failure trajectories (Coleman et al., 1996). Parental involvement has been documented as a way to help close this achievement and opportunity gap but this remains in a background of historical marginalization of families of color in the schooling process (Epstein, 1991). Latina mothers perceive there are limited opportunities, if any, for them to get involved or engage with their children's school, based on the school's predominant cultural systems (Coleman et al., 1996). Middle-class values are further perpetuated and White culture still dominates (Matias & Liou, 2015). Relatively few studies of parental involvement have focused on Latinos. As a result, Latina mothers' experience with parental involvement in schools is not well-understood.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to learn from Latina mothers as they tell stories about their experiences in school with parental involvement. This qualitative study examined the stories of four Latina mothers who have worked to be involved in a White-dominant educational setting

where the overwhelming majority of the staff are White and speak English as their first language. Such statistics lend a perspective on the contexts in which Latina mothers in this study engage with their children's school. As the researcher, I conducted one face-to-face interview with each of the Latina mothers to hear about their perceptions and experiences of parental involvement in school. What activities and practices do they believe constitute parental involvement? How do these mothers in a culturally-specific group report on their experiences of parental involvement? These were some of the questions at the heart of this study.

Over the last decade, critical scholars have begun to problematize conceptions of Latino parental involvement by uncovering the hidden power relations often entrenched within the institutional systems of family and school partnerships, which often in fact serve to demote low-income immigrant Latino families to second-class status (Bowen, 2006). I believe the following theories offer insight into these issues, and I used them as analytic lenses on the data I collected: Critical Race Theory, LatCrit, and Freirean Social Theory. Critical Race Theory examines how laws reinforce racial inequality and preserve hierarchies when they were meant to promote and create a fair society. LatCrit focuses mainly on advocating for social justice for marginalized communities, specifically Chicana/Chicano people but also includes Latinos/as, Asians, LGBTQ, Native Americans/First Nations, and women of color. Freirean Social Theory examines the transformation from oppressive to more equitable structures from practices of domination to practices of freedom.

Research Questions

Guiding this study were the following questions:

1. What stories do Latina mothers tell about their experiences with parental involvement in school?

2. What do Latina mothers identify as significant barriers and issues?
3. What do Latina mothers identify as successful engagement with their child's school?
4. When engaging with school/school personnel, how do Latina mothers feel?

Definitions of Terms

This section provides definitions for terms used throughout this study.

Critical Race Theory. A theoretical framework that recognizes that racism is entrenched in the fabric and system of the American society. It is not a focus on a particular individual who might be identified as racist but rather institutionalized racism that has permeated a dominant culture. It examines existing power structures based on White privilege and White supremacy through an analytical lens. Such power structures perpetuate the marginalization of people of color (Calmore, 1992).

Cultural Broker. A cultural broker helps advance equity work as he or she fosters two-way communication by helping students and families navigate the educational system, while also ensuring school personnel understand families' needs, beliefs, values, and expectations (Gentemann, 2014).

Dominant White Culture. The dominant White culture is the culture that is the most powerful, widespread, or influential, and is the norm for United States society. It consists of an established language, religion, and sets of values, rituals, and social customs.

Latino (a). People who are descendants of the Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America.

Institutional Racism. Occurs when a person(s) is targeted and discriminated against based on their race, expressed in the conscious and unconscious practices of social and political institutions (Croizer, 2001).

Race. A social construct in which society groups people according to physical traits (Croizer, 2001).

Racism. The belief that the people of a particular race have specific characteristics and/or abilities endemic to the race that denotes them as superior to another race or races (Croizer, 2001).

School-wide Title I School. A school-wide program built on school-wide reform strategies that allow a school to use Title 1 federally-funded monies to improve the entire educational program of the school, as opposed to funding separate, add-on services.

Schools Uniting Neighbors (SUN). A local full-service neighborhood hub in which the school and community partners collaborate with each other to help ensure students and families have what they need to be successful inside and outside of school.

Limitations and Delimitations

This is a narrative qualitative study that will be conducted with a small and specific participant sample of two to three Latina mothers in one Oregon elementary school. This allows for rich, in-depth information and understanding of their narratives. Several limitations and delimitations bear explanation.

Limitations. One limitation of this study is that it will focus on a very small sample of Latina mothers, which means the findings cannot be generalized to larger populations. Participants will be drawn from a specific sample: Latina mothers who participate in a culturally-specific mothers' group, Madres Unidas during the 2016-2017 school year. This specific group of Latina mothers were members of a culturally-specific parent group that I helped start during the 2012-2015 school year as part of an initiative in parental involvement with the Latino population at the school. This parent group included only the Latino population as a focused

strategy in the school's improvement process. This mother's group was unique to this particular school; at the onset of this group, no other school in the district or neighboring districts had such a group. As a result, the participants in this study represented a unique group of people with important perspectives to offer: when I worked there, I heard comments to the effect not only have they experienced the difficulty of getting involved in their children's school, they have also actively engaged with the work to find ways into the White-dominant culture that so often excluded them. Thus, one limitation of this study is its inability to generalize findings to broader perspectives of Latina mothers or broader contexts of parental involvement.

Potential bias of both the participants and me exist as a limitation of this study, as all the research participants were actively engaged in this culturally-specific parent group. This study is specifically designed to involve these Latina mothers because they represent a unique space in which to explore their realities and their stories of parental involvement. This unique space creates potential bias, but Peshkin (1982) points to the power of identifying and excavating one's subjectivity as a potential strength for narrative and ethnographic research.

Another limitation for this study is time allocation. While the culturally-specific parent group is in its 4th year of implementation, this study will reflect only a moment in time as opposed to a more comprehensive, multi-year exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences.

Delimitations. One delimitation is the fact that the school selected for the study is a school in which I was the former principal, which means I worked within established relationships to explore Latina mothers' experiences. While this study could have included participants previously unknown to me, it would take time to build trusting relationships with them. Narrative research relies heavily on relationships in order for participants to feel

comfortable sharing their stories (Lyons, 2002). The trust we have already established with one another will reduce the time it would take to build new relationships with new participants and hopefully provide a safe opportunity for these mothers to tell their stories about their experiences.

Summary of Purpose of Study

Listening is one of the most effective ways we can learn. The purpose of the study was to learn about parental involvement by listening to the stories of Latina mothers. My study offered a much-needed space for Latina mothers to report on White cultural constructs in education as a means of informing the field. Parents across all cultures have differing perceptions about their parental role and what constitutes parental involvement; we need an increased understanding of how Latina mothers conceptualize their parental role and what their experience with it is (Epstein, 1991). In some student populations, it seems like parental involvement has increased (Ishimaru, 2014). But, as indicated by ethnicity, cultural, and socioeconomic variables, parental involvement has not increased in the Latino community (Forsyth & Stafford, 2008). The literature continues to emphasize the importance of including parent voice. Nevertheless, language barriers often exclude Spanish-speaking families from such studies and schools are often set up in ways that do not honor or invite parents from diverse backgrounds (Gentemann & Whitehead, 2015). Challenges like this make this study an important one, as we seek to better understand Latina mothers' experiences and perspectives such that schools might have a deeper awareness of how and why it is critical to include parent voices.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The first portion of this chapter examines the historic and current issues and barriers regarding Latina mothers' involvement in school through Critical Race Theory, Freirean Social Theory, and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit). The second section identifies what is presently known about the various ways that Latina mothers are involved in schools and their experiences and perceptions of this involvement in regards to schools and school personnel, their role as parents, and parental involvement. Lastly, this chapter addresses culturally relevant experiences and opportunities for parental involvement that are specifically geared to serving underserved parents. This includes parental involvement that is active, consistent, inclusive, and respectful of diversity as it recognizes that families have specific assets based on their diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and values (Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001).

Historical Issues and Barriers

As numerous ethnographies (Byron, 2011; Camangian, 2010; Delgado, 2006; Galvan, 2005) have shown, racism is evidenced in the pervasive ways in which schools fail Latino children. While considering the importance of understanding the intersectionality of oppression in the United States (i.e., race, class, gender), this literature review begins by addressing in part how racism is embedded and entrenched with White privilege in schools. This promotes colorblind policies and systems, which constitute barriers for parental involvement for culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse families. The lenses of Critical Race Theory and Freirean social theory are useful in understanding how the supremacy of "Whiteness" and the subordination of Latino people are created and maintained in the U.S. public education system (Freire, 1978, 1993; Mayo, 2010). Utilizing a Latino critical race theory framework, White

educators' deficit characterizations of Latina mothers operate from normalized standards of what it means to be an involved parent and fail to acknowledge the educational participation of Latina mothers as well as the institutional barriers they face in schools (Perez Huber, 2011; Rodriguez, 2010; Soloranzo & Yosso, 2001).

This section of the literature review focuses on the historical and current issues associated with Latina mothers' parental involvement. These stories by Latino people are in opposition to the common narrative which "constructs realities in ways that legitimize power and position" (Valdés, 1999). Such stories and voices are the data by which a CRT lens can reveal how despite the school rhetoric of parent involvement, non-White parents are shut out of schools by the negative ways in which they are treated, by insensitive bureaucratic requirements, and by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural coinage (Cutler, 2000).

According to Perez Huber (2011), school-based barriers to Latino parental involvement fall into two categories; personal and institutional. Sociocultural factors of parents, misconceptions by parents and teachers based on cultural difference, implicit biases and microaggressions fall into the personal category while institutional barriers may include limited bilingual staff, inadequate training of teachers, dominant White culture communication and logistical problems due to conflicting work schedules of parents and teachers, child care, and transportation.

Personal barriers. For ethnic, racial, and English learning families in the United States, castification is a reality they face. Trueba (1993) describes castification as "fundamentally an institutionalized way of exploiting one social group, thus reducing this group to the status of a lower caste that cannot enjoy the same rights and obligations possessed by the other groups" (p.

30). According to Rodriguez (2010), among the myths in the immigration debate is that Latino immigrants and their children do not assimilate well, are main contributors to a declining U.S. economy, and that they are crime-prone. These myths and rhetoric are ideologies embodied in the common discourse and language of anti-Latino, anti-immigrant xenophobia that becomes oppressive when translated to real policies, practices, and laws (Perez Huber, 2011; Pollock, 2010). Sociocultural factors of immigrant parents, misconceptions based on cultural differences, implicit biases, and microaggressions are other contributing factors that further perpetuate the castification of Latina mothers.

Sociocultural factors. Sociocultural factors, commonly referred to as demographic variables (i.e., ethnicity, race, education level, etc.), are important in understanding a minority parent's level of participation in her children's education. Immigration status, along with racial and social class background, have shaped the perceptions of migrant Latina mothers' self-worth and their abilities to become involved (Pollock, 2010). Glavan (2005) reported that the higher a family's socioeconomic status, the higher the involvement of Latina mothers in their children's schooling.

Several studies have found that teachers' lack of Latino cultural knowledge and social coinage between families and schools is one of the most common barriers to school-based involvement of Latina mothers (Delgado, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006). Acculturation levels have been shown to be an important factor for understanding Latino culture across a number of contexts. A common factor that influenced immigrant acculturation levels was self-efficacy (Martinez, McClure, Eddy, & Wilson, 2011).

Self-efficacy refers to people's expectations that they can successfully cope in particular situations (Epstein, 2008). With respect to parental involvement, parents who perceive

themselves as competent tend to become more involved in their children's education than their counterparts who perceive themselves as "less competent." Ultimately, Latino parents' lack of familiarity with the American educational system may also influence their efficacy beliefs regarding involvement in their children's schooling. Martinez et al. (2011) found that although less acculturated Hispanic parents reported less knowledge about school activities and more barriers to involvement, they had high levels of perceived self-efficacy with respect to parent involvement. Their perceived efficacy was deepened and encouraged by other Hispanic parents as they reinforced their cultural definition of parent involvement. They believed they were involved as parents because they were measuring and assessing their involvement through their definition as described by their culture and not the White dominant culture. More in-depth research is necessary to identify the specific issues facing Latino families' ability to engage in their children's education.

Misconceptions based on a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding. Culture plays an important part in highlighting the problems Latina mothers face as it shapes what it means for parents to be involved. Misalignments exist between school culture and Latino home culture, as White culture often de-values or does not understand Latino culture (Velez, 2008).

The education of Latino children in regards to family responsibilities as well as in their orientation to school achievement is often accomplished through the power of consejos, folk narrative advice or oration. Consejos are the means by which parents impart the cultural values and morals that guide their children in good behavior and in making good decisions both at home and in school (Bernhard, 2010). Through consejos, Latina mothers believed they were highly involved with their child's education as they pushed their children to succeed in school (Crea, Degnan, McRoy, Median, & Reynolds, 2014). Trueba's (1993) study contains stories with the

consejos of parents who advised their children on the importance of graduating from high school. They urged their children to finish by telling them about their own lives, hopes, and dreams, explaining they are going to end up like them if they do not study. These consejos are unknown, or not acknowledged, sometimes dismissed, and parents are described as not caring by teachers and school officials. Nonetheless, consejos are just one example of how Latino families impart values to their children and construct their role as an involved parent in ways that are not necessarily recognized or valued by White educators (Villenas, 2006).

Institutional barriers. Not only do Latino families face mischaracterization and sociocultural barriers that prevent their involvement, but larger realities of repression and oppression exist at curricular and institutional levels, fed by commonly-constructed public narratives of who Latinos are and what they do (Villenas, 2006).

Deficit narratives. One consistent finding among various studies (Perez Huber, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Vales, 2008) is the racially-constructed deficit narrative of Latino students and their parents based on some teachers' negative beliefs about Latinos. Rather than seeking to understand the cultural differences of students and their families, teachers often attribute root causes of student failure to cultural, language-based and/or social developmental deficits, uncaring parents, or unfit homes that lack the necessities for school success (Nagda, 2006).

Critical Race Theory and critical Whiteness studies assert that colorblindness flourishes when most White, middle-class urban teachers feel emotionally uncomfortable to engage in dynamics of race in the classroom (Okun, 2010). Colorblindness is a form of racism, also known as aversive racism, and is a racial ideology that suggests the best way to eliminate discrimination is by treating every person as equally as possible, without regard to race, the color

of one's skin, culture, or ethnicity (Parker, 2015). From this perspective, race, the color of one's skin, culture, or ethnicity "does not matter." On the surface, colorblindness may seem like a good thing as it focuses on the commonalities between people. But, most marginalized subgroups will argue that race, and/or the color of one's skin does matter as it has an impact on opportunities, access, income, and experiences (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Essentially, attitudes of colorblindness communicate to people of color that the unique attributes that create them are not acknowledged or visible. This invisibility makes race a taboo topic which most people have difficulty in openly discussing. The lack of dialogue makes it hard to understand and even more difficult to fix the racial problems that continues to plague our society. Rather than probing the bigger picture in regards to cultural differences and values within context, colorblindness tends to individualize problems (Pollock, 2010).

Colorblind ideology has a tendency to distort teaching because it assumes that White, middle-class urban teachers are skilled missionaries destined to save, and that some students in urban schools may need to be saved (Fernandez, 2002). White people can guiltlessly subscribe to colorblindness because they are usually unaware of how race affects people of color and American society as a whole (Freire, 1978). This common deficit narrative among White, middle-class female educators identifies the problem as outside the school context and therefore out of their control, thereby giving little cause for any institutional analysis of teachers' expectations, pedagogy, or limited school curriculum (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Cultural assimilation has been a strategic and natural response to the colorblind ideology in overcoming this common deficit narrative. The goal in assimilation is to culturally and/or linguistically resemble members of the dominate group through a slow or fast process of becoming homogeneous. Teachers have expressed concerns about the cultural differences

through the hope that their students and families will become “normal,” or assimilated in given time (De Gaetano, 2007). Teachers explain, “I think they (parents) hold him back well, unwillingly. I think they want the best for him but they’re unwilling or not able to help. I’m sure everything is in Spanish” (Hernandez, Denton, Macartney, 2009, p. 90). Such views seem to portray the belief that assimilation is essential for school success and students must leave their languages and cultures at home.

LatCrit theorists argue that requiring assimilation of Latino children is part of numerous issues, including the ethnocentric belief that middle-class White ways are the only correct ways of living (Martinez et al., 2011). Murillo Jr. (1997) argues that dominant culture takes on the job of disciplining the “immigrant other.” In other words, Latino immigrants are taught how to act within White culture. This includes teaching them about their place in U.S. society by asserting the “do’s” and “don’ts” of living in the U.S. and teaching correct thinking (submissiveness, assimilation, English-only). While for some teachers, the requirement of assimilation may be an unintentional and natural reaction to students they do not understand, this view becomes a common way of disregarding Latino culture and encroaching White middle-class norms (Manglitz, 2003).

Failure in standardized testing is another common theme that Latina mothers hear in the deficit narratives constructed about their children. Standardized testing is often used to validate vocational paths that Latina mothers loathe (Hernandez et al., 2009; Manglitz, 2003). In the area of assessment, Ladson-Billings (2000) argues that for critical race theorists, IQ tests have been a movement to legitimize the framing of African American children as deficient under the guise of scientific rationalism. For Latino students too, standardized testing in public schools plays the same role of legitimizing their segregation and tracking them into vocational paths, thereby

leading to their overrepresentation in low-level classes (Giroux, 2010). A CRT lens argues that deficit explanations of teachers and school administrations are strategies of maintaining White privilege and power. As Latino students are placed in remedial, low-level classes, White students are placed in advanced placement and high-level elective classes with the justification that this prepares them for the type of jobs they are “capable of” (Manglitz, 2003; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Findings from qualitative studies such as those of Carreon, Drake, and Barton (2005) point toward the need to challenge deficit models of parental school involvement that have served to marginalize Hispanic parents in the process of educating their children. These deficit narratives negatively affect relationships between Latina mothers and their children's teachers, however one of the most common and aggravating contributors to strained relationships is ineffective communication between school personnel and Latina mothers (Olivos, 2009).

Communication barriers. Perhaps the most frustrating obstacle to Latina mothers' involvement with their children's schools is the language barrier (Nagda, 2006; Olivos, 2009; Rodriguez & Conchas, 2009). Many Latina mothers have felt powerless to becoming involved in their children's education because they spoke only Spanish or limited English.

When schools attempt to translate documents into Spanish, false assumptions and expectations about parents' acculturation levels are frequently made, thus resulting in the loss of intended meanings. Velez (2008) applies a LatCrit perspective to U.S. schooling system, stating,

The colonization of the mind is continued through instilling a historical amnesia that contributes Latino indigenous peoples as immigrants, foreigners who have no right to the American public school system, while White Americans are established as the rightful owners of these schools. (p. 254)

Summary of Historical Issues & Barriers

Understanding the sociocultural factors Latina mothers face, such as education and acculturation, are key to understanding personal and contextual factors relevant to parent involvement. Such characteristics give educated Latina mothers more power or social capital with which to involve themselves in their children's education than their less-educated counterparts. Yet latent racism in communities and schools is particularly evident from a CRT and LatCrit theory perspective, which deconstruct and analyze the complex social, political, and economic processes that immigrant Latina mothers are forced to navigate in order to be involved with their children's education (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Latina mothers' involvement with White school-prescribed normalization practices is affected by ideological messages that subordinately position them in terms of their ethnicity, class, and immigrant status. In essence, a CRT frame demands an analysis of the totality of racism and the interplay of the macro (anti-immigrant xenophobia, anti-bilingualism, anti-affirmative action) and the micro (school policies and structures) in the lives of Latino families (McKay, 2010). As critical race theorists contend, exposing racism also means advocating revolutionary action for change which is described in the next section of this literature review.

Latina Mothers Report on their Experiences and Perceptions

In many schools that have a long history of failure, it is often easier to rationalize the underachievement of students through genetic or cultural explanations than it is to look deeper at the social, economic, and political forces that shape these communities (Calderon, 2015; Ledesma, 2001). For example, in various ethnographic studies of schools where a large Latino immigrant population had rapidly replaced a predominately White and middle-class community, teachers were unprepared to teach and support their new students of color (Carreon, Drake, &

Barton, 2005; Goldenberg, 2014; Matias & Liou, 2015). They assumed disinterest, apathy, and even antagonism by the failure of these parents to care and support their children. They failed to recognize why working parents might not be able to make the midday appointments with their children's teachers and how they might not be able to read or write in English (Lopez & Donovan, 2009; Olivos, 2009; Zarate, 2007).

In schools with high percentages of immigrant Latino populations where their first language is not English and most have low levels of formal education (up to the 6th grade), participating in normative forms of White culture involvement is an intimidating process (Capper, 2014; Olivos, 2009). How then can schools reach out to these families? How might these relationships be improved? More importantly, what are the ideologies of involvement informing educators that seek the participation of immigrant families? Latina mothers' reports about parental involvement fall into two main areas: issues with schools and their personnel and the ways Latina mothers perceive their role as parents. The literature indicates that Latina mothers report that public schooling is a social construct that is very political, especially when it comes to meeting the educational needs of their culturally and linguistically diverse children.

School & school personnel. Latina mothers in the United States occupy a space within school contexts that define them not only as parents without the professional status of school personnel, but also as racial and linguistic minority women who are commonly perceived by school personnel as passive, feeble, and unintelligent (Matias & Liou, 2015). They are typically assumed to have little knowledge about education and child development (Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Crozier, 2001). Teachers often treat Latina mothers as hopeless victims of their circumstances because the specific cultural capital that allows them to exist, negotiate, and

sometimes thrive within a racist society remains unrecognized. Consequently, mothers often feel powerless and subsequently silenced or dismissed (Capper, 2014; Olivos, 2009).

Referring to Bourdieu's (1989) concept of symbolic violence, Latina mothers are recipients of the sociocultural and historical nature of institutionalized violence in schools where leadership legitimizes such violence. Symbolic violence, or the imposition of power manifested through policy and practice that sustain existing power relations based on arbitrary factors such as race, class, and gender then are seen as "natural" phenomenon. From this perspective, symbolic violence toward Latina mothers is part of broader institutionalized ideologies because of their race and how they are socially defined.

Researchers argue that school environments have unique personalities which facilitate or constrain certain behaviors from both students and their families. Moreover, the ways one perceives his or her surroundings influence the ways one will behave in that environment (Insel & Moos, 2004). Of particular importance towards improving the involvement of low-income and socially marginalized immigrant Latino families is addressing the lack of respect, where the attitudes of school staff are negative towards students of color and their families (Matias & Liou, 2015). These researchers illustrated how Latina mothers believed the cultural understandings and expectations they bring to schools do not align with those expected among school personnel (Crozier, 2001). For example, various qualitative studies found that Mexican immigrant mothers were disrespected by the ways in which school personnel interacted with them in meetings (Bourdieu, 1989; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Goldenberg, 2014). The examples in these studies indicate teachers' lack of responsiveness to mothers' English language needs, as translators were not provided. Even when a translator was provided, there was still a lack of respect and empathy to connect to the Latina mothers, as the explanation of education themes and terms was

limited. These mothers felt awkward in the school and chose to withdraw through silence after their repeated attempts to advocate for their children were dismissed (Matias & Liou, 2015; Reynolds et al., 2014). Other studies (Alemán, 2004; Parker, 2015; Zarate, 2007) document how Latina mothers were often given the wrong information or minimally informed about their child's options, resources, and abilities (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernandez, 2002). In one incident, a Latina mother's request to a school counselor went unmet until a cultural broker imbued with the cultural capital of English proficiency and knowledge of school structures dominated the interaction.

Some ethnographic studies have uncovered the pain and shame that Latina mothers experience at their children's schools (Bourdieu, 1989; Forsyth & Stafford, 2008; Lee & Bowen, 2001). For example, one Latina mother shared her feeling of betrayal with a school secretary when she confided in her the difficulties she was having in bringing her child to school. This information was shared with other individuals during a meeting. When the mother reported this to the principal, the principal rolled his eyes. This time the mother felt betrayed by the school principal. This microaggression is commonly exemplified in dominant group responses toward people of color as "playing the race card" whenever they tell their story of being wronged by school personnel (Lopez & Donovan, 2009; Olivos, 2009; Zarate, 2007).

Bowen (2006) states that "simply bringing parents to school will not change the racist or classist responses that teachers may have toward them and their behavior" (p. 195). These words illustrate the issue with many White educators simply believing the limited view of the academic gap between Whites and non-Whites only exists because minority parents are less involved in the education of their children. In truth, the majority of White educators may have implicit biases that impact their perceptions of culturally-specific behaviors of Latino parents. For example, in

the Latino culture, family is the most important social construct. Most often, parents will keep their student home from school to attend a family member's birthday party or take their students out of school for a long period of time to travel back to Mexico for a family reunion. Most White educators view these culturally-specific behaviors as Latino parents not valuing the education of their children. Often, the opposite is true. Immigrant Latina mothers are so deeply committed to their children's education that many of them have traveled to a new country, at great risk, to offer their children better schooling and a better future (Perez Huber, 2011). Lack of respect, symbolic violence, humiliation, and shame are some of the experiences that Latina mothers have reported experiencing with school personnel.

Latino parents' role. A Latino parent's role in their child's education is somewhat different from a White parent's role. For example, Latino parents take a holistic approach to learning that includes social and ethical education, in addition to formal academic education. One's social status, according to interviews and observations of immigrant Latino families, cannot be achieved with just formal academic education. Latino culture believes that a moral education is crucial to promoting one's social status because one must be ethical at all times, in all places, and in all things (Bernhard, 2010; Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005; Fernandez, 2002).

In the Latino culture, parents are the experts in offering their children a moral education, and educators are the experts in providing a formal academic education (Auerbach, 2007). Latina mothers' perceptions of what constitutes parental involvement in the academics of their children's education include activities like attending parent-teacher conferences when there is a translator, signing (not grading) homework, listening to their child read even if they do not understand the language, visiting classrooms during open houses, utilizing a cultural broker for

help for their child, taking them to the library, purchasing materials and supplies, and expecting high performance from their child (DeGaetano, 2007; Zarate, 2007).

From Latina mothers' perspectives, parental involvement in the moral education of their children includes being aware of and monitoring their child's affect, knowing their child's friends and interacting with their parents, teaching good morals and respect of others, communicating with their child, encouraging their abilities and career aspirations, discussing future goals, discipline, teaching them about drugs and sex, and encouraging siblings to look out for each other (Carreon, Drake, & Barton, 2005). From this perspective, Latino parents equate involvement in their child's education with involvement in their home lives. Participation in their children's lives ensures that children's formal academic schooling is complemented with education taught by their parents. Thus, Latino parents often believe their role is to monitor their children's lives and provide moral guidance that is a direct result in good classroom behavior, which in turn allows for greater academic learning opportunities (Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; De Gaetano, 2007). Finally, parents felt that this means of involvement constitutes their part of an unspoken agreement with the school to holistically educate their child (Calderon, 2015; Ledesma, 2001).

In contrast, most White educators view parent involvement as being visible at the school or participating in school events. They would value parents coming in to build a bulletin board, prep materials and supplies for the teacher, or clean parts of the school. Other ways would also include when parents participate on field trips, tutor children, and assist with class projects and/or celebrations.

These examples illustrate how Latino parents view their role as parents in a very different way than most White educators view their roles as parents (Olivos, 2009). Latino families

support and nurture their children's education mostly at home rather than at school. For example, they believe they are involved in their children's education as they provide them with the necessary supplies to do their homework or take them to the library to check out library books. Many White teachers and administrators come from middle-class to upper-class backgrounds (Lewis & Landsman, 2006; Singleton & Linton, 2005). The cultural values from these differing backgrounds and their own experiences growing up may contribute to their understanding of parental involvement (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Hill & Tyson, 2009). The differing perceptions of parental involvement contributes to the common narrative from White teachers that Latino parents are not involved in their children's education (Fuller & Garcia-Coll, 2010).

Summary of Latina Mothers' Reports

There is limited literature that examines the family involvement practices of Latino families, specifically those from migrant farm-working backgrounds. While the literature overwhelmingly points to the increased benefits of parental involvement, especially in regards to various academic indicators, it also lacks issues of conceptualization. There is a lack of research on parental involvement that is conducted and communicated from an asset-based lens on how best to serve Latina populations. There is too much emphasis on what these student populations and their families lack, rather than the assets they bring (Forsyth & Stafford, 2008). This ascription towards deficit thinking contributes to the status quo of current concepts of parental involvement and leaves little room or space for promising practices to enter into the conversation (Giroux, 2010).

While academic indicators can be helpful, they are also limiting because they highlight what students lack, often blame the families, and fail to see the ways we as a system have not

provided opportunity or access due to a belief gap. This belief gap is reinforced as the deficit lens perpetuates validity issues with the research and becomes the normative “research best practices” (Lee, 2001).

Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement

This final section of the literature review focuses on culturally relevant parental involvement through social networks that are designed to specifically support Latina mothers. There are some ethnographic studies (Bernhard, 2010; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; DeGaetano, 2007) in which Latina mothers report a positive, supportive, and trusting school environment in which they were involved as mothers. Culturally-specific parent groups that promote sociality are an area that is not prevalent in the literature as a strategy to increase parental involvement (Bowen, 2006; Galvan, 2005).

Gentemann & Whitehead (2015), along with Graves (2005), discovered that culturally specific community living rooms (*salas comunitarias*) provided an empowering safe space, particularly for Latina mothers. These spaces allowed Latina mothers to unravel how racial meanings, practices, and common sense are created, circulated, enforced, and contested in the parental roles of their children's school. They provided emotional and social support to Latina mothers. Additionally, schools that provided a cultural broker reported higher participation percentages than those who did not have a cultural broker.

Using a social network theory, researchers gained an understanding of how parent social networks, specifically relationships with other Latina mothers in a school, influenced their perceptions of their role in the educational process and their efficacy to fulfill perceived roles (Ladson-Billings, 2000; Lee, 2001). The Latina mothers in these studies were more motivated to be involved when they received invitations from their children or from other Latina

mothers. According to social role theory, roles are a socially constructed set of duties, rights, obligations, and expectations corresponding with varied positions carried out in multiple contexts (Rodriguez, 2010). These roles are constructed by individuals in the context of their relationships with others, with society, and with the culture in which they live (Galvan, 2005; Staton-Salazar, 2011; Zarate, 2007).

Roles in education are largely learned through observation and modeling to others in the educational environment. In other words, social influences in the educational environment can alter a parent's efficacy to take action. For example, in a large, urban school in Texas, Latina mothers reported observing other Latina mothers attending the monthly Madres Unidas meetings with the school's Schools Uniting Neighbors (SUN) after school program coordinator who was also Latina (Bowen, 2001; Lee, 2001). They were curious and asked their children if they could find out from their friends what they were doing. Upon the children's inquiry, the Latina SUN coordinator immediately created invitations to the Madres Unidas meetings with the children. These mothers not only became regular participants, but also became leaders facilitating the meetings. In another qualitative study (Velez, 2008), Latina mothers noticed other Latina mothers helping out in the school cafeteria and asked them how they could also be of assistance. These four Latina mothers created the group, "Madres de Comida" (Mothers of Food) in which they organized numerous food initiatives to problem-solve various cafeteria issues. Examples such as these, offer a glimpse of what is possible when schools learn to embrace rather than marginalize the wisdom and the ingenuity of Latina mothers, their concern for their children, and their hopeful visions of the future.

Throughout the mentioned ethnographic studies, Latina mothers engaged in a process of self-affirming activism through various types of social networks (Freire, 1993). Through this

process, they developed their own voice as effective organizers in the school community, learning and sharing valuable lessons on commitment, community organizing, participation, and decision-making. These mothers became effective school activists by collectively engaging in what Freire (1979) called “desvelamiento critico” (critical unveiling) of reality, involving development of individual and collective agency through their activism (Freire, 1979).

While there are various styles and forms of culturally specific social networks, self-efficacy and parent role construction are salient aspects of parental involvement with Latina mothers. These mothers not only expressed confidence in their ability to assist their children but felt empowered as their culture was reconstructed as an asset in the success of the children's education (Graves, 2005; Mayo, 2010). Schools provided opportunities to develop and build relationships between the mothers themselves and between school personnel. These relationships became the foundation and conduit in exchanging cultural knowledge and understanding. Both sides reported an increased understanding in each other's roles and knowing how to support one another in those roles (Zarate, 2007). Yet, while parental involvement has been of interest of researchers, understanding parent perspectives and broadening the lens of parental involvement beyond White dominant culture is a further necessary step in effectively connecting schools and the Latino community.

Summary of Culturally Relevant Parental Involvement

Findings suggest that social relationships with other Latina mothers are important resources and support for role identification and efficacy, and may help diminish the cultural misalignment between Latina mothers and White dominant culture in public schools. When the conditions for Latina mothers' involvement are facilitated, and their culture and particular ways of participating are validated and developed, a more inclusive partnership is established with the

school. As schools develop symbolic spaces of leadership and offer cultural brokers to facilitate participation, Latina mothers are empowered to have a more active voice in the education of their children (Freire, 1979; Graves, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This portion of the literature review synthesized studies on Latina mothers' experiences and perceptions regarding parental involvement, concentrating on those that focus on "what involvement is" and how Latina mothers understand it. It identified strengths and limitations of the present knowledge base, as well as directions for future research. Lastly, it identified key theoretical concepts from the literature that focus on framing parental involvement from an asset-based lens by challenging deficit ideologies that blame families of diversity for the persistent educational disparities between them and their White counterparts. Theoretical concepts such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino critical theory (LatCrit) demonstrates how critical raced epistemologies acknowledge parents of color as creators and holders of knowledge that historically have been undervalued, misunderstood, or absent.

The following chapter describes how narrative methodology is not only an appropriate methodological approach but also a vital method for understanding these issues better. Narrative methodology provides a unique space for Latina mothers to tell their stories and offer perspectives that may directly challenge the broad range of research paradigms, from positivism to constructivism (Delgado Bernal, 1999; Gordon, 1990; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Chapter 3 describes the interview as a critical component of narrative methodology as a means to elicit critical-raced stories. These stories hold potential for showing how critical race theory (CRT) and Latina/Latino (LatCrit) gives credence to epistemologies that recognize parents of color as assets who are holders and creators of knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

Methods

In educational research, there is a theory that views humans as the authors of stories who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Hence, narrative research is the study of the ways humans experience their world (Creswell, 2013). This notion translates into the view that education and educational research is the creation and recreation of personal stories; learners, teachers, and researchers are storytellers and characters in their own and in others' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011). Life history researchers have been particularly interested in narrative research because people compose stories to understand their lives or phenomena. Narrative inquiry borrows and draws on scholarship and methodology from anthropology, history, and literary theory (Lyons, 2002).

In general, narrative researchers resist the idea that there is a defined method through which narratives can be elicited or analyzed. Bruner (2002) believed that people have innate predisposition to narrative organization of their experiences, whereas cultures offer forms of telling and interpreting that makes narratives comprehensible both to the self and to others. This study was designed to be a narrative inquiry, through which the experiences of four Latina mothers related to their involvement in their child's school would be studied. The stories of their experiences of parental involvement were retold in a narrative chronology (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011; Giovannoli, 2010).

Face-to-face interactions in a natural setting allow for the exploration and discovery of processes and issues that are not readily evident through quantitative methodology (Creswell, 2013). The researcher serves as a key mechanism in the collection and analysis of data that are subsequently reviewed and analyzed both inductively and deductively. Throughout the study,

the researcher maintains a reflexive, exploratory position while seeking to understand and adequately portray the participants' meanings. This narrative approach was appropriate for my study due to the need to better understand the dynamic and multi-directional processes by which Latina mothers are invited or uninvited into school contexts and/or the ways they experience involvement in particular ways (Craig, 2003).

Narrative methodology provides an opportunity to take a fresh look at parental involvement as it gives researcher and participants the freedom to explore a different set of questions than past research, offer different perspectives, and work from different vantage points. It seeks to offer empirically rich interpretations of what happens when reform proposals become enacted (Jaeger, 1997). Within this study, I illuminated different aspects of parental involvement reform, held these phenomena open to inquiry, and presented rich contextualized narratives. In narrative methodology, interviews enable a researcher to explore the embodied, narrative knowledge that participants hold and express in the contexts of their roles (Ortrun, 2009). This study explored Latina mothers' parental roles as they told their stories to make sense of their personal experiences in a highly-complex school environment. Interviewing provided a personal, unique platform for understanding where these participants found themselves in a phenomenon.

In this research, narrative stories were a format best suited to capture Latina mothers' experiences. The personal narratives about school-based and home-based involvement in their children's academic experiences gave meaning to interactions with other "actors" as they illuminated the contextual influences on their school involvement. Moreover, narrative inquiry allowed for the interrogation of aspects of human agency and time which shaped the participants' school involvement stories (Riessman, 2008). Through narrative methodology, I investigated not

only how the mothers' stories were structured and the ways in which they worked, but also who considered who created them and by what means, the mechanisms by which they were consumed, and how the mothers' narratives might have been muted, rejected, or accepted by other actors (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011). Cultures create the realm of stories that are deemed acceptable, which terms the tension between the norm and what is possible. Through narratives, interpretation is central to humanity as it is how we bring meaning and order to life.

My desire to frame this study in terms of narrative inquiry was rooted in the belief that by doing so, I would be able to see different and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, bring those into useful dialogue with each other, and more fully understand individual and social change. This study further illuminated how narrative research can be used to investigate real social problems and helped me consider some of the ethical dilemmas that Latina mothers confront on a daily basis. Their stories have the potential to shed further light on their assigned parental roles in supporting their children's academic development, as well as their struggles and triumphs in doing so (Chase, 2005).

Bruner (1991) distinguished the narrative mode of knowing from the paradigmatic one. The study gave participants opportunities to speak their truths through a description of multilayered meanings of historical and personal events. Narratives, then, are viewed as the foundation of the construction of meaning and reality, giving us "the power to make sense of things when they don't" (Bruner, 2002, p. 78). Narrative research is inductive in that it requires work from a reflexive position; it focuses on the holistic aspects of participants' biographies and utilizes the capacity to interweave observations and theory in authentic, meaningful ways. Interviewing is an essential feature of narrative research as it is conducted within a postmodern frame in which learning is constructed rather than discovered. Method then becomes a way of

thinking about inquiry, modes of exploration through interviewing, and creative approach to offering one's constructed findings to the scholarly community (Craig, 2003).

Setting

This study was conducted at Sumpter Elementary, which is a school-wide Title 1 school where 100% of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch and received a free breakfast every day. Out of 491 students, 46% were English learners, with 18 different languages spoken; 37% were Hispanic/Latino students. Among the faculty, there was one culturally and linguistically diverse educator, along with 24 White educators, two racially diverse para-educators, and nine White para-educators.

Participants/Sampling Strategy

In this section, I describe the participants, along with the recruitment and selection process. In addition, I detail the existing relationship between the participants and myself to offer background and explanation about my role and my awareness of power relationships.

Mothers of Madres Unidas. The Madres Unidas parent group became part of the school's SUN (Schools Uniting Neighbors) program. This SUN school program was a full-service neighborhood hub where the school and partners from across the community came together to make sure kids and families have what they need to be successful – in school and in life. There was a SUN supervisor that led the efforts of the SUN school to mobilize and strategically organize community resources to provide

- Strong core instructional program,
- Educational support and skill development for youth and adults,
- Enrichment and recreation activities,
- Family involvement and support,

- Social, health and mental health resources, and
- Family and community events.

Our SUN school was open to all ages, preschool to seniors, with a focus on students in the immediate school community. It provided a school-based service delivery in which specific student groups meet both before and after school. The after-school program offered daily enrichment and academic classes coordinated with the SUN supervisor, school principal, and teachers. After the 2-hour classes, students were served a dinner followed by transportation home.

The anonymity of this study's participants has been preserved through the use of pseudonyms. Rick, the supervisor of the SUN school program, collaboratively worked with me to implement the vision of the unique culturally-specific parent group: Madres Unidas. This culturally-specific mothers group met monthly in any available classroom during the school day or after school. Due to logistics, a classroom was the best suited location for these meetings as it provided chairs, tables, and the technology to present. Rick and I hired Laura, who helped facilitate Madres Unidas. SUN paid her salary through a federal grant. During my years there as principal, Rick and Laura led the two-to three-hour meetings that were participant-driven.

As in any study, trust is a critical component. It is the starting foundation to an ethical and trustworthy relationship between researcher and participants. As the researcher, I wanted to capitalize on an established trust I had with the Madres Unidas group. This specific group of Latina mothers were members of a culturally-specific parent group that I created as part of an initiative in parental involvement with the Latino population at the school. This parent group included only the Latino population as a focused strategy in the school's improvement process. Our leadership team knew trusting relationships were a critical factor in the creation of this

culturally-specific parent group. Rick was a bi-lingual, bi-cultural, Spanish-speaking person that created trusting relationships with the Latino population at Sumpter. A trusting relationship and the percentage of student population were two high leverage points that were the driving decision of including only Latina mothers in this study.

The SUN school program hired a bi-lingual, bi-cultural Latina facilitator, Laura, to assist in facilitating monthly meetings with the Madres Unidas parent group. The purpose and the discussions at the meetings were identified by the Latina mothers in the group. Their voices were represented in the agendas as well as the outcomes for each meeting. As the principal, I participated in all meetings as a learner by listening, observing, and asking questions. I asked questions that elicited an understanding of them as concerned mothers of their children's education. This learner role enabled me to establish a trusting relationship with these mothers as I treated them with respect by cultivating their culture and language as an asset. They viewed me as a trusted person with positional power and authority who followed through on issues they identified in these Madres Unidas meetings. The mothers communicated to me that they felt like they had a voice at the school for the first time in a long time.

I recruited Latina mothers from the 2016-2017 Madres Unidas parent group through an informational letter (see Appendix A) which explained the research study, the purpose of the research, the method of the research, the extent of their participation, my participation, the role of the cultural broker, and how the research findings would be used. At a parent meeting in November, Rick gave a brief description of the purpose of the study, researcher's name, and a date to meet with the researcher if interested. A week prior to meeting with the researcher, Laura called the moms to remind them and get an initial sense of interest. From this recruitment, five mothers formally accepted the invitation to participate by telling Laura. Due to limited time and

the candidates' availability, I selected four out of the five mothers to conduct face-face-interviews. The selection of these four Latina mothers was solely based on their availability to conduct the interviews within a certain time period. Following the selection, I initiated a formal invitation to participate through a face-to-face meeting at the school during the regular SUN school session hours from 4:30-5:30. We met in the staff room in which both teachers and administration had already left.

Stories of the four Latina mothers are expressed in Chapter 4 with some characteristics of their demographic information listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Latina mothers

	Lupa	Sofia	Valeria	Isabella
Age	63 yrs.	27 yrs.	24 yrs.	36 yrs.
Number of School Years in Mexico	10 yrs.	1 yr.	6 yrs.	0 yrs.
Number of School Years in U.S.	0 yrs.	11 yrs.	3 yrs.	0 yrs.
First Language	Spanish	Spanish	Spanish	Quiche
Oral Spanish Skills	Fluent	Fluent	Fluent	Fluent
Oral English Skills	Beginning	Fluent	Beginning	None
Graduated from High School?	No	Yes	No	No
Age Upon Entering the U.S.	16 yrs.	7yrs.	12 yrs.	20 yrs.

Role of the Researcher

As a culturally diverse female educator and administrator who has navigated American public education in mostly culturally and linguistically unconscious environments, I am passionate about not only involving culturally and linguistically diverse families, but about empowering them to be leaders in their communities to make necessary systemic change in their children's education. This acknowledgement of my previous professional role in the school as well as my personal lens demonstrates my awareness of researcher bias. As a result of the preponderance of racial marginalization within racially unconscious learning environments, a peer review and debriefing process was implemented to examine where bias might have arisen throughout the process of this study.

Data Collection

The principal data collection method was a semi-structured, face-to-face interview with each participant that consisted of one long conversation lasting an average of three hours. The interviews were conducted with the help of a cultural broker, an individual with extensive knowledge and experience with the school community culture and the Latino culture. A cultural broker helps advance equity work as he or she fosters two-way communication by helping students and families navigate the educational system while also ensuring school personnel understand families' needs, beliefs, values, and expectations (Gentemann, 2014). The cultural broker who assisted in this study was named Laura, and worked as a Special Education Staff Assistant at the school during the day. After school, she was employed by a local education agency as the facilitator of the culturally-specific mother's group in the SUN after-school program. The premise of narrative research is that people live and/or understand their lives in a

story format through the connection of events creating a plot with beginning, middle, and end points (Josselson, 1996).

Laura the cultural broker. Laura knew the “plot” of these Latina mothers’ stories. She was one of the main characters who played a role in intersecting plotlines in these women’s lives as the facilitator of Madres Unidas. In narrative research, a trusting relationship with the investigator cultivates the value of detailed and honest descriptions of experience. A trusting, nonjudgmental relationship with research participants helps participants overcome habitual social prohibitions and aides them in eliciting the full, honest, detailed, emotional narration of their lived experience (Josselson, 1996). Both Laura and I established trusting, nonjudgmental relationships with these mothers that contributed positively to the enactment of this study.

One unique way Laura increased trust with these mothers was through her own parental role. In addition to the professional role and responsibilities she fulfilled at the school, she was also a mother. She defined this role through the lens of Latina culture, rather than White Culture: biologically, she was the oldest sister of two children that attended the school. But in Latino culture, she was considered another mother of the children because she represented, communicated, attended to, and acted as a parent in the absence of their biological parents. Her parents signed an authorization form giving her legal permission to make decisions regarding the children. This parental role gave her cultural capital with the mothers as she served dual roles as a participant and facilitator of Madres Unidas.

Laura’s trusting relationships with the mothers extended out to include me as a researcher, and the school community as well. Narrative stories can play out in the context of other stories that may include societies, cultures, families, or other intersecting plotlines in a participant’s life (Josselson, 1996). I worked with Laura during the three years I served as the

principal at the school. We had a trusting relationship in which we believed in each other's ability to be nonjudgmental and honest in our interactions with the participants and ourselves. As an employee of the school, she had existing relationships and connections with the staff and community members. She had intricate knowledge of the school climate and culture consisting of norms, rules, policies and procedures specific to the school. She was familiar with the other stories narrating the school culture and community consisting of staff, families, school programs and initiatives, and past and current administration.

I conducted interviews with my participants with Laura's help, as a cultural broker. We chose a local, public library that was convenient, comfortable, and accessible to all parties and helped participants feel more comfortable sharing their story. Within this public location, I used a conference room with closed doors to ensure privacy and quiet. I utilized a semi-structured process in which some interview questions were fully decided, and others were contextualized queries. I modified the initial interview questions to meet the needs of the moment and clarified meaning with the participants with follow-up questions. Depending on each participant's language needs and level of comfort, I conducted the interviews in English while Laura translated in Spanish during the interviews. The participants were given the choice of language with which they preferred the interviews to be conducted. Offering participants the choice of language honored their linguistic abilities and did not presume their language needs. Three out of the four participants choose Spanish in which, I consulted with Laura on how to proceed. First, I spoke in English, and then she translated in Spanish. After the moms responded back in Spanish, Laura translated into English. Frequently, she asked follow-up questions ensuring accurate translation. Using the app, Mic Notes, all interviews were recorded.

I took field notes of the interviews, which were informal descriptions of the contexts of the interviews (setting, participants, time, body language, physical environment of interviews). While there were follow-up questions from the original interview questions, each participant was asked the same interview questions that included these follow-up questions. This consistency was critical as it helped in keeping to the allotted time as translating was something I did not accurately account for. Data analysis commenced after the interviews were completed.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis aims to maintain a view of how a participant weaves multiple realities (Craig, 2003). I analyzed the interview content through a systematic examination (search for themes in relation to one another as a dynamic whole), coding (initial, focused, thematic), and the implementation of conceptual maps (Turner, 2010). This analytic process was one of piecing together data, making the invisible apparent, deciding what was significant and insignificant, and connecting seemingly unrelated facets of experience together. Analysis was a creative process of organizing data so that the analytic themes emerged. I read the transcripts for personal, social, and historical conditions that narrated the story. My goal was to discover both the themes that unified the story and the disparate voices that carried, commented on, and disrupted the main themes.

What is unique to narrative research is that it endeavors to explore the whole account rather than fragmenting it into discursive units or separate categories of themes. It is not the parts that are significant, but how the parts are integrated to create a whole, meaningful narrative (Lyons, 2002). I began analysis by reading through the interview transcripts multiple times. I endeavored to do this work in a hermeneutic circle, by paying attention to how the whole illuminated the parts, and how the parts in turn offered a holistic, more comprehensive picture of

the whole, which then led to a better understanding of the parts (Josselson, 1996). First, I coded the narratives into themes. Then within these themes, I identified the mother of the story and coded specific details within the story as temporality, sociality, and place. These hermeneutic circles are fundamental to narrative research as narrators are constructing ordered accounts from the chaos of internal experience, with the recognition that these accounts will likely be multi-faceted and multi-voiced.

Narrative analysis rooted from the hermeneutic circle process involves gaining an overall understanding of meaning and then exploring the individual parts in relation to it, which will involve changing our comprehension of the whole until the researcher arrives at a holistic understanding that best represents the meanings of the parts (Bruner, 1991). Using this approach, I engaged in the text by coding the individual parts within each theme with Clandinin and Connelly's 3-D dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place through:

1. Conducting overall reading of the interview to get a sense of the structure of the narrative and general theme(s), return to each specific part to construct its meaning, and then consider more global meanings in lieu of the deepened meanings of the parts;
2. Conducting multiple readings to identify different "voices" of the self and create a view of how these selves were in dialogue with each other; and
3. Developing a "good Gestalt" to identify contradictions (Lyons, 2002). In other words, when similarity occurs, a voice can be emphasized when it is dissimilar to the others.

During this analysis, I made every attempt to be aware of my own presuppositions, how I as the interviewer and interpreter shaped the text as a co-constructed experience. To achieve greater validity, I utilized a peer review or debriefing throughout the process because it provided an external check of the research process. Colleagues and peers in a similar field have some

familiarity with the research literature and methods, and thus were able to provide corroboration with regard to the interpretation of the data (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 253). I utilized a friend who is in her own dissertation process at a neighboring university. She helped me by asking difficult questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations, and provided me with the opportunity for catharsis by listening to my feelings and experiences within the research process. These debriefings first began while I was developing the interview questions, revealing that my own subjectivity was unavoidable and I needed to acknowledge and be conscious of it throughout the entire research process. There is great benefit when researchers are attentive to their own subjectivity. According to Peshkin (1982), subjectivity can be an asset as it is the foundation of a unique contribution of the researcher's unique qualities combined with the collected data. If researchers are aware of their subjectivity, they are able, at the very least, to disclose this intersection of the researcher and the subject to the reader.

I chose to use my own first-person voice to reconstruct mothers' narratives as I best understood them, rather than try to reconstruct the stories in their voice. I did this because I did not feel I understood the mothers well enough to try and appropriate their voice. Nevertheless, I emphasized co-construction of meaning between me and the participants during interviews and analysis. I did this by reading and re-reading the data, comparing it to my own personal understandings, and investigating how the pieces of the stories made sense together.

The structure in this study is based on Clandinin and Connelly's (2011) three-dimensional space approach detailed in their text *Narrative Inquiry*. Temporality is one aspect of this narrative approach I utilized as it related to learning about experiences, and how new experiences developed as these experiences grew. Initial analysis included a focus on the temporal, seeking an overall sense of the ways these mothers lived their lives in relation to

parental involvement. Furthermore, I investigated the sociality of their personal experiences that included feelings, hopes, reactions, and responses to experiences as well as the interactions with other people. What were their responses and feelings to their experiences? What were the social events that occurred and how were they situated within a larger social, institutional narrative as experienced by the mothers? These experiences and interactions among people happened in a specific, physical place or context, such as a classroom, school, or home. What were the multiples places and spaces where the mothers were composing their parental involvement experiences? These three aspects: temporality, sociality, and place structured the analysis of this study.

Ethical Considerations

I obtained informed consent via a letter of consent from my participants by fully explaining both verbally and in writing what my research was about and how it would be disseminated. This letter of intent (Appendix A) included the identification of the researcher, the purpose of the study, and the sponsoring institution. Participants were aware of the benefits for participating, notation of risks, and their right to refuse to participate. The letter detailed steps for participant confidentiality followed by the assurance that they could withdraw at any time. They were provided persons to contact if questions arose, along with the potential uses of the data. In addition, I secured a statement of confidentiality from the cultural broker, Laura.

I ensured the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants through several means. I used study codes on data documents instead of recording identifying information (e.g., name, addresses, employer's name or address, relatives' names or addresses, date (e.g., birthdate, date of death, etc.), phone numbers, E-mail addresses). When I collected data, I removed identifiers through the use of pseudonyms that participants choose for themselves. I utilized the find and

replace tool in my word processing program to change specific names of people and places. I knew my data sets contained references in how I described this unique parent group and what they were doing within a district and school and consulted with my chair in ways to protect participants' identities. I reduced the risk to the participants by gaining consent to shred data at the time of fieldwork through pro forma letters and agreement forms, where the raw data and other materials, once analyzed, was shredded.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter offers a synthesis of four Latina mothers' stories about their experiences in school with parental involvement. I wanted to situate my understanding of the events in their own upbringing and recollections of how their parents were involved in their own school journeys. Using a narrative inquiry methodology, I organized the study around these research questions:

1. What stories do Latina mothers tell about their experiences with parental involvement in school?
2. What do they identify as significant barriers and issues?
3. What do they identify as successful engagement with their child's school?
4. When engaging with school/school personnel, how do they feel?

I collected mothers' stories through semi-structured face-to-face interviews. This chapter, organized as individual narrative sections, describes the findings of the study. Within each narrative, I describe significant barriers and successes as informed by Clandinin and Connelly's (2011) three-dimensional space approach; temporality, sociality, and place. I applied this three-dimensional narrative inquiry space as a way to explore the events that occurred before, during, and after each experience (temporality). I also elicited details about the places in which these stories occurred, including homes and school in both Mexico and in the U.S. (place). Finally, I attended to the social interactions among Madres Unidas members and school officials that included teachers, principal, and other staff members (sociality). Thinking narratively within these three commonplaces of narrative inquiry highlighted transitions of the phenomenon of parental involvement. Writing the mothers' narratives through all three commonplaces was

key to my analysis and part of the distinguishing characteristics of this narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011).

By taking temporality into account, I selected stories that reached as far back as their childhood to start from the earliest narratives the mothers could recall about parental involvement. To understand parental involvement, I needed to understand the lives of these mothers, because as parents themselves, the mothers utilized the personal stories they had both as children as well as parents. What events did they draw on in order to conceptualize their own involvement in their child's school? What were the mothers' perceptions about parental involvement? What stories made them perceive parental involvement in particular ways? What were the narratives that constructed the mothers' perceptions about parental involvement? These questions meant that I needed to start from their schooling experiences in Mexico as children.

As events are dynamic and transitional in nature (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011), every experience that the mothers told with reference to their early experiences also had a temporal dimension: the meaning they made told me something about the mothers' current perspectives about themselves. As I attended to temporality, I considered individuals, opportunities, and parental involvement activities in relation to their past, present, and future.

Sociality revealed that the mothers' lives were part of a bigger landscape of experiences within the different contexts in which the mothers lived, socialized, and worked. It also demanded I attend to the ways their relationships with significant people affected the ways they perceived parental involvement. There are two dimensions of sociality; personal and social (Clandinin & Connelly, 2011). In my study, I referred to the mothers' personal conditions as their hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and morals based on their beliefs and values. Social

conditions referred to the surrounding environmental factors, people, and conditions in which a person's experiences and events untangle (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006).

Some of the social conditions deserving attention were relationships among family members, friends, teachers, Laura, Rick, and the principal. The broader levels of sociality conditions included things like the mothers' relationships and interactions with the school system, educational policy, communication system, and the legal system as they navigated the process of migrating to the U.S. and gaining citizenship.

Place, the third commonplace pointed me to the "specific concrete, physical and topological boundaries of place or sequences of place where the inquiry and events take place" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006, p. 480). All of the experiences occurred someplace, and I specified the places to contextualize the qualities of place and the ways it impacted their stories. The mothers' individual identities proved inseparable from their experiences in a particular place, and also from the narratives they told of those experiences, shaping the mothers' events (Clandinin & Connelly, 2006). In my study, places referred to most frequently were the homes where the mothers lived and schools where the mothers and their children attended.

In addition to the stories the mothers shared about their childhood experiences of schools in Mexico and unique migrations to the U.S., I chose stories that represented the impact of the mothers' cultural values on their engagement in school. For example, the mothers' migration stories all described a cultural value for education and the quest for a better life in the U.S. Hence, their migration descriptions elucidated their cultural beliefs based on values, hopes, and desires.

Who Am I in This Research?

As I began to write the mothers' narratives, I discovered that they told their stories in such a way as to presume upon the context and background that I, myself had as a character (the principal) in those stories. As I wrestled with the tension of re-telling their stories well, I found it necessary to include background knowledge that was not actually a part of the data set, in order to contextualize the narratives. When I could distinguish between background knowledge I had about a situation that did not directly come from the mothers, I denoted those places in the upcoming narratives with the use of italics. I did this to more transparently situate the event, place, or people in the larger scope of how I worked to not only involve, but to empower these mothers. I did this by purposefully using their cultural values and characteristics as assets. Throughout some of the stories, I offer background context of the stories through my voice as a principal and narrator to their story.

Individual Narratives

Each of the following themes describes various barriers, issues, and the mothers' feelings when engaged in their children's school. Some of the events connected back to a mother's historical background, a parental involvement occurrence that happened when they were children, themselves. As I wrote these narratives, I went back in time to the mother's childhood and offered contextual details that helped to create the temporal present story. This helped me elucidate the ways they experienced their own parents' involvement within the schooling system in Mexico. It also enabled an analysis of the relationship of a childhood event to the present experience. The stories are collected into themes related to school forms, volunteerism, food, events, and communication. Each theme encompasses relevant snippets of the mothers' stories woven to reveal the key things they shared about these aspects of parental involvement.

Forms

School forms were one of many communication tools widely used by school officials at the district, school, and classroom level and they made their way into mothers' stories with poignant frequency. Such forms required parents to read, comprehend, and provide additional information to various individuals in the schooling system. Standard district forms requested information such as immunization records, proof of residence, free or reduced lunch application, and permission to test for qualifications to specific district-wide programs such as talented and gifted. Forms from the school communicated information about school-wide programs, events, and systems, including teacher-created forms pertaining to each individual teacher. These forms might have requested parent permission for students to participate in a program and/or event, verification of homework, or solicitation of parents' resources such as money, time, or supplies for the classroom.

As the principal, I created, reviewed, and edited numerous forms at this school. My familiarity with the Spanish language provided cultural context to many discussions with the school's bi-cultural translator, Maria, regarding the effectiveness and accuracy of the forms. In addition to Maria's input, I frequently consulted with a bi-lingual, bi-cultural Latina woman who worked in a position of power in our school district. Her expertise in Spanish language, culture, and school systems was invaluable as we thought about what these forms represented and communicated to families.

While most of the forms were translated into Spanish, the often-utilized literal translation created numerous barriers for several reasons. First, there was difficulty in translating some concepts, phrases, or words because there were English words that did not exist in the Spanish language and vice-versa. For example, on school-wide discipline referral forms, the words,

referral, climate/culture, bullying, and Tiger trackers were non-existent in the Spanish language. Engage was another word commonly used to describe student behavior and parental involvement that had no adequate Spanish equivalent. There was no direct translation to Spanish for the word become; though it can be explained, it took many words to offer a similar meaning.

School-wide registration/enrollment forms that requested parents to provide proof of residency and identify their nationality had contextual meanings tied to immigration status (green card) in the Spanish language as opposed to how the English language uses these phrases to refer to where one lives or the country one comes from. Kindergarten round-up, staggered start, open house and curriculum night were other commonly-used words on back-to-school forms. Various Special Education forms that described services and assessment results were filled with words that had no direct translation to Spanish; motor skills, adaptive behaviors, cognitive demand, pull-out services, inclusion, and discrepancy model.

Valid identification. *During one Madres Unidas meeting, the mothers expressed a strong desire to help at the school. I sensed their feelings of hopelessness as they talked about being unable to help at the school because they lacked a driver's license or a social security number. Confused, I asked to see the volunteer form and noticed it did not actually request a driver's license number and social security number, only a valid photo identification. In this moment, I recognized it was a mistake for school personnel to ask for a driver's license and social security number. After the meeting, as I investigated school board policy and the company that conducted the parental background checks, I confirmed that any piece of identification with a photo and name was sufficient, whereas the mothers had been told they needed a driver's license and social security number. Under my direction, the school secretary*

attached a self-created "FYI" statement explaining what constituted as sufficient identification to the official company-created form. We attached this "FYI" statement to the form that went home to all parents because the company forbade any alterations/edits to their company-created form.

At the next Madres Unidas meeting, I clarified the false information as I gave the mothers the parent background check form with the newly school-created "FYI" statement. The mothers filled out the forms and turned them into me to pass along to the school's secretary.

Clarifying this form was an important step in expressing the school's genuine interest and desire for our Latina mothers to be involved. This form was the beginning of the parental involvement process for these mothers at the school. Once the school received clearance, the parent volunteer coordinator, Pamela, called each parent and inquired about the activities that interested them and informed them of upcoming opportunities. This form proved critical for determining membership into an exclusive parent group that represented successful parental involvement (as defined by the White teachers and White mothers of the existing parent group).

During our interview, Lupa described her perception of successful parental involvement.

Now we volunteer in the school, it's important. We are there so they (children & teachers) can see us in the school. I want to be there with my grandchildren. I feel more love for them because I'm connected to their education (Interview, February 7, 2017).

As she described her perception, it reminded me of a second critical moment with the Madres Unidas group when Lupa and the other Latina mothers identified additional barriers to getting involved, even after we sorted the issues with the form.

I am not needed. *A month later during a Madres Unidas meeting, one of the Latina mothers (who was not a participant in this study) described a short phone message she received*

from Pamela; she was not needed at the school because we had enough volunteers.

Disappointed and confused, the mother relayed this message to the translator who then discussed it with Rick and me. After a few long conversations with Pamela and a few other White moms, I could tell they felt unsure how to navigate the Latina mothers' language capabilities: "They don't speak English and we do not speak Spanish. How do we communicate with them?" I reassured them that our translator, Maria would assist with language translation.

After assessing what I felt was a belief gap based on stereotypes and biases, I made an executive decision to change the parent volunteer process. The secretary would communicate cleared background checks from Latina mothers to Rick, Laura, or me instead of to Pamela. Between the three of us, we would then connect with Pamela regarding involvement opportunities. Within a week after this change, I walked by Latina mothers speaking Spanish to one another in the school hallways as they stapled student work to walls, stuffed homework folders, and cut out various items in the parent volunteer area.

As Valeria recalled her first experience volunteering at her children's school, I sensed her feelings of inclusion.

Laura called me and said I can volunteer at the school now. Maria and Laura met me at the office. We walked to the area with tables, cutting machines, and lots of red folders. There were other White mothers there, they looked at me but didn't say anything. Then Sofia and Lupa came to help. We all said hi, hugged and kissed each other on the cheek. Pamela told Laura and Maria what she wanted us to do in English and then they told us in Spanish. I cut these papers into little squares for a teacher and then put papers in the red folders. I was glad that Sofia and Lupa were there because I felt more comfortable. I had

friends I talked to while we all helped. I felt important like the White moms (Interview, February 10, 2017).

It was this same inclusive feeling she expressed as she described her membership in a church community upon her arrival to the U.S. Having grown up in a small town of Mexico, upon completion of 6th grade, she migrated with her family to the U.S. and completed two years of school in Idaho. Due to illegal citizenship, her parents struggled to find stable work. Sometimes, there were periods of weeks in which her parents were gone working in the various potato crops throughout Idaho. She was the oldest of five children and unexpectedly became the primary caregiver for her younger siblings.

I learned Valeria's close support system extended beyond family as she described the church community's great impact on her and her family's temporal and spiritual well-being. On numerous occasions, school-aged children from this church community talked Valeria into returning to school for another two years of middle school when she was living in Idaho. Some of the children's parents took care of her siblings so Valeria could go to school. Without such help, she thought maybe their life would be different. Valeria expressed how membership in this community was one of inclusion and felt as if someone was genuinely interested in her.

When Valeria reached high school, her family moved to Oregon and the transition to high school in a new town was rough. She lacked the close support system she left behind in Idaho. While she did not return to school, she was thankful for the education she received as it increased her English skills and deepened her love for math and writing. She expressed regrets of not completing high school; it was this regret that ignited the desire to be involved with her children's school.

These stories illuminate how school forms, policies, and school personnel attitudes became gatekeepers of power and authority that excluded the mothers' abilities to be involved. The Latino cultural value for education, even the regret about its lack became the impetus for mothers to be involved in their children's education. The mothers in the Madres Unidas group were able to capitalize on their hopes to be involved by voicing their concerns. The barrier illustrated in Valeria's story was not as easy a solution as changing a form because it stemmed from a belief gap held by a White person in authority. Such power created an unequitable parent volunteer system controlled by White culture that did not recognize the mothers' assets.

The next story illustrates how another participant encountered a barrier with a different form. The minor difference of a couple of words' difference between two forms caused major confusion in who had the authority to take children from school early.

I filled out the wrong form. Sofia was born in Mexico and came to the United States when she was seven years old with her grandparents, parents, and two older siblings. In Mexico, her grandparents and parents owned a local restaurant that was Sofia's second home where she spent her days since she was old enough to attend school. She recalled her grandparents and parents often describing a new life in America. Her grandfather said, "Soon, we will have a better life where you can have your own room. Papa will play with you more." Sofia spoke very fondly of her relationship with her grandparents and the relationship her own children have their grandparents, representing a common value in Latino culture about the extended family's important role. She recalled an incident in which she felt the relationship between her children and their grandparents was disrespected when they were not acknowledged by school officials.

I got a phone call from the school when I was at work. My sick daughter wanted her *abuela*/grandmother to bring her home but the school said my mother wasn't on the right

form. I needed to get off work to come get her. I didn't know what to do because I couldn't leave work. Why couldn't she just go home with my mother who wasn't working and she was already there? I had to talk to you (the principal) and you let my mother take her home. The office sent home the right form so my mom could take her home in the future. I didn't understand because in our culture, my mother is a mother to my children. She is like me and my children respect their elders (Interview, February 8, 2017).

As Sofia told her story, I recalled my own experience of this incident; the confusion was in the difference between an emergency contact form and permission to take child form.

My presence was requested in the office to calm a parent down by explaining the school rule regarding who has permission to take a child home early from school. Upon arrival, I immediately recognized both the student and her grandparent. The school secretary explained the situation as the parent listed the student's grandma on the emergency contact form but not the permission to take student form. This was not the first time this misunderstanding had occurred; these two forms caused much confusion among families as many assumed if an individual was listed as emergency contact, they would have permission to take the student. I called Sofia and explained the difference in forms then asked for her verbal permission giving grandma authority to take the student home. This phone call resolved things swiftly and Sofia's daughter went home with her grandma.

Once Sofia knew which form to put her mother on, she gladly complied. My decision to let Sofia's grandmother take her without the correct form stemmed from my own cultural knowledge of the role extended family played in the Latino family unit. This cultural knowledge

also enabled me to understand the financial impact that missed work would have on Sofia's immediate and extended relatives living in Mexico, as family is everything

Volunteerism

Engagement, participation, involvement, and empowerment were among the various words this school referred to when speaking to the things parents could do to support their child's education. However, I chose to use the words "parental involvement" to describe the school's expectations because this school practiced a conventional, mainstream model of parental involvement that defined and measured the amount of participation a parent had in school-based activities. These things constituted attendance at various school and classroom meetings, and support of events that sustained the agenda and outcomes of the school. Latino families or parents of color did not define how parents were involved in the school; rather the power to define involvement was in the hands of a few White parents and White staff. The following stories illustrate the differences in these cultural understandings and indicate the need for marginalized parents to help create a culturally-responsive definition of parental involvement that empowers them and honors their culture and values.

What's a parent volunteer? As long as Lupa can remember, both her parents worked very long hours as farm workers in Mexico and expected all of their children to excel in school by being an excellent student. Her parents constantly counseled her to put forth her best effort so she could graduate and be a professional. In fact, she described her parents as people who valued education and fondly remembered them saying, "you must do better than us." Due to long working hours, Lupa's parents did not have time to help her with any school work or engage in conversations about school. They felt it was the school's job to ensure she was doing her best, getting good grades, and they gave the school permission to hit her if she was

performing any differently. Her father told her, "I only feed you and you go to school. If your teachers say you were bad, you deserve it."

As Lupa described her childhood schooling experience in Mexico, it became apparent that parental involvement in Mexico was very different than it is in the United States. Teacher roles and parent roles were at the crux of such differences. In Mexico, her parents trusted Lupa's teachers to teach her; they were the experts and that was their role as the educational authority. Her parents' role was tending to her emotional needs through encouragement, providing basic necessities, and teaching good manners and behavior.

Both Valeria and Lupa described a level of cultural shock when their children and grandchildren started attending school. As invitations to school events such as open house, curriculum night, math night, began coming home, these moms experienced a cultural transition from their conceptualization of parental involvement in Mexico schools to schools in the U.S. School events considered "traditional" for U.S. schools were not offered in Mexico schools. Lupa recalled questioning her grandchild about her own parental role in participating and the purpose of the events. She called the school and established a relationship with the translator who eventually became her school friend when she had questions.

I asked Maria lots of questions. My parents did not come to my school in Mexico. When my children went to school in America, I couldn't come to the school because I worked a lot. I'm an *abuela*/grandma now. Am I supposed to come to the school? Why do I need to come to the school? It's better that I know because I feel more connected to my child's education. It's different and I try to be at the school as much as I can with my children (Interview, February 8, 2017).

It was a parent-teacher conference invitation that Valeria gave a little more detail in how she was learning how to be involved in her son's American school.

In Mexico, my parents woke me up for school, made breakfast, and took me back and forth to school. My parents did not come to my school or talk to me about school. They gave me advice and always told me to do good in school. *Ganas* means to do your best effort, do all you can for your family and community. They asked me if I did my best. Was I kind and respectful to the teacher? Did I help my friends? When I went to school in Idaho, my parents still didn't come to the school because they worked a lot away from home. But they still always told me to do my best effort. When I came to my son's teacher-parent conference, the translator was there and told me what he was studying. I thought this was good. The teacher asked me what I thought about his learning and I didn't know because I'm not a teacher. When she asked me to ask her questions, I didn't know what to ask. I remembered what my parents asked me when I was a child and I asked the teacher the same questions. Was my son good? Did he respect her? Did he put forth his best effort (Interview, February 10, 2017)?

While Valeria enjoyed the opportunity the school provided for interaction with her son, she did not intuitively understand the school's expectations regarding her role and the teacher's role, as these practices were different from the norm in Mexico.

Even though Sofia started first grade in the U.S., similarly to Valeria's experience, she rarely saw her parents at the school.

My parents and grandparents did not like coming to the school because they didn't speak English. It was very uncomfortable for them, but they always made sure I had everything I needed like clothes, school supplies, and books. They did not attend anything at my

school and I understood why. I was in 6th grade and all the kids were putting their science fair project in the cafeteria and I knew my parents would not be there because everything was in English. I didn't want them to feel bad so I didn't invite them. But when I was in high school, I was in track and they were always at my competitions if they didn't have to work (Interview, February 8, 2017).

Unlike Lupa and Valeria's confusion about their role regarding school, Sofia's understanding of her parental role in her children's school was clearer to her, because she spent most of her education in American schools. She did not feel the same discomfort her parents did while attending school events; she was a fluent English speaker and felt very familiar with the American school system from her own schooling experiences.

I didn't really want to come to open house at the school because I had a lot of things to do at home. The first time I came to the school with my children, some of the teachers I had were still teachers at the school. They were surprised I had children now. Mr. Smith was my 6th grade teacher and he was happy to see me and said he wanted my son in his class. He asked me if I could help with the science fair when my son gets into 6th grade. That made me feel good because I remembered when I was in 6th grade and I now I want to help my son do his best with this project. I know what it is and I feel comfortable helping (Interview, February 8, 2017).

It seemed all three of these mothers created a definition and made meaning of what a parent volunteer does at their children's school. The mothers' parents fulfilled their own parental roles in alignment with Latino cultural values and the traditions of the schooling system in Mexico. Lupa and Valeria's stories described the unique realities of what it meant to be a Latina child in the education system in Mexico, and the ways they used their experiences to

shape their own parental roles in response to school in a different culture. They, along with Sofia, passed down the Latino cultural value of *ganas*; the desire to succeed in school and put forth one's best effort for the benefit of family and community. Yet all three mothers re-defined parent and teacher roles differently from their parents by choosing to come to school. They even made moves to purposefully incorporate cultural values into their volunteer experiences, as demonstrated in the next collection of stories.

Food. As participants described various volunteer experiences, I began to understand the significance and/or impact they felt in the power of overcoming self-identified barriers. Threads of empowerment wove throughout the stories. These moms were pioneers in unknown territories, re-defining motherhood in a maternal quest for their children to do better than they had done themselves.

Isabella grew up in a small, rural area in Guatemala with no formal educational experiences, and came to the United States with her family when she was twenty. Her father was a hard-working farmer who questioned the value of school for girls, since they were only going to get married, have children, and work in the farms. Isabella expressed feelings of shame in her lack of education when she described her ability to read Spanish as a 2 (on a scale of 1-10) and her ability to write at about a 1. She self-identified as a non-English speaker and as a beginner in her understanding of spoken English. I felt Isabella's lack of education was a motivator in her engagement with her children's education.

I wish I went to school because I don't know how to read or write in Spanish or my first language; Quiche. I can only teach my children how to talk in these languages and I wish I could teach them how to read and write because the school will not teach them my country's language. I can't teach my children English so they must learn at this school.

My son reads to me in English and I want to read to him in Spanish, or Quiche but I can't. I try to learn but it's very hard. I tell my children they must learn how to read and write in both Spanish and English. They will be smarter and get better jobs. I want to know how to help them so I come to the Madres Unidas meetings (Interview, February 9, 2017).

I believe one of Isabella's cultural assets is her persistent determination to help her children. I first noticed this asset during a Madres Unidas meeting as members discussed school concerns with Laura and me. In the midst of the discussion, Isabella surprised me by raising nutrition as a concern among the mothers. In my 15 years in education, parents had repeatedly expressed their frustration with the limited time students had for lunch, but never were they concerned about nutrition. Intrigued, I invited more dialogue with her. Within this discussion, Isabella explained how food is a significant value in Latino culture because it demonstrates respect to the body through nourishment, love to others through preparation and serving of the food, and a festive and traditional way of bringing family and loved ones together to socialize. I realized the necessity of integrating this cultural value into the school's food service system. This realization prompted me to invite them to a meeting with our cafeteria manager who could explain the food service system that offered breakfast and lunch daily.

Soon after the moms accepted this invitation, I arranged for a tour of the cafeteria. They met the cafeteria manager in which she explained the USDA federal nutrition guidelines and how they inform breakfast and lunch menus. In addition to the nutrition guidelines, safety in food preparation, preservation, serving, and disposal were also part of the tour. As I led this cafeteria tour, I had an idea of how to involve the mothers during breakfast and lunch. After the tour, I expressed a need to the mothers in assisting students with their food throughout the

various stations; salad & fruit, main entrée, condiments & silverware, and disposal, which included a full recycling food program. The mothers were interested and asked when they could start helping. With the assistance from the school secretary, the mothers created a rotating schedule that identified their availability.

Shortly afterwards, during a cafeteria planning meeting, Isabella raised her concern about her English capabilities as a possible issue that could interfere with her volunteerism. Both Laura and Rick reassured her that they would be there the entire time to translate. As I sought to create an empowerment model of parental involvement, I focused on true power-sharing by inviting Isabella to share her expertise in her Spanish skills by speaking in Spanish to the children and the staff while volunteering in the cafeteria. She seemed more comfortable as she responded, "I can learn better English also."

I remembered how excited Isabella and the other moms were when they came to volunteer in the cafeteria for the first time. I gave them and their little ones school t-shirts to wear while in the cafeteria as a visual for students to quickly locate help. For the first couple of visits, I stayed in the cafeteria and their smiles affirmed they were feeling empowered to get involved in a way that was culturally-meaningful.

Isabella described her first volunteer experience in the cafeteria this way:

I was so happy when you said I could come to the school and help the children with their lunches. Food is very important in our culture and I wanted to see what my children eat at school. I felt proud when you gave us our own school shirts to wear because it made me feel important. My children were so happy when they saw me helping other children. I was also nervous because I didn't know English very well but Rick, Laura, and the principal were there. Rick and Laura gave us directions in Spanish and stayed with us the

whole time. I didn't know a lot about school because I never went to school (Interview, February 9, 2017).

Isabella's story is important for several different reasons. The first is her enthusiasm to share her culture. This enthusiasm resulted in a tour of the cafeteria which led to a culturally-responsive parental involvement opportunity. Secondly, she was the only mother out of the four participants in this study who never experienced formal schooling. This was a critical detail that set her voice apart from the others; it was a powerful asset only to Isabella. Her unique schooling experience seemed to spark a curiosity in school nutrition because she did not have first-hand experience of eating at a school. Her expressed concern regarding school nutrition inspired the other mothers in this parent group because it identified with a shared Latino cultural value for the goodness of quality food and community.

El día los niños/The day of the children. As the mothers shared various parental involvement stories, El día los niños was the most commonly-told occurrence across all four mothers' interviews. As I listened to them recount these stories, I reflected on my own knowledge of how significant this event was, based on my involvement as principal. This event became the first school event in which the linguistic and cultural diversity of the volunteer group who put it on actually reflected the majority of the students and families at the school. This is because the Latina mothers designed this culturally-relevant parent-teacher family affair at the school, generating the idea and assisting the teachers in putting it on.

Throughout this story, I offer extensive contextual details to accompany the mothers' accounts. These critical details chronicle interrelated discussions and occurrences between myself, Rick, Laura, and the teachers that were actually unknown to the Madres Unidas parent group, but prove important for understanding the significance of this event.

It was during a Madres Unidas meeting right after the winter break that the mothers discussed their initial ideas about holding an event around El día los niños. In conjunction with the teachers, they wanted to do something special for their children at the school and thought of the Mexican observance that honored and appreciated children annually on April 30th would be a good opportunity. I recognized the potential opportunity to empower these mothers in affirming and valuing cultural and familial knowledge and experiences with this event. The traditional date of this event coincided with the school's annual literacy night with a Dr. Seuss theme.

As the mothers brainstormed ideas, apprehension about communicating these ideas to the teachers began to weigh heavily on them. Such apprehension was due to their insecurities with the English language and their cultural respect for the power and expertise of the teacher. Laura talked them through these insecurities by asking them to tell her exactly what they wanted to say to the teachers. She recorded the ideas in a notebook and then repeated them back to the mothers. Her reassurance of her role in the upcoming teacher meeting, to translate the mothers' ideas to the teachers seemed to ease their apprehension. My commitment to supporting their idea also helped boost the mothers' confidence in moving forward with sharing their ideas with the teachers. Their apprehension was only the first of many barriers that we worked through.

Shortly thereafter, Rick, Laura, and I met with one of the Title 1 teachers, Susie, to propose the mothers' idea. We knew that Susie's support would be important; as a respected lead teacher, she was the organizer of this traditional literacy night. Susie was quite supportive and helped us discuss potential issues and barriers, in order to plan our next meeting where Lupa and Sofia posed the idea to the family and community involvement (FCI) committee. This FCI committee was comprised of teachers, while Laura, Rick, and I led the parent and

community involvement efforts. Periodically, Madres Unidas mothers and various community members would attend our meetings depending on the topic.

Lupa described her anxiety about this initial meeting to present the idea:

I remember when I had to talk to the teachers about our idea. I was very nervous because I don't speak English very good but Laura and Rick was there. The teachers asked me what kind of activities do we want and I was so happy they were asking me. I talked about my culture and how we do it in Mexico. Sofia and I sat beside each other and she talked more because her English is better than mine. Sometimes she talked to me in Spanish too. The teachers were writing our words down (Interview, February 9, 2017).

Although the teachers were polite to the mothers in this first meeting, they expressed their opposition to the idea more freely in the next two FCI committee meetings. The Latina mothers were not in attendance to hear these conversations, where at one point, someone even recommended a segregated event where the teachers would conduct their traditional Dr. Seuss event in their respective classrooms while El día los niños took place in the cafeteria for the Madres Unidas families. While I encouraged dialogue about these issues, I also reminded the team of our vision and mission and how this event directly met one of our goals to empower Latino parents. Due to time constraints, minimal staff support, and most importantly to promote the Latina mothers' voice and efforts, Susie and I made the decision to replace Dr. Seuss with the Madres Unidas idea. Together, we communicated to the teachers that we would hold one event where teachers and mothers would partner together to design, plan, and implement the evening. We also requested that teachers honor cultural components of El día los niños in the structure of any literacy activities put on that evening.

Laura, Rick, Susie, and I shared these decisions with the mothers at the next Madres Unidas meeting.

Sofia described her feelings of excitement during this meeting.

I remember when the principal told us we could go ahead with El día los niños. I was excited because we wanted to do this for our children and the teachers said yes. We asked what we need to do next and started to talk about ideas for the activities.

Securing common planning meeting times for the event between teachers and mothers became another barrier to overcome. Oftentimes, teachers' contract hours conflicted with the mothers' availability.

Isabella recounted,

We have to find ways to communicate, to be involved because we don't know English and we work when the teachers are at school. We asked if we could do something for our children with the teachers and we couldn't talk to the teachers. So, we had to send Laura and Rick. They speak for us. Whenever I had a question, I would always tell Laura to ask the teacher. I couldn't come to all the teacher meetings because I was at work. I asked Laura to tell me what I missed (Interview, February 9, 2017).

Ultimately, the planning for this event took place throughout numerous Madres Unidas meetings, FCI meetings, and all-staff meetings. Laura, Rick, Susie, and I were integral in communicating planning decisions amongst the stakeholders as we participated in all of these meetings. Laura became the messenger between the teachers and the mothers who missed the meetings. She personally called these mothers, conveyed information, and asked for their input. It took three months to plan the event. While most staff was still not supportive, they did comply and Laura,

Rick, and I continued to express support and empowerment narratives on behalf of our Latina mothers.

During the event, the FCI committee implemented an anonymous survey through exit tickets at the end of each classroom-based activity session. The data indicated that families strongly supported the event as indicated by attendance rates, positive comments, and overwhelming agreement that we should do the event again next year.

Lupa expressed happiness for the opportunity to plan a family event centered on Latino culture, saying:

We celebrated children back in my country and for the first time, we did it at the school.

We focused on love for our children through our culture and food. We had lots of fun activities like face painting, braiding hair, telling stories in Spanish, and making piñatas.

We gave the children candies, books, and made over 500 tamales. We shared our culture.

That's what we do as mothers for our children because we love and honor them

(Interview, February 7, 2017).

Sofia described similar sentiments:

My children and I really liked the El día los niños because it was about our culture and other cultures. I know people enjoyed all the tamales because there was hardly any left

over. I felt more involved when I came to the meetings. I couldn't come to all of them but tried. I liked planning and then getting the other moms to help (Interview, February

8, 2017).

Isabella recounted the following:

I did not go to school in Mexico or in America and didn't know what kids do there. I am thankful for the good things we did at El día los niños. I helped the kids and their families make piñatas. My children and I liked putting the Mexican candy in them.

Valeria told the following short story about the family event:

I helped the other Latina mothers make the tamales for El día los niños. We worked very hard to make sure there was enough. I'm happy we did because a lot of people came and ate them. My favorite part was the hair braiding because my children wanted their hair braided.

The focus of this culturally-relevant family event was on empowering the Latino parents to contribute in ways that honored their culture and moved them from the margins. It highlighted true power-sharing (Delgado Bernal, 1999), where, with the help of leaders, the power was occupied by the Latina moms themselves. Communication was another area where the mothers identified issues of power-sharing between school officials and the mothers.

Communication

The mothers raised concerns relevant to communication throughout the interviews. Their stories revealed how central communication is in Latino family dynamics. In their culture, both verbal and non-verbal communication demonstrates respect to elders, authority, strangers, or family members. For example, Latino people may seem to agree with you, when they really do not (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Nodding may mean nothing more than a non-verbal demonstration of respect to that person.

I speak Spanish. Respect was a common value in the Latino culture that was woven throughout issues related to verbal and non-verbal communication. Valeria stated, "When we see each other (close friends or family), we hug and give *besitos*/little kisses on the cheek."

Given the mothers' small but significant ways of communicating respect through affection to others in their lives, it was easy for them to misconstrue teachers' interactions with them as cold or uncaring. Teachers' verbal and non-verbal communication sometimes verged on rude, as in the time a busy teacher shook her head in response to Lupa speaking Spanish to her. Lupa explained to me how she felt inadequate and intimidated several times by her grandson's teacher after she told Lupa, "you need to learn English if you want to talk to me. I need to get the translator." Lupa continued, "I avoided this teacher when I dropped him off in his classroom." Lupa also described how she felt disrespected as a grandmother:

In my culture, we teach our children to respect their elders like the parents and grandparents. Family is very important to us and I teach my grandchildren to talk kindly to me and obey my rules.

I knew the Spanish language utilizes structural forms of formal and informal address in the context of the relationship between the speakers involved in the conversation. As a grandmother, Lupa would have experienced the norms of respect typically directed toward elders to increase *ganas*. Latina mothers and grandmothers are commonly known as key role models who pass down this social norm of respect to their children and grandchildren through verbal words, non-verbal actions, and even meaningful periods of silence. Through all of these means, these women instill respect to build trust and security. These two concepts, respect and community, are foundational in the Spanish language and are at the core of relationships in Latino culture. This background helps explain that when the teacher told Lupa to learn English, she effectively dismissed Lupa's native language, disregarded her linguistic identity, and left unacknowledged Lupa's important role as extended family.

Discipline. The mothers reported school-based disciplinary practices confusing in terms of identifying who was responsible for students' behavior at school. Physical means of discipline was a major feature of traditional disciplinary practices in the schooling system in Mexico. If the child did not put forth a good effort, they did not learn, therefore the teacher had the right to hit them. All participants (except for Isabella, who did not attend school) consistently indicated that physical discipline as punishment had been a commonly-used practice utilized by their own teachers. However, these moms were also aware that physical discipline is considered a form of child abuse in the United States, and is illegal to implement in schools. They learned this information from friends and other family members. Valeria stated:

The difference from teachers in America is that Mexican teachers are stricter and have more authority. They can do whatever they want and American teachers do not. They want the parents to come to the school and talk to them and the principal, but in English. One time, I had to come to the school because my son was not paying attention in class. The discussion became uncomfortable as my son had to translate because the translator was busy. This is when I learned his teacher wasn't allowed to hit him. He refused to tell her that she had my permission to hit him. In our culture, we teach our children to respect teachers and parents. He didn't want to disrespect his teacher by telling her she could and he didn't want to disrespect me by not doing what I asked him. I told him it was ok. I felt like the teacher was looking at me and my son which made me feel bad for both of us (Interview, February 10, 2017).

As a mother, Valeria felt compassion for her son as he was caught between two conflicting cultural views on discipline, while being burdened with translation duties between his mother and his teacher. Latina mothers feel they have succeeded in their maternal roles when the child

learns to be respectful, to be obedient to authority figures. Based on Latino culture, Valeria did not feel she was a good parent because her son was not showing respect to her when he would not obey her and communicate his mother's views to his teacher, whom he knew believed differently. In this instance, even though he disrespected his mother, Valeria understood why.

It became apparent that participants also learned that Latino parents in Mexico have much more freedom in disciplining their children at home than mothers do in the United States. Lupa described:

If I lived in Mexico, I could hit my child for not paying attention in school and no one says anything. But in America, if the teacher hears you hit your child, the counselor calls you for a meeting. I was mad and confused because I'm the mother and it's my job to teach my child to pay attention at school. I can discipline him at home because he's my son (Interview, February 7, 2017).

Feelings of confusion and anger resulted from various cultural perspectives on respect. Lupa taught her grandchild to respect authority figures and felt it was her parental role to discipline when he was not respectful. Lupa felt confused when the counselor called to speak with her about her discipline methods, but feelings of confusion turned to anger as Lupa's parental role was questioned. Similarly to Valeria, Lupa was disciplining out of her own perception that she was shirking her duties as a grandmother if she did not correct her grandson; the way a child behavior reflects their parenting skills. Latino parents feel they have succeeded as parents when their child behaves at school. These cultural perceptions offered many opportunities for the mothers to experience confusion and tension about who was actually responsible for their child's behavior at school.

Reciprocal respect. Sofia recounted a story in which she expressed frustration in how she felt some teachers lacked the same level of respect towards Latina mothers compared to the respect that the mothers showed teachers. During her interview, she described differences in the teachers' communication between school and home. When it came to school-based and/or teacher-supported events, there was more communication going home than there was about parent-driven activities, such as El día los niños. Teachers put forth more effort to invite parents to their events and less when the mothers wanted to do functions at the school. Sofia noticed this and did not feel supported by the teachers or by the school when the Madres Unidas group asked to host learning experiences for their children. As I pushed for further explanation about this during our interview, she replied,

If the activity is what the teachers want to do, then we get lots of papers in the red homework folders telling us to come, teachers pass them out after school in the halls, and in our cars when we pick up our children. They announce it on the speakers in the mornings and put them on the walls. Like math night, parent-teacher conferences, back to school, science night. But when we want to have an activity, there is no communication. The Madres Unidas wanted to have an OMSI night. We told the teachers and they weren't as excited for us. They did not communicate in the red homework folders and they did not come to the OMSI night. They did not support us, but we supported them by going to math night and all their activities. We helped because we want to do this for our children's school but the teachers did not do it back to us.

They did not respect us like we respected them (Interview, February 8, 2017).

It seemed Sofia sought reciprocal respect in the communication system between home and school for the school-based events the Latina mothers wanted to do. She not only desired respect

for their hopes and interests, she felt she earned it by giving respect to those who defined it, the same ones who held power and authority. Disappointed and hurt feelings resulted from this unequal respect in communication for Sofia.

Summary of the Findings

In this chapter, themes related to forms, volunteerism, food, events, and communication all combined to convey the barriers and successes Latina mothers shared regarding their experiences with parental involvement in school. Through a comprehensive data analysis of personal interviews, I chose to weave these experiences with explanations of Latino cultural values that could highlight and enhance these stories. In some cases, the Latina mothers re-defined their parental roles through an empowerment model of parental involvement. As these women acknowledged inequitable social structures, they began to shift the balance of power in their relationships with the Madres Unidas mothers and the White mothers. Parent-teacher partnerships started to balance when the Latina mothers were given decision-making power to be true partners. Culturally-relevant family-school experiences provided an opportunity for the Latino culture to be the center of El día los niños family event and as cafeteria volunteers. The Latina mothers finally had an opportunity to be recognized and share their cultural values.

As bi-cultural, Spanish-speakers, Laura and Rick treated cultural differences as assets, Latina mothers were empowered to become engaged. These cultural brokers were vital in the assistance of balancing social structures where these marginalized mothers were given an opportunity and space that re-shaped the sociality of the school culture. The stories described how cultural values and past events in their individual narratives helped shape the mothers' perception of parental involvement in their children's school. While these past events created new events both in the present and in the future that continually defined the mothers' perception

of parental involvement, there were present events that re-defined their parental roles in how they engaged with their children's school. Based on these findings, the significance of this research and directions for further study will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Conclusions

In this final chapter, I review the answers to my research questions by discussing the implications of Latina mothers' stories about their experiences with parental involvement in school. This dissertation offers potential counter-stories that differ from the prevailing discrepancy perspective that has become a common narrative within White-dominant educational culture. Thus, this narrative inquiry study sought to use words from Latina mothers who were members of a culturally-specific parent group to elucidate their barriers and successes to being involved in their child's school. I conducted semi-structured personal interviews with four Latina mothers whose children attended the same school. An in-depth analysis of the data supports discussion in answer to the following questions:

1. What do these mothers identify as significant barriers and issues?
2. What do they identify as successful engagement with their child's school?
3. When engaging with school/school personnel, how do they feel?

These stories effectively enrich the discourse on parental involvement for Latina immigrant mothers. Through a critical analysis of the participants' stories, a colorful landscape emerged of the ways they supported their children's education and worked through cultural and linguistic differences to do so.

Barriers

The data revealed both institutional and systemic barriers created by policies from a White dominant culture. The mothers encountered these conceptions of parental involvement particularly in the strong roles and voices of teachers and other volunteer mothers who were not

invitational. These mothers courageously enacted culturally-responsive solutions while navigating these barriers.

Re-defining parental involvement to include teacher and parental roles helped mitigate some cultural misalignment. These findings not only correlated with Olivos's (2009) findings identifying how Latino parents view their role as parents very differently than most White educators view their parental roles, but also revealed that when cultural and linguistic differences are treated as strengths, a transformation of traditionally defined roles can take place. This study uncovered ways these bicultural moms transformed their non-existent, passive role in this school to active, contributing members. The participants spoke of accessing cultural knowledge and social coinage in the inequitable institution of the school to assume key roles as facilitators and change agents.

The findings of this study also indicated language differences as a barrier to parental involvement for these moms. Lupa's experience in the story, "I speak Spanish" demonstrates the truths of critical Whiteness studies such as Okun's (2010) work, and its assertion that colorblindness thrives when White urban teachers project discomfort in engaging with the dynamics of race. Certain characteristics of the school and beliefs of school personnel became barriers as the mothers navigated these language differences in the context of Madres Unidas meetings. While the mothers did not always perceive the ways that cultural brokers subsequently analyzed, challenged, and changed the policies that constituted barriers, the mothers expressed appreciation for the ways they were able to be involved once those barriers were addressed.

Successful Engagement

The mothers' success stories in getting involved were particularly evident in the "El día los niños" family event. As the mothers sensed the shift of power from White teachers' ideas and notions of literacy to one that valued their own, they proposed and enacted a literacy event in keeping with empowerment parental involvement models (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) utilized in school reform. As the mothers expressed an interest in engaging with the school through their culture, existing power differences between parent and teachers were reconstructed. Successful experiences resulted as the Latina mothers interacted in parent-teacher opportunities as active decision-makers rather than passive participants.

The data indicated the high value of cultural brokers like Rick and Laura who were part of enacting successful engagement. These cultural brokers offered necessary supports to empower the transformation of the Latino families and other bicultural communities who historically did not have power. Using their knowledge and understanding of the Latina mothers and the school culture, the cultural brokers helped challenge the basic inequalities within the school structures.

Mothers' Feelings

Throughout the stories, the centrality of respect emerged as a recurring theme, aligning with other research that indicated respect as a strong belief in Latino culture (De Gaetano, 2007; Fernandez, 2002; Freire, 1978). Not surprisingly, the mothers expressed feelings of appreciation, value, and inclusion when school officials sought to understand, communicate, and respectfully respond to the cultural differences of students and families.

The feelings the mothers expressed in this study coincide with those by other authors (Bernhard, 2010; Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011, DeGaetano, 2007). These studies indicate that

common experiences of isolation and separation can be inverted for many Latino families when they are called to be partners alongside officials in creating systems that promote culturally responsive parent involvement models.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The findings of this study regarding parental involvement are limited to the experiences of four Latina mothers and are not subsequently generalizable to a larger population. Despite this, these stories may lead to new understandings about the realities that marginalized, bi-cultural, bi-lingual mothers experience in White dominant school cultures. The following recommendations offer suggestions for how educational leaders can make pathways for traditionally marginalized families.

Incorporate Cultural Brokers into School Communities

As demonstrated by this research, cultural brokers can be key in helping school communities move from conventional models of parental involvement notions that disregard Latino knowledge and cultural values to empowerment parental involvement models where the focus is on true power-sharing. Research points to the importance of communities of color and bicultural families also occupying the power instead of White school officials and parents (Valdes, 1999).

While there are different definitions of the word “empowerment,” this study has potential to provide information on an empowerment parental involvement model where collaboration with mediators or organizers like Rick, Laura, and myself helped teach mothers to become believers and activists for restructuring school systems that perpetuate the invisibility of underrepresented parents.

For participants in this study, having a translator and a cultural broker at their children's school was critical because they helped them translate and navigate school systems. The ways the mothers spoke about the cultural brokers indicated they are a worthwhile consideration for school communities informed by critical race theory who are committed to engaging marginalized populations (Beckett, Glass, & Moreno (2013).

Promote Sociality Among Marginalized Groups

The mothers' experiences with parental involvement align with the dominant issues LatCrit theorists point out in U.S. education systems: there are oft-unacknowledged but nevertheless powerful social and cultural assumptions regarding culture, language, and capability (Manglitz, 2003). Both LatCrit and Critical Race Theory demonstrate how critical race-gendered epistemologies recognize parents of color as holders of knowledge. This knowledge must be actively promoted within White dominant culture to counteract the dominant views of what counts as knowledge, specifically regarding language and culture (Goldberg, 2014).

As indicated across the narratives, the Madres Unidas group offered a safe space for the mothers to construct and deconstruct their views of cultural and linguistic knowledge. This culturally specific community promoted dialogues where their efforts to be involved could be verbalized and analyzed. It allowed for power-sharing to occur, as the mothers were consistently invited to make their opinions known. As schools seek to engage marginalized parents in a culturally-responsive way, social networks might be another area worth exploring as a place in which traditionally marginalized families connect around common values and make those values known.

Contributions to the Research & Directions for Further Study

I believe this study contributes to the limited research of the experiential systems that are deeply rooted in a belief gap influenced by the dominant White culture (Cutler, 2000; Oakes & Rogers, 2006). These belief gaps can be explained as the difference between what students (and in this study, mothers) can achieve and what others believe they can achieve. There is minimal research that uses an asset lens to study parental involvement of Latina mothers with dominant Spanish language proficiency (Olivos, Ochoa, & Jimenez-Castellanos, 2011). The narratives revealed the types of discourse that Latina mothers do have about parental involvement and their children's education. They also provide insights as to how critical-raced epistemologies can inform educational researchers who are committed to "imagine how race, ethnicity, and class are braided with cultural knowledge, practices, formal education, and the law" (González, 2001, p. 643).

Education plays an important role in the economics of social mobility and diminished economic marginalization (Ledesma & Calderon, 2015). The continuation or increase in funding for effective programs is always defined by policies. These findings identify and question the common beliefs and attitudes that shape school policies around volunteerism. It is one thing to say schools should involve diverse parents; it is a completely different thing to do it. These are crucial considerations for educational leaders who want to design inclusive systems based on equitable policies for culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse families.

I aligned my research with a critical race epistemology, grounded in CRT and LatCrit, because it offers insight into methodological and pedagogical approaches that affirm experiences and responses to different forms of beliefs, cultures, and language. It gives credence to culturally and linguistically relevant ways of knowing and reinforces educators' commitment to rethink

traditional notions of what counts as knowledge. Rather than focusing on what parents of color lack, my study focused on the cultural knowledge they brought, and the ways these mothers enacted that knowledge when given the opportunity (Baron, 2005; Giroux, 2010).

By incorporating a counter-storytelling method based on the narratives of culturally, linguistically, and racially diverse mothers, I was able to offer a non-majoritarian perspective, a story that White educators usually have not heard or told (Delgado Bernal, 2000). At the same time, counter-storytelling served as a pedagogical tool that gave space to better comprehend and appreciate the unique experiences of diverse families through deliberate, mindful efforts in active listening. An important component of using counter-stories included learning how to listen and hear the messages of the counter-stories while simultaneously telling non-dominant stories. Legal scholar Williams (1997) believed that counter-storytelling and critical race practice are “mostly about learning to listen to other people’s stories and then finding ways to make those stories matter in the legal system” (p. 765). Likewise, this study indicates how the educational world must learn to listen to counter-stories, both as a methodological practice for educational researchers and as a critical pedagogical practice for all educational stakeholders.

The Researcher in the Research

At the urging of my chair, I am compelled to offer personal reflections on the most salient aspects of this research from my own personal perspective. My choice to select mothers from a school where I was a formal principal was both beneficial and challenging. My existing relationships with these women enabled the mothers to be honest and truthful in their responses; they folded me into their narratives as “one who knew” exactly what they were speaking about, because I had participated in numerous conversations with them over different experiences prior to this study. However, such familiarity meant the mothers often presumed I already knew the

details since I was the principal. As I wrote Chapter 4, I wrestled with the ways I became an unforeseen character in their stories in order to offer important contextual knowledge. In hindsight, had I been working with mothers who did not know me, I may have exchanged familiarity and trust for additional details. Whether this trade-off would have made for richer research, I cannot say.

Often, it became difficult to tell the “truth” when contextualizing the narratives because there were numerous background details that contributed to what I perceived to be a belief gap held by the White staff and White parents. Their uninformed and often unconscious beliefs became the root cause to systemic racism identified by the Latina mothers as challenges, barriers, and issues. I could see this because as a person of color, I constantly code my thinking, communication, and actions so as to engage or disengage a current reality of structural racism. How do I tell the truth when it pinpoints blatant racial injustice? How do I tell the truth in such a way as to not portray myself as a “hero” due to the power I held as a principal or as an equity-oriented change agent?

According to one of Singleton’s (2005) agreements to promote courageous conversations (speak your truth), one should be open about one’s thoughts and not just say what one thinks others want to hear, otherwise known as code-switching. During my years as the principal or even as the researcher in this study, I would not consider myself as a “hero” as defined by someone who is identified for doing something brave or courageous. From my perspective as a culturally diverse female educator and administrator, my interactions as a principal with staff, community, students, and these Latina mothers were my attempts to disrupt the inequities that may have contributed to accessing an education which is a basic civil right for members of this school community. To those who have privilege of choosing whether or not to engage in such

social justice efforts, I can see how my interactions may be considered heroic. But for those who do not have such privilege, this is only our daily effort to navigate culturally and linguistically unconscious environments. This is our reality.

Looking Forward

A further study including more Latina mothers in the school and/or within the school district may be able to more conclusively answer the research questions this study explored. It is my sincerest hope that all readers will learn and grow from the narratives of these powerful Latina mothers. The truth, slanted as it may be (Dickenson, 1998) is not always easy to hear, but without it, how do we hear a counter-story to the dominant White narrative? Should not all voices and perspectives inform and be reflected in all that we do? While we have come a long way in our public schooling system, we can certainly do more if we are truly committed to each and every child's bright future.

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Appendix A

Letter of Consent for Participating Mothers

Examination of Latina Mothers' Experience with Parental Involvement

Dear Parent,

My name is Christie Dudley and I am a student in the Doctor of Education program at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. I am also a director who works at the Oregon State Department of Education. As a requirement of my program, I will be conducting research and have chosen to examine Latina mothers' experience with parental involvement. You are invited to share your story with me in an interview, telling your experiences as a parent with parental involvement.

Details of the Study

This study consists of a two-interview process. This means that, should you choose to participate, you would meet with me two times for interviews lasting approximately 60-90 minutes each.

The first interview will consist of open-ended questions in which there is no right or wrong answer. They are related to you as a parent and your involvement with your child's school, teachers, and classrooms. The interview questions will include topics such as: (a) your experiences with school in general; (b) your experiences with your child's school in general; (c) your experiences with your child's teacher and/or any other school personnel.

The second interview will consist of a process called member checking. You will be asked to review and give feedback on the story I wrote about your experiences with parental involvement. This process is to help ensure I accurately portray what you told me in the first interview.

Benefits

I hope the findings of my interviews will uncover culturally-specific assets that Latina mothers possess as thought partners who have knowledge to transform schools into places where the experiences of all parents are recognized, validated, and appreciated. Participants should know that, while their identities will remain anonymous, their personal stories will be told with honesty. This will be a chance for the education world and others to hear your story and learn from your life experiences.

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. I will also offer participants a beverage and/or a snack of their choice to enjoy during the interview. At the end of the study, I would also like to present you with a small token of appreciation for your participation in my study.

Confidentiality

You identity will be protected in several ways. First, pseudonyms (fake names) will be used to maintain confidentiality when we are conducting the interviews and in the writing of any results of this study. You will be given the opportunity to choose your own pseudonym. I will use it in your interview and when I refer to you in the study. I will make digital recordings of the interviews, which I will later transcribe (type up). That information will be analyzed and anonymously presented. Second, I will be the only one who knows your identity, which will be stored in a secure location that I only have access to. This information, as well as all recordings, will be destroyed within two years of the end of the study. The specific location of the school and city will not be disclosed in the study.

Risks

The risks associated with this research are minimal as the interview questions are not person, rather broad and general in nature. Therefore the interviews should not create any discomfort. Nonetheless, please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any question or discontinue at any time without any penalty.

Arranging Interviews/Location

I will need to communicate with you in order to arrange the interviews. I would like to use whatever form of communication is easiest for you, which might include phone, email, social media messaging, or text messaging. I will arrange this with you prior to our first interview. The location of the interviews will be a safe, public place that is convenient and comfortable for you. This could include, but not limited to a public park, library, or a local restaurant or coffee shop.

Use of Study

The results of this study will be used for dissertation and research purposes. If you are interested in seeing the final results, I would be happy to provide you an electronic copy of the study upon completion.

Other Information

The matters relating to this study can be directed to Christie Dudley at christiedudley4@gmail.com or the faculty advisor, Susanna Steeg at ssteeg@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: _____

Appendix B

Prospective Interview Questions

The following primary questions are listed with possible additional and/or probing questions outlined below each primary question in case a participant needs more prompting.

Interview Part 1: Life History

Cultural, racial, ethnic identity

Tell me about yourself...

- 1) What is your culture, race, or ethnicity?
- 2) What other places have you lived?

Language identity

- 1) What languages do you speak?
- 2) What is your preferred, first language?

School experiences when you were a child

- 1) Tell me what it was like for you in elementary school.
 - i) Where did you go to school?
 - ii) Describe your teachers, classroom, principal, leaders, and students.
 - iii) Describe your studies.
 - iv) Describe the relationships between teachers and parents, teachers and students, principal and parents, principal and students.
 - v) Describe your parents or caretakers in relationship of your school. What was their role? What did they do at the school? What did they do at home to help you in school?

School experiences as a parent

Roles

- 1) Tell me what it is like for you as a parent of a child in an elementary school.
 - i) What is your role as a parent?
 - ii) What is the teacher's role?
 - iii) What is the principal's role?
 - iv) What is your definition/perception of parental involvement?

Successes & Barriers

- 1) What do you identify as significant barriers & issues for parental involvement? What are possible solutions?
- 2) What do you identify as successful parental involvement? What contributed to the success?
- 3) When you engage with school/school personnel, how do you feel?

Interview Part 2: Member Checking

Provide a written and verbal summarization and/or paraphrase my interpretation of their story.

- 1) Is this accurate? Do I need to change anything? Do I need to add/delete anything?
- 2) How well do you feel this story represents you?