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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

MEANINGFUL PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT  
IN THE MIGRANT EDUCATION PROGRAM:  
A VIEW THROUGH THE LENS OF  
SIX MIGRANT PARENTS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
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May, 2010

## ABSTRACT

Good, Mary Ellen. *Meaningful Parental Involvement in the Migrant Education Program: A View through the Lens of Six Migrant Parents*. Published Doctor of Education dissertation, University of Northern Colorado, 2010.

Meaningful parental involvement is an important component of the academic success of all children; however, little is known about how this construct plays out in the lives of migrant farm worker families. To gain a deeper understanding of the research problem, a qualitative case study was conducted to address the primary research question: How do migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement? Grounded in an epistemological foundation built on constructionism, this inquiry was guided by a critical theory framework and was informed by case study and portraiture methodologies.

Participants were 6 migrant parents purposefully selected to include mothers and fathers of elementary, middle, and high school students enrolled in a Migrant Education Program in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States. Data were collected over 6 months from 2 focus group interviews, 17 individual interviews, over 50 hours of direct observations in natural settings, documents, and audiovisual materials. Viewed as equally knowing subjects, participants helped co-construct the findings presented as four interconnected themes: Migrant Parents as Mexican Immigrants, Academic Ethos, Critical Relationships, and Empowerment.

Recommendations are made to provide meaningful learning opportunities for migrant parents to strengthen communication with school staff and other parents, and to promote equitable access for migrant students to preschool, post secondary education, and health services. Further research is needed to expand the ways educators think about the relationships between migrant families and the U.S. public education system. Findings from this inquiry justify parental involvement as a focus for current educational research.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to migrant parents and their children. May their hopes and dreams for a better life be fully realized!

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I give thanks to the migrant parents who participated in this research study: Airolg and Kike, Chayo and José, Lucy and Lupe, ¡Mil gracias! Thank you for opening the door and letting me in. You entrusted me with your hopes, fears, joys, pains, and dreams, and welcomed me into your lives. This dissertation is your story and I am humbled to serve as your messenger.

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Finally, I thank you, the reader, because this dissertation has no meaning until it is read. Hopefully your interests and curiosities in this study will be satisfied.



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## CHAPTER 1

### FRAMING THE INQUIRY

Great debates surround almost every issue in public education, yet few would argue meaningful parental involvement is an essential component of students' academic success. Numerous studies show when parents are involved in the education of children, students do better in school and schools improve (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein, 1986, 1995; Epstein et al., 2009; Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Doan Holbein, 2005; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; United States Department of Education [U.S. Department of Education], 2007). The positive impact of parental involvement on the academic success of children was documented in a comprehensive research synthesis (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) which summarized 51 studies, 31 of which looked at the relationships between student achievement and parent-community involvement. Findings from Henderson & Mapp's research indicated:

Students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to earn higher grades and test scores and enroll in higher-level programs; be promoted, pass their classes, and earn credits; attend school regularly, have better social skills, show improved behavior, and adapt well to school; and graduate and go on to post-secondary education. (p. 7)

While many studies have documented the overall importance of parental involvement, there is a dearth of research specifically addressing parental involvement from the frame

of reference of parents marginalized by the United States (U.S.) educational system (López, 2001; Olivos, 2006; Perea, 2004). The majority of past studies focused on traditional forms of parental involvement, forms which are primarily school-centered and highly valued in public schools (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, Aulicino, & McHugh, 1999). Far fewer studies have addressed parental involvement in families that live outside the boundaries of mainstream educational culture, in particular, families with Latino immigrant and migrant farm worker backgrounds (Brooks, 2005; Chamorro, 2005; López; Olivos; Vocke, 2007).

To help frame the research problem addressed by this inquiry, this chapter opens with an introduction to parent involvement in public education, preschool through high school. The focus is then adjusted to highlight relevant federal laws and current demographic shifts in student populations. The achievement gap is presented as a significant problem for educational leaders, and the spotlight is directed on students whose lives are dominated by poverty, particularly students who are English language learners (ELLs), Latino immigrants, and whose parents are migrant farm workers. It is important to note these student groups are not mutually exclusive; moreover, thousands of students across the nation are included in all three groups (Vocke, 2007).

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand and make sense of meaningful parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life. In this chapter, the reader is introduced to federal laws related to parental involvement, demographic shifts in U.S. classrooms, and the achievement gap problem. The Migrant Education Program (MEP) is described, and barriers that impede the academic success of migrant students are presented from a critical perspective. The

significance of the research problem is discussed, an overview of the study is presented, and my researcher stance and assumptions are disclosed. At the conclusion of this chapter, salient points are summarized, and terms relevant to specific topics addressed throughout this dissertation are defined.

### Parental Involvement

The terms parental involvement, parental engagement, parental collaboration, and parent-teacher partnerships are used interchangeably in the literature and in public schools; however, key stakeholders such as teachers, administrators, policymakers, parents, and students may differ in their understanding of how these constructs are defined and how they should be measured and evaluated. Universally accepted standards, indicators, and mutually-agreed upon definitions are important because the way constructs are defined dictate the way they are achieved (Sternberg, 2008). Without a shared understanding of what makes parental involvement effective and meaningful, discussions about this important topic are likely to remain ambiguous.

### *Federal Laws*

Parental involvement is not only an important component of public education, it is also a mandate for schools that accept federal funding under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, commonly referred to as NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002). NCLB is the current reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) originally enacted in 1965 under President Johnson as part of the War on Poverty (Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 [ESEA], 1965). Containing over 1,000 pages, NCLB is divided into sections called Titles, and each Title targets specific populations and programs.



The first Title under NCLB, Title I, Part A, provides funding and program guidelines for school districts with high concentrations of educationally disadvantaged children, typically from poor families (NCLB). The amount of federal funding allocated to schools under Title I, Part A is based on a formula that uses poverty indicators from the U.S. census data and school reports. The number of students eligible for the federally-funded free and reduced-price lunch program is one of the most commonly used measures of poverty in America's schools (Carey, 2002); consequently, the amount of federal funding allocated to schools under Title I, Part A is often partially based on what is commonly known as the school's free and reduced lunch count.

The major provisions for parental involvement under NCLB are defined in Title I, Part A and are explained in non-regulatory guidance provided by the U.S. Department of Education (2004). School districts that accept federal funds under Title I, Part A are required to plan, implement, and evaluate their programs and policies with meaningful consultation from parents (U.S. Department of Education). This requirement stresses the need for schools to consult with parents who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, have limited English proficiency, have limited literacy, or are of any racial or ethnic minority background (U.S. Department of Education).

Developing communication and building relationships between school staff and marginalized parents can be challenging, especially when differences in language and culture create barriers. Parents and school staff must gain each others' respect and trust as they learn to navigate across the cultural borders that tend to divide families and schools, particularly bicultural families with immigrant roots (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995, 2001; Valdés, 1996).

### *Bicultural and Immigrant Parents*

The term bicultural refers to individuals or social groups who “function in two (or more) distinct socio-cultural environments: their primary culture and that of the dominant mainstream culture in which they live” (Darder, 1991, p. xvii). In studying bicultural parents, Olivos (2006) found definitions of parental involvement to be primarily school-centered, with goals, values, and priorities often determined in isolation of parents. Olivos highlighted critical issues relevant to bicultural parental involvement, particularly for Latino immigrant parents, and raised the following questions:

What rights do parents legally and morally have in regard to how the school system functions? Should parents be allowed to have an equal voice and power status at the schools in par with the “experts?” Furthermore, how far reaching should the influence of parents be in how the schools choose to educate children and whose responsibility should it be when educational attainment is unsuccessful? (p. 18)

These questions suggest “a functional as well as a conceptual gap in thinking and practice... it often appears that both parents and school personnel have a fundamentally different and sometimes contradictory view of what parent involvement is or what it entails” (Olivos, p. 18).

Differences in the ways school staff and bicultural parents understand and make sense of parental involvement can make collaboration difficult. Connecting with bicultural parents marginalized as a result of poverty, social and linguistic isolation, racism, and limited experience with educational systems can be challenging for schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996). For bicultural parents who emigrate from other

countries, accessing educational resources can be difficult, especially if parents lack knowledge and understanding of how U.S. school systems work (Delgado-Gaitan; Olivos). Learning how to navigate the U.S. public education system can be confusing and overwhelming for immigrant parents unaware of schools' spoken and unspoken rules and cultural norms (Delgado-Gaitan; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Even the very idea of parental involvement, which implies actively advocating for the education of children, can cause conflict for parents who emigrated from countries where this practice was not an accepted norm, as Olivos described:

This concept creates a personal contradiction for many immigrant parents who trust the school and value the responsibility of the teacher and the educational system.

The notion that a parent must be actively involved in educational matters in order to oversee that the school is doing its job and to assure that all children are receiving a good education presents a major inconsistency for many immigrant parents who believe that the schools should assume their responsibility and educate every child equitably. Moreover, this contradiction is further complicated when the schools exclusively blame the parents for their children's educational difficulties. (p. 64)

Beliefs of immigrants about the role and responsibilities of parents in the education of children can contrast sharply with cultural norms of U.S. schools where parental involvement is not only accepted, it is expected, and sometimes even mandated (Olivos; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). As the face of the U.S. public education system continues to become increasingly more diverse, schools must take a broader look at the varied and complex issues surrounding parental involvement, particularly in communities with growing numbers of immigrant families.

## Shifting Demographics

Demographic, social, and economic changes over the last 3 decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century created challenges for educational leaders in assuring all students had equitable opportunities to succeed in school. According to a report by the National Center for Education Statistics (Planty et al., 2009), between 1972 and 2007 the percentage of White students in public schools decreased from 78% to 56%, while the percentage of students from other racial and ethnic groups increased from 32% to 44%. Much of this increase was largely attributed to rapid growth in the Latino student population (Planty et al.). In growing numbers of communities across the nation, Latinos are no longer considered a minority group; in fact, Latinos are the majority population in many public schools (Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). One of the key factors in the growth of the Latino population has been immigration, and this demographic trend is predicted to continue well into the middle of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Suro, 2003).

### *Latino Immigrants*

For the past 30 years, immigration has represented the largest and fastest source of growth in the Latino population; however, a fundamental change has now begun to take place (Suro, 2003). Currently, Latino births in the U.S. are outpacing immigration as the key source of Latino population growth (Suro). This second generation of Latinos consists of children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents and, as a group, they are “overwhelmingly young – nearly two thirds is under the age of 18 years old” (Suro, p. 9).

What happens to Latino immigrant students in schools today will, to a large degree, determine the future of all children in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Now, more than ever, it is critical for educators to be willing and able to engage

Latino immigrant families in ways that are culturally responsive (Gay, 2002). This might mean schools need to “reach out differently to Latino parents and do whatever it takes to make them partners in the pursuit of Latino student achievement” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. ix). Even if the numbers of new Latino immigrants entering the U.S. significantly decrease in the next few decades, the adaptations of the growing number of children born in the U.S. to Latino immigrant parents will profoundly shape the future character of U.S. society and its economy (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). The rapid growth in the Latino student population has economic and moral implications for schools and educational leadership that must not be ignored.

### *Cultural Differences*

The U.S. is a nation originally “founded on values of rugged individualism and competition” (Bordas, 2007, p. 23). Generally speaking, we remain a nation that places a high value on individualism, self-reliance, and competition (Bordas; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Perea, 2004); a nation where children are raised to become independent and autonomous members of an individualistic culture that promotes change (Bordas). In individualistic cultures, the needs of the individual supersede collective needs, and this is not considered to be selfish because society is served when people reach their potential (Bordas). Achievement and accomplishment, high priorities in U.S. society, mirror the individualistic values embedded in our educational system which are personified in classrooms where individual student achievement is highly regarded and rewarded (Perea).

In contrast to the individualistic values of mainstream U.S. educational culture, Latino culture is a collectivist culture that places the welfare of the community above

self-interest (Bordas, 2007). Latino cultural beliefs are based on collectivism and generosity, which often “go against the grain of individualism” (Bordas, p. 24). Community takes precedence over the individual in Latino culture, and people generally work for group success before personal credit or gain (Bordas). Traditional Latino values and beliefs focus more on relationships than on individual factors, and group welfare, unity, and harmony are the norm (Bordas). Latinos also place a high value on belonging, group benefit, mutuality, generosity, interdependency, sharing, and cooperation (Bordas). In Latino culture, demonstrating genuine concern for people’s needs and giving freely of one’s time are more than guiding principles; they are moral obligations (Bordas).

### *Latinos Students*

From a historical perspective, the key for minorities to achieve the American dream has always been assimilation (Perea, 2004). Unfortunately, for many immigrant groups, assimilation often meant giving up one’s ethnic and racial identity in the quest to become an American (Perea). We are now evolving into a new America with Latinos being the largest minority group in a country that no longer has a majority (Kohler & Lazarin, 2007; Perea). Sadly, educational outcomes for Latino students have not improved much over the past 30 years, and, as a group, Latinos struggle in school, have low academic achievement, and the highest dropout rate of all student subgroups (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Jones & Bou-Waked, 2007). Closing the achievement gap for Latino students is a 21<sup>st</sup> century monumental, educational challenge.

### The Achievement Gap Problem

The achievement gap is a term used to define the differences in academic performance between mainstream students and specific sub-groups of students identified

by race, ethnicity, family income level, disabilities, and English language proficiency (NCLB, 2002). Closing the achievement gap is at the heart of educational reform, yet in spite of efforts and federal spending over numerous decades, the achievement gap not only persists, it continues to widen (American Federation of Teachers, 2004; Olivos, 2006). Some have questioned whether the goal of closing the achievement gap is even realistic given that most large-scale efforts to date have failed (Linn, 2003; Olivos; Public Education Network, 2007). Regardless of how the problem is framed, the achievement gap will remain an unresolved educational problem if schools, parents, and social and economic institutions work in isolation (Rothstein, 2004, 2008).

There are many different opinions about the wide array of circumstances that create and fuel the disparity in achievement between mainstream and minority students, and there are perhaps even stronger opinions on how to address this problem. Some believe there has been far too much focus on test scores and not enough focus on teaching students the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills they will need to enter college and the workforce (Wagner et al., 2006). Others suggest without change in public policy to address the social and economic inequalities in U.S. society, the achievement gap problem may never be resolved (Olivos, 2006; Rothstein, 2004).

To shed light on the problem, Rothstein (2004) addressed the affect of social class differences on the academic performance of students. Instead of more commonly used educational terms such as disadvantaged, at-risk, or students of low socioeconomic status, Rothstein preferred the term “lower class” to describe families with children “whose achievement will, on average, be predictably lower than the achievement of middle-class children” (p. 3). Rothstein found childrearing styles, health status, family income, access

to early childhood education, and stability in housing are all characteristics that affect and predict the academic performance of children. However, in spite of myriad factors outside the control of the educational system, the bulk of the blame for the achievement gap has been misguidedly directed at public schools (Rothstein). Clearly, school improvement plays a critical role in resolving the problem, but schools cannot shoulder the entire burden, or even most of it, alone (Rothstein). Accountability for closing the achievement gap must be shared.

### *Accountability*

NCLB ignited a controversial educational movement to close the achievement gap by changing the culture of America's public schools (NCLB, 2002). The cornerstone of NCLB is accountability for schools, districts, and states to demonstrate high expectations and high achievement for *all* students. The emphasis on *all* is important because it frames education reform as a collective endeavor (Checkley, 2008). Accountability under NCLB is measured by the amount of adequate yearly progress (AYP) student subgroups, schools, and school districts make towards meeting state defined achievement targets (U.S. Department of Education, 2003a). The degree to which AYP targets are met depends on student participation rates on state standardized assessments, test scores, and improvement among student subgroups defined by race, ethnicity, family income level, disabilities, and English language proficiency (U.S. Department of Education). By the year 2014, NCLB requires 100% of student subgroups tested on state standardized assessments to demonstrate grade-level proficiency (U.S. Department of Education). Schools and districts that do not meet their state's AYP objectives can face serious consequences, such as increased state monitoring, imposed spending restrictions on the



use of federal funds, and requirements for public notification of their failure to make AYP (U.S. Department of Education). Additionally, schools that do not reach AYP objectives must make funding available for students to access school choice options and supplemental educational services (U.S. Department of Education). If, after 4 years, schools still do not meet their AYP objectives, the State can require they be restructured (U.S. Department of Education).

Demonstrating proficiency on high stakes tests can be challenging for any student, but it is especially problematic for students who enter school with little or no English language skills. For ELLs, the results of state assessments reflect not only knowledge of subject matter, but mastery of the English language as well (Abedi & Dietel, 2004). Under NCLB, schools and districts are held accountable for the academic achievement of *all* students, including ELLs; however, “from the very beginning, these students are clearly at risk of failing” (Abedi & Gándara, 2006, p. 39). The large performance gap between ELL students and their English proficient peers creates a substantially lower starting point for ELLs, and because they start lower and progress slower than non-ELL students, they “can not make the race for reaching the intended goal of 100% proficiency by the 2014 target date or even any time soon after that date” (Abedi & Gándara, p. 39).

#### *English Language Learners (ELLs)*

Proficiency in the English language matters a great deal in U.S. public schools (Crosnoe, 2006). Students who enter school with little or no understanding of English face a double challenge; they must quickly master academic content while simultaneously learning a new language. Studies show it usually takes up to 2 years for most ELLs to learn social English, but it takes 5 to 7 years or longer to master academic

English (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Acquiring language is not an innate skill; it must be cultivated over time (Crosnoe).

Significant time and effort are required for ELLs to acquire skills needed to demonstrate academic proficiency in a new language (Hakuta et al., 2000).

ELLs have widely varying academic backgrounds and degrees of language proficiency; perhaps the only common characteristic they share is having a primary language other than English (Kindler, 2002). Although ELLs in U.S. public schools represent more than 400 different language groups, 80% list Spanish as their primary language (Kindler). The high percentage of Spanish-speaking ELLs is a reflection of the rapid growth in the Latino student population nationally. ELLs are culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse, and emigrate to the U.S. from every continent (Wolf et al., 2008). Many are children of immigrant parents, or are immigrants themselves. In addition to learning English, immigrant ELLs must also learn to adapt to new social and cultural rules in the U.S.

School is an important site of cultural contact for immigrant children; it is where they must learn how to interact with teachers and children from other backgrounds (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Because immigrant children have greater exposure to U.S. culture through school, they often learn English much quicker than their parents, especially if their parents work in jobs with other immigrants of the same ethnic background (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Unlike their children, immigrant parents are often socially and linguistically isolated from mainstream U.S. culture (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco).

Unfortunately, academic assessment results show the performance of ELLs consistently falls far below that of other students nationwide (Abedi & Dietel, 2004; Abedi & Gándara, 2006; Kindler, 2002; Viadero, 2001). The underachievement of ELLs is a serious problem that becomes magnified when ELLs move from school to school, as many do, because of economic necessity (Vocke, 2007). For example, many migrant ELL students change schools three or more times in an academic school year because they move frequently with their parents who work in temporary and seasonal agriculture (Vocke). Recognizing that fragmented learning results from repeated interruptions in schooling, immersion in unfamiliar surroundings, and constantly changing curricula, the U.S. government provides federal funding through the Migrant Education Program (MEP) for schools to help migrant students succeed, despite the many obstacles inherent in their highly mobile lives (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b).

#### The Migrant Education Program (MEP)

The MEP is authorized and funded under Title I, Part C of NCLB (NCLB, 2002). The goal of this federal program is to ensure all migrant students reach challenging academic standards and graduate from high school prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b). To be eligible to receive support services under the MEP, students must be between 3 - 21 years of age and have moved from one school district to another within the preceding 36 months to accompany or join a parent, spouse, or guardian who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

It is difficult to verify the exact number of migrant students in the MEP at any given point in time, but a report of the National Association of State Directors of Migrant

Education (n.d.) showed there were approximately 500,000 migrant students from 49 states enrolled in the MEP in 2008 when I began collecting data for this inquiry. Every day, in every state, different migrant students start and end their 3 year eligibility in the MEP; however, no national MEP database existed during the time of this study. The U.S. Department of Education, Office of Migrant Education, requires states to submit an annual performance report that includes the number of migrant students who were enrolled in the state's MEP the prior year; consequently, any estimate of the number of migrant students in U.S. schools would, at best, be at least a year old.

### *Migratory Life*

It is important to recognize the difference between the terms migrant and immigrant. Although many migrant families have immigrant roots, immigration status has no bearing on MEP eligibility. In the context of this study, the term immigrant is used in reference to an individual born outside of the U.S., whereas the term migrant refers to families with children enrolled in the MEP, regardless of national origin. Studies suggest the majority of migrant farm worker families in the U.S. have cultural origins that can be traced to Latin America, particularly México (Parra-Cardona, Bullock, Imig, Villarruel, & Gold, 2006; Vocke, 2007). Migrant families with immigrant roots face the same challenges and barriers as other immigrant families; however, the struggles (in) migrant families confront are compounded by a highly mobile life.

High mobility, the defining characteristic of migrant families, creates new situations for migrant families to which they must quickly adjust. Learning how to fit in and succeed in ever-changing schools and communities becomes a normal part of life for many migrant families (Vocke, 2007), and successful adaptation might require living

simultaneously in two cultures. By embracing a bicultural orientation (Buriel & De Ment, 1997), the adaptation process is facilitated as (im) migrant families attempt to understand and make sense of new cultural norms, while at the same time retaining their own cultural beliefs, values, behaviors, and language. As (im) migrant children learn to adapt to new environments, they form new identities and develop bicultural and bilingual competencies that become an integral part of their sense of self (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

### *Barriers*

The primary goals of the MEP are for migrant students to succeed in school and graduate from high school, yet far too many migrant students never achieve either goal. Overall, migrant students are prone to more illness, have lower attendance rates, and higher dropout rates than their non-migrant peers (Vocke, 2007). Barriers related to language, culture, and poverty can alienate migrant students from their schools, and high mobility can create obstacles for students to accrue the number of credits they need to graduate from high school (National PASS Coordinating Committee, 2009). In years past, migrant and immigrant adults without much formal education could find jobs that provided sufficient income to sustain their families; however, that time has passed (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Having at least a high school diploma is now essential, because the current world economy does not generate meaningful jobs for high school dropouts (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco; Wagner et al., 2006).

Most parents in the U.S. today assume their children will graduate from high school prepared for college and/or the workforce. Unfortunately, all too often, barriers become insurmountable for migrant families, shattering the hopes and dreams of migrant

parents. At the time of this study, the national migrant graduation rate was 50.7% (National PASS Coordinating Committee, 2009); suggesting half of all migrant students will not graduate from high school. Nevertheless, earning a high school diploma is a goal for many migrant students, and for some, it is their only hope for a better future.

Dropping out of school has negative consequences, not only for migrant students and their families, but for society as a whole, because of lost productivity, lower tax revenues, and higher cost of public services (Levin, 2009). By raising high school graduation rates, society benefits from increased tax revenues and reduced costs in criminal justice, public health, and public assistance (Levin). Because high school graduates are also more likely to continue their education in post-secondary institutions of higher learning, high school graduates and society share in the rewards when more students graduate (Levin). Providing opportunities for all students to succeed in the U.S. public education system is a matter of educational equity and social justice, two critical components of a democratic society.

### *Equity and Social Justice*

In societies where life chances and opportunities are often determined by a person's education, equity in education is more than important, it is a moral imperative (Levin, 2009). Fairness in access to a quality education is a matter of social justice and it also makes good economic sense, as Levin noted:

A society that provides fairer access to opportunities, that is more productive, and that has a higher employment, better health, less crime, and lower dependency is a better society in itself. That the attainment of such society is also profoundly good economics is simply an added incentive. (p. 17)

If half of our nation's migrant students continue to drop out of school, society will ultimately pay the inevitable price for increased rates of crime and delinquency when large numbers of undereducated children enter adolescence and adulthood without the skills they need to become productive members of society (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Students who drop out of school have fewer choices in an increasing competitive job market. High school dropouts are ill-prepared to take their place in a competitive U.S. workforce and they risk a future dominated by poverty. The marginalization of large numbers of undereducated (im) migrant students represents a "significant danger for the future" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, p. 49).

#### *Marginalization and Oppression*

Migrant workers have been described as "*invisible people* because of their status as one of America's most marginalized and undereducated populations" (Vocke, 2007, p. 3, emphasis in original). According to Young (2000), marginalization is the exclusion from meaningful participation in society and it is one of the most dangerous forms of oppression. Migrant families are marginalized by mainstream society because of issues related to class, race, ethnicity, language, and national origin, and this form of oppression must be recognized and named (Young, 1990).

Paulo Freire, a deceased Brazilian educator and liberation philosopher, was passionate about his concerns for oppressed people (Freire, 1972a) who have been described "as masses upon whom, within culturally alienated societies, a regime of oppression is imposed by the power elite" (Crotty, 1998, p. 154). In his best known work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972a), Freire focused on bringing an awareness of oppression to oppressed people themselves. By identifying ways society creates groups of

privileged and oppressed people, Freire found oppression to be most forceful when those who are oppressed accept their oppression as natural, necessary, and inevitable. Freire believed the way out of oppression was through praxis, an integrated process of dialogue, critical reflection, and action.

Freire (1972b) used the term “the culture of silence” (p. 30) to describe oppressed people as being mute, meaning they had no voice in society. Even worse, Freire found the oppressed were unaware they had no voice. He believed oppressed people become liberated when their voice is honored and their ability to reason is trusted (Freire, 1972a). Capturing the essence of Freire’s critical philosophy, Crotty (1998) stated:

With this ... comes a new view of reality and a founded hope for freedom. It makes possible a conscientised people. These are people who encounter one another in the common search to be more human. They are people emerging from their situation to reflect upon it and cast aside the culture of silence that has held their consciousness submerged. They are people whose critical awareness melds reflection and action and enables them to transform their lives in a new-found spirit of hope and courage. (p. 156)

Perspectives of Freire and Crotty related to marginalization, oppression, voice, and the culture of silence resonate with the harsh realities of migrant life and the conditions that render migrant families invisible and mute.

If society is to become truly free and just, the voice of marginalized and oppressed people, such as migrant parents, must be liberated (Freire, 1972b). In spite of federal laws and mandates prescribed in NCLB, invisible people can be easy to ignore and leave behind. In the words of Freire, “It is impossible to democratize schools without



opening them to the real participation of parents and the community in determining the school's destiny" (1993, p. 94). This statement reflects the powerful role parents play, not only in determining the destiny of children and schools, but also the destiny of American democracy. As expert interpreters of their own experience, the voice of all parents deserves to be heard and honored; however, the voice of migrant parents is missing in current educational dialogue. Shamefully, it is a voice that has long been silent or perhaps worse yet, a voice that has been silenced.

### Significance of the Problem

There are many moral, ethical, legal, and economic reasons why a democratic society should care about the academic success of all students. Unfortunately, large and growing numbers of Latino, immigrant, ELL, and migrant students are far from succeeding in school; instead, they are dropping out at alarming rates. The underachievement and high dropout rate of marginalized students, particularly migrant students, should concern educational leaders at all levels, preschool through college. Students who drop out of school lack the knowledge and critical thinking skills needed to succeed in challenging 21<sup>st</sup> century environments (Wagner et al., 2006). Schools, families, and society all share in the costs when the educational system fails to produce an educated workforce.

Migrant students, many who are also Latino, immigrant, and ELL, are perhaps the most vulnerable of all student subgroups (Vocke, 2007). Theirs is a world of poverty and isolation where low expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies. Given the likelihood that half of the migrant students in schools today will not graduate from high school, the best prospect for many migrant students is a life of hard labor and low pay. Without an

education, they, like their parents, will be doomed to work in the fields where they will most likely be exposed to dangerous pesticides, extreme climates, long hours, difficult work, and unsafe conditions.

Although the positive impact parental involvement has on student achievement has been noted across all socio-economic, racial, and ethnic groups (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Olivos, 2006), little is known about how this construct plays out in the culture and lives of migrant families (López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Some studies suggest minority parents are not involved in their children's education at all, and even go as far as blaming minority parents for their children's low academic achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Few studies have identified the ways in which migrant parents *are* involved in their children's education, particularly in their homes (López, et al., 2001). New understanding and knowledge about meaningful parental involvement is needed to help educational leaders create conditions needed to strengthen relationships with migrant parents to benefit student success. In addition to improving student achievement and creating opportunities for parent leadership in schools, meaningful parental involvement can also be a valuable exercise in grassroots democracy and community self-determination (Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2004/2005).

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand and make sense of meaningful parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life. Because knowledge of meaningful parental involvement specific to migrant families is limited, studies are needed to explore this topic from new and different perspectives. Research on parental involvement in the MEP is also needed

to help educational leaders develop models for evaluating program effectiveness and to inform change. Qualitative and quantitative studies can each provide unique contributions to the body of knowledge; new insights and understanding that emerge from qualitative research can be utilized to design future quantitative studies with more generalizable findings. Studies such as the one detailed in this dissertation have the potential to influence future policy, practice, and research aimed at closing the achievement gap. Most importantly, this inquiry dignifies the efforts and sacrifices migrant parents make to provide opportunities for children to receive the best education possible and become productive members of U.S. society.

To explore the research problem, a qualitative case study was conducted to address the following research question:

Q 1 How do migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement?

To gain a deeper understanding of the problem, three sub-questions were also raised:

1A How do migrant parents practice meaningful parental involvement?

1B How do migrant parents express goodness in parental involvement?

1C What barriers impede meaningful parental involvement for migrant parents?

### *Study Overview*

Because the nature of this study centered on gaining a deeper understanding and constructing meaning, a qualitative approach provided the best fit for addressing the research problem. Participants in this qualitative inquiry were 6 migrant parents, or 3 married couples from 3 migrant families, who lived and worked in three small, rural, agricultural communities located in the Rocky Mountain Region of the U.S. To provide a

perspective across all grade levels, participants were purposefully selected (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002, 2008) to include migrant parents of children in elementary, middle school, and high school.

Using methodologies from case study (Creswell, 1998, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995) and portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), data were collected over a 6 month period of time from multiple sources including focus group interviews, individual interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials. To capture data that might have otherwise been missed, participants were given digital cameras to photograph things they did in their everyday lives that represented meaningful parental involvement, as understood through their lens. Through the use of photography, journaling, and dialogue, the voices of 6 migrant parents were liberated through stories; this dissertation is a synthesis of their stories.

### Limitations

Because the researcher in qualitative inquiry is the primary instrument of both data collection and data interpretation, it is imperative “to reflect on, deal with, and report potential sources of bias and error” (Patton, 2002, p. 51). Qualitative case study positions the researcher and participants in close contact with each other as well as the research problem under study, making independence and neutrality important issues to consider. While absolute neutrality may be difficult to achieve, credible strategies can be utilized to help address selective perceptions, biases, and theoretical predispositions of the qualitative researcher (Patton).

A particular strength of qualitative inquiry is that “it depends on, uses, and enhances the researcher’s direct experiences in the world and the insights about those

experiences” (Patton, 2002, p. 51). Patton suggested using empathic neutrality as a “middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding” (p. 50). After attending a workshop presented by Patton and reading a number of his books, I found myself embracing his concept of empathic neutrality, as Patton explained in his following comment:

Empathy describes a stance toward the people one encounters – it communicates understanding, interest, and caring. Neutrality suggests a stance toward their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors – it means being nonjudgmental. Neutrality can actually facilitate rapport and help build a relationship that supports empathy by disciplining the researcher to be open to the other person and nonjudgmental in that openness. (p. 53)

My personal stance in this study aligned with Patton’s view of empathic neutrality.

### *Researcher Stance*

For over 30 years, I have had the great fortune of living and working in Spanish-speaking communities, both north and south of the U.S.- México border. A rich collection of life experiences and opportunities presented to me over the past 3 decades has influenced my worldview and ultimately led me to this study. My interest in working cross-culturally initially grew out of experiences in Guatemala where I served as a Peace Corps volunteer from 1979 through 1981 in one of the highest altitude municipalities in Central America. On the summit of the Sierra Madre Mountain Range, 10,200 feet above sea level, I lived in the rural highland village of San José Ojetenam where I spent 2 years working among people whose language and culture vastly differed from mine. It was

there I learned my earliest lessons about the power of language, culture, and oppression, working as a volunteer public health nurse.

My Guatemalan friends and neighbors were a blended people labeled by Guatemalan society as Ladinos, a term often interchanged with the term mestizo, meaning people of mixed racial ancestry (Stearns, 2001). The Guatemalan Ministry of Education characterized Ladino people as “*Una población heterogénea que se expresa en idioma español como idioma materno, que posee determinadas características culturales de arraigo hispano matizadas con elementos culturales indígenas y viste a la usanza comúnmente llamada occidental*” (Ministerio de Educación, 2008, p. 1) (A heterogeneous population that uses Spanish as its maternal language, has specific cultural traits of Hispanic origin mixed with indigenous cultural elements, and dresses in a style commonly considered to be western), (Translation mine).

Having entered Guatemala with no Spanish language skills, it took almost a full year for me to acquire enough vocabulary to be able to ask my neighbors personal questions, such as how they self-identified as a people. Don Juan, a village elder and close neighbor, grinned a toothless smile when he simply replied to my question saying, “*Somos naturales*” (“We are native people”), (Don Juan, 1980). Unfortunately, during the years I lived in Guatemala, many indigenous, native, Ladino, and mestizo people paid a high price for their culture and language, through alienation and exploitation by a powerful government with an elite military regime. The edges of my awareness and understanding of oppression and hegemony were sharpened by witnessing unspeakable human indignities imposed upon people whose voices had been silenced by terror and fear.

Over time, as my Spanish language skills improved, I began to earn the trust and respect of the people in my village. Working in a small health post, delivering babies, vaccinating children, dogs, and chickens, providing training for midwives and health promoters, digging latrines, and planting community gardens, afforded great opportunities to build relationships with people who thought and talked about the world in ways I could never have imagined. From those experiences I came to realize people think differently about their worlds based on language. I developed an understanding that children inherit not only a language from their families, they also inherit the culture that lives behind that language.

Upon returning to the U.S. in 1981, I felt it was important for me to maintain my newly acquired Spanish language skills so I vowed never to accept a job unless it required me to use Spanish on a regular basis. I was fortunate to find employment as an administrator in the MEP, a program I have continued to work in for past 22 years, primarily with families of Mexican descent. Experiences working in the MEP in California, Oregon, and Colorado provided ample opportunities to improve my Spanish language skills and deepen my understanding of Latino culture. Within a few years of returning to the U.S. from Guatemala, I found myself not only speaking in two languages, but also thinking and dreaming in both English and Spanish. For me, having the capacity to dream in my second language and understand some of the nuances of Latino culture meant I was more than bilingual; I was also becoming bicultural.

When my husband was offered an opportunity to teach at a prestigious Mexican university, El Tecnológico de Monterrey, we embraced the chance to immerse our three children in a new culture and language. We moved to México in 1997 where we lived in

the Pacific coastal towns of Colima and Mazatlán for 2 years. While our children each completed two grades of elementary school in México, I actively searched for ways to become involved in their learning. My motivation to connect with their schooling was based on my U.S. education and understanding of what “good” parental involvement practices looked like north of the border. In México I learned that, unlike in the U.S., parents were not expected to show up and volunteer in classrooms. In fact, as a parent, I was not even welcome in my children’s classrooms.

Through a variety of experiences and discussions with Mexican friends and neighbors, I came to understand the cultural and linguistic differences between the terms teach and educate. I learned that teachers teach and parents educate. In México, teaching meant giving students information and instruction on how to use it; whereas, educating referred to parenting, or raising children to be good people. I came to understand how teaching happens at school and educating happens in the home. The roles, expectations, and responsibilities for parent involvement in the México were quite different from my experiences in the U.S. While I had previously heard and read about such cultural differences, the actual experience of being a parent of children in a foreign school system helped me more fully comprehend how parental involvement is culturally and contextually defined. My experiences as a parent of three elementary school children in México led me to reflect upon and question the assumptions I previously held about meaningful parental involvement.

### *Assumptions*

Denzin and Lincoln (2008) stated all research is interpretive and is guided by the researcher’s set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood



and studied. Beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology create an interpretive framework that guides the questions researchers ask and the interpretations they bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln). As I approached this inquiry, I carried deep within me a life biography defined by rich experiences that shaped three of my assumptions in this study related to power, voice, and goodness. Each of these assumptions is explained in the following sections.

*Power.* My first assumption related to my own power inherent in the dual role I played as both the researcher and administrator of a MEP that provided services to the families of participants in this study. Having over 22 years experience as a MEP administrator, I had knowledge, privilege, and power based on my insider status, which had both advantages and disadvantages. One strong advantage was the value of having pre-established relationships with the migrant community and the MEP staff who worked in the region where this inquiry took place. Because I had worked over 10 years in the community where this study was conducted, I felt I had gained the trust of many migrant parents, including those who agreed to participate in this study. Earning the trust and respect of migrant families is a gift and responsibility I try never to take for granted.

One disadvantage of being an insider is that biases might cause the researcher to overlook emerging insights (Yin, 2009). To address this, I continually reflected on the power in my dual role and remained open to the possibility of unexpected and contrary findings (Yin). In doing so, my understanding was continuously reshaped as new meanings evolved. To help sort out my thinking about power, I used reflective journaling (Janesick, 1999) to address concerns as they arose. Additionally, I discussed ethical issues and questions with my research advisor, as well as with the national and state

director of the MEP. The perspectives and insights of these, and other experts in the field, challenged me to think deeply about the strengths and limitations of my role, status, and power in this inquiry.

*Voice.* My second assumption, grounded in critical theory, was that the voice of migrant parents is a unique voice, one that differs from the voice of mainstream parents; I believed that difference was critically important to understand. Recognizing and acknowledging migrant parents as the best authorities on their own experiences, I viewed participants and myself as “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1972b, p. 31), and I identified our research relationship as a partnership in which we could learn from, and with, each other. In sharing my assumptions, theoretical framework, and early interpretation of findings, participants and I worked together as partners, or co-researchers in this study. Through critical dialogue, participants gave voice to their experiences and enabled their perspectives to be broadly shared in this inquiry.

*Goodness.* My third assumption related to the concept of goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) and how it is revealed within the unique context of migrant family life. My assumption about goodness was not based on a traditional interpretation of righteousness or virtue; rather, it echoed the perceptions of Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) who found goodness to be “a complex, holistic, dynamic concept that embraces imperfection and vulnerability... best documented through detailed, nuance narratives placed in context” (p. 142). Goodness “is not a static or absolute quality that can be quickly measured by a single indicator of success” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, p. 23). Because there are no set criteria or standards for judging goodness, I avoided thinking about this construct in evaluative terms. For example, instead of looking for indicators of

effectiveness, I chose to explore how migrant parents understand, make sense of, and construct meaning in parental involvement. In seeking to uncover what was meaningful, I attempted to “capture the origins and expressions of goodness” (Lawrence- Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 9) in parental involvement practices within the unique context of migrant family life. I had full confidence in the ability of migrant parents to define and abundantly express goodness in a variety of ways that could be documented, understood, and shared, and my expectations were exceeded far beyond my imagination.

#### Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined relative to the context of this study:

*Binational Family.* This term refers to families that have immediate family members who are immigrants, as well as immediate family members who were born in the U.S. Some binational families might also be considered mixed-status families, meaning they have at least one unauthorized immigrant parent and at least one U.S.-born child (University of Denver, 2009).

*English Language Learners (ELLs).* The term ELLs refers to students whose first language is not English and who have been identified on a language assessment as having limited English language skills. As a group, ELLs differ in language, cultural background, and family history. There is no single defining educational characteristic of ELLs besides the use of a primary language other than English (Kindler, 2002).

*Equity.* Within the context of educational policy, equity is used as a complement to social justice. Viewed from a critical perspective, both ideals are concerned with inclusion, representation, processes, content, and outcomes. Equity in schools means all

students are held to the same high standards and are provided the support they need to achieve those standards (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005).

*Latino/Hispanic.* The terms Latino and Hispanic are both commonly used in the literature; however, because participants in this study stated they were more comfortable being referred to as Latinos, the term Latino is used throughout this dissertation whenever a choice in terminology is given. Latinos are Spanish-speaking people from the Americas south of the U.S., including México and Puerto Rico (Perea, 2004). Latino is a culture, not a race (Bordas, 2007). Hispanics are people of Spanish descent who originally came from the Iberian Peninsula. The term Hispanic was popularized in the 1980s when the U.S. Bureau of the Census used it as a way to categorize people historically or culturally connected to the Spanish language (Perea, 2004). The term Hispanic has no precise meaning racially or in terms of national origin (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

*Immigrant.* First generation immigrants are people born in a country other than the U.S. Second generation immigrants are children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents; these children are U.S. citizens (Suro, 2003). The term children of immigrant parents can refer to both U.S.-born and foreign born children.

*Marginalization.* Marginalization is a process in which groups of people are excluded by the dominant society. This term is often used in economic and political contexts in reference to rendering individuals or ethnic groups powerless by more powerful individuals or ethnic groups. Various groups, such as migrant families, are marginalized from society because of practices, policies, and programs that only meet the needs of the dominant group (Yee, 2005; Young, 2000).

*Migrant Education Program (MEP).* This federal program is authorized and funded by NCLB under Title I, Part C - Education of Migratory Children (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b). The MEP was first developed in 1967 to address the disruption and fragmentation in education experienced by students who move frequently with their parents or guardians across school district boundaries in search of temporary or seasonal agricultural work. The goal of the MEP is to ensure all migrant students reach challenging academic standards and graduate with a high school diploma (or complete a GED) that prepares them for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment. A migratory child is a child (ages 3 - 21) who: (1) Is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher; or (2) has moved within the preceding 36 months, in order to accompany or join a parent, spouse, or guardian who is a migratory agricultural worker or a migratory fisher who (i) has moved from one school district to another; (ii) in a state that is comprised of a single school district, has moved from one administrative area to another within such district; or (iii) as the child of migratory fisher, resides in a school district of more than 15,000 square miles, and migrates a distance of 20 miles or more to a temporary residence (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

*Mixed Status Families.* Mixed status families have at least one unauthorized immigrant parent and at least one U.S.-born child (University of Denver, 2009).

*Parent.* In addition to natural parents, the term parent also includes legal guardians or other people standing in *loco parentis* (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This could include adults legally responsible for a child's welfare, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, stepparents, guardians, and foster parents. This definition recognizes that children may live with adults, other than their natural parents, who carry

the primary responsibility for the most basic of all parental functions: providing for children's safety, well-being, and education.

*Parental Involvement.* NCLB defines parental involvement as the participation of parents in regular, two-way and meaningful communication involving students' academic learning and other school activities, including ensuring that parents: (a) play an integral role in assisting their child's learning, (b) are encouraged to be actively involved in their child's education at school, (c) are full partners in their child's education and are included, as appropriate, in decision-making and on advisory committees to assist in the education of their child, and (d) that other activities are carried out, such as those described in section 1118 of the ESEA (U.S. Department of Education, 2004, p. 3). In this inquiry, the definition of parental involvement was expanded to include the role parents play in supporting the academic success of children through both home and school-based activities.

*Temporary and Seasonal Agricultural Work.* Agricultural work includes any activity directly related to the processing of crops, dairy products, poultry, or livestock for initial commercial sale or personal subsistence. Temporary agricultural work means virtually no workers remain employed by the same employer for more than 12 months. Seasonal agricultural work occurs only during a certain period of the year due to the cycles of nature and may not be continuous or carried on throughout the year (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

## Summary

Meaningful parental involvement in public education has been established as an important component of the academic success of all children, yet few studies have addressed this construct from the frame of reference of parents marginalized by the educational system, particularly Latino (im) migrant parents who move frequently in search of work in temporary and seasonal agriculture. In this chapter, federal education laws relevant to parental involvements were introduced, demographic shifts in student populations were discussed, and the achievement gap was explored with a focus on Latino immigrant, ELL, and migrant students. The strengths and limitations of this inquiry were discussed from a critical perspective. The research problem and an overview of the study were presented, and specific terms used throughout this dissertation were defined.

In the following chapter, a synopsis of the literature associated with parental involvement is presented. Traditional and non traditional perspectives are reviewed within a parental involvement framework, and studies related to culture, language, demographic shifts, immigration, and the deficit paradigm are discussed. The literature is reviewed with a specific focus on Latino immigrant and migrant families, and gaps in the literature are identified to help support and justify the purpose and nature of this inquiry.

## CHAPTER II

### A REAR-VIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In qualitative research, an extensive review of the literature is not generally discussed at the beginning of the study because findings need to “emerge without being constrained by the views of others from the literature” (Creswell, 2005, p. 79). Instead, prior studies are reviewed to document the importance of the research problem and to justify the need for further investigation (Creswell). Metaphorically speaking, this chapter is like the rear-view mirror of a car, written to frame a view of past studies that have advanced the body of knowledge and continue to drive current educational practices. As the driver of this study, I adjusted the rear-view mirror to glance back at research that lay behind the direction I was headed. Perched in the driver’s seat with my gaze fixed forward, I was also able to look through the windshield and see what lay ahead.

Following the qualitative tradition, the rear-view mirror was adjusted in this chapter to focus on parental involvement studies specific to Latino immigrant and migrant families. By angling the frame to limit the view, complex and diverse interpretations of parental involvement, and gaps, or blind spots in the literature were revealed. In essence, the literature related to parental involvement is rear-viewed in this chapter to establish a research context and support and justify the purpose and nature of this inquiry. Relevant studies are again referenced in chapters six and seven to compare



and contrast the findings of this inquiry with ideas and practices advanced by prior research (Creswell, 2005).

### Parental Involvement Research

In past studies, parental involvement has been defined in a variety of ways, but the fundamental purpose for any and all forms of parental involvement must be to support student achievement and academic success (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Parental involvement has long been a centerpiece of federal education programs, but lacked statutory definition until 2002, the year the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) was signed into law. Having a statutory definition for parental involvement is significant because it sets parameters for schools to implement programs, activities, and procedures to engage parents of students served by federal programs, such as those authorized under Title I, Part A of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Under NCLB, parental involvement is defined as “the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication” (U.S. Department of Education, p. 3). This federal definition suggests a relationship between two key stakeholders: parents and schools. Missing in this definition, however, is clarity about what makes communication meaningful, particularly from the parents’ perspective.

Even though the educational backgrounds of parents vary widely, parents with both high and low levels of education have similar educational goals for their children (Epstein, 1986). Studies demonstrate parents and teachers may hold different interpretations of practices that constitute meaningful parental involvement (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; López et al., 2001). For example, some teachers limit their view of meaningful parental involvement to include only school-based practices, such as parents

volunteering in classrooms, chaperoning field trips, donating supplies and materials for class projects, attending conferences, and participating on advisory groups and committees (Olivos, 2006). Likewise, some parents also limit their interpretation of meaningful involvement to practices which are primarily home-based, such as monitoring school work, motivating children to do their best, and sharing expectations for educational attainment with children (Englund, Luckner, Whaley, & Egeland, 2004). Joyce Epstein, considered by many to be a leading researcher in the field of family involvement (Grant & Ray, 2009), developed a framework that describes the different kinds of parental involvement practices that can lead to increased student achievement (Epstein, 1995). Epstein's parental involvement framework is detailed in the following section.

#### *Epstein's Parental Involvement Framework*

According to Epstein (1995), parental involvement can be categorized in six key areas: (a) parenting, (b) communicating, (c) volunteering, (d) learning at home, (e) decision-making, and (f) collaborating with the community. Research indicates involvement in each of these areas can lead to different results, not only for students, but also for parents, teaching practices, and school climates (Epstein et al., 2009). For example, certain practices are more likely to improve students' test skills and test scores, while other practices tend to have a greater impact on students' attitudes and behaviors (Epstein et al.). Epstein's framework suggests best practices in parental involvement combine efforts in all six categories so that specific actions are supported by as many practices as possible. Presented in the following section is a review of the

six categories of parental involvement and examples of related practices, as suggested by Epstein et al.

*Parenting.* In this category, parents provide for the health and safety of children and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and positive behavior in school. School staff can suggest home conditions to support learning across all grade levels, but educators must first understand the needs of families and their available resources. Schools provide opportunities for parent education and trainings on topics of interest to parents, such as health, nutrition, and family literacy, to help parents better understand children's learning needs and ways to best support child development. Information is appropriately disseminated to all parents, not just the few who are able to attend school-based workshops and meetings. Families are encouraged to share about their culture, background, talents, and needs. Schools also provide training for teachers to increase understanding and collaboration with diverse parent groups. Teachers make home visits at transition points, such as preschool, elementary, middle, and high school. Informal neighborhood meetings can help families better understand schools and also help schools better understand families.

*Communicating.* There are a variety of communication channels to help connect schools, families, students, and the community, such as phone calls, written and electronic correspondence, report cards and progress notes, parent-teacher conferences, and home visits. Communication must always be in a language and format that parents understand. Translation, interpretation, and individualized support are provided for parents with special needs, limited English language skills, and low literacy skills. Schools must take the initiative to reach out to families and share information about

programs, opportunities, and student progress. Educators care about the families they serve and they pay close attention families' needs and concerns.

*Volunteering.* A volunteer can be anyone who supports learning and child development, in any way possible, at any place (Epstein et al., 2009). Volunteering can happen at any time, not just during the school day or in the school building. Training is provided and work is organized so that all volunteers are productive and feel their efforts are valued. Having a parent room or family center in the school building provides structure and a place for volunteers to work, hold meetings, and offer resources to families. Schools create flexible volunteer schedules that accommodate parents' work hours. All parents can make significant contributions to the environment and functions of a school; consequently, parents need to know their time and talents are welcomed.

*Learning at home.* There are many different home-based strategies that engage parents with children's school work. For example, parents can encourage, listen, react, praise, guide, monitor, and discuss ideas with children. Learning at home does not mean parents teach children content matter, although, with guidance and support from teachers, parents can supervise and support children with homework assignments, projects, and other school activities. All parents need to understand the school's homework policies and expectations related to monitoring and assisting with schoolwork at home. Learning at home also includes the involvement of parents in setting student goals each year and in planning for college or the workforce after high school graduation.

*Decision-making.* Decision-making is a process of partnership that includes shared views and actions toward shared goals (Epstein et al., 2009). As key stakeholders, parents and students must both be included in the decision-making process. Schools can give parents meaningful roles in decision-making by providing training, information, and opportunities to be involved in school governance. Schools can support the empowerment of parents and develop leadership skills needed for parents to serve as representatives of other families. Parents from all racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and other groups in the school must be offered opportunities to network with other parents and parent representatives. Active parent organizations, advisory councils, and committees can promote parent leadership and participation in school governance. Opportunities to be involved in school governance and leadership should be open to all segments of the community, not just to people who have the most time and energy to devote to school affairs.

*Collaborating with the community.* Collaboration is mutually beneficial when schools, parents, and communities share their resources and support each other's goals. By integrating community resources and services in the school building, student learning, family well-being, and educational programs can all be strengthened. Families can gain access to support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, social services, emergency assistance, adult education, libraries, cultural and civic events, tutoring and mentoring, summer learning programs, and after-school child-care programs. Schools strengthen the community when they help connect families with other groups and programs, such as seniors, universities and community colleges,

service organizations, homeless shelters, recycling projects, food and clothing banks, and community revitalization projects.

There are many different ways and reasons for parents to engage in public education, but the strongest and most consistent predictors of parental involvement, both in the school and in the home, are the specific school programs and teacher practices that encourage and guide parental involvement efforts (Epstein et al., 2009). This finding suggests schools must take the lead to support, promote, and strengthen, parental involvement efforts to benefit student success.

#### *Parental Involvement and Student Achievement*

While parental involvement has the potential to benefit parents, schools, and communities, its primary purpose is to support the academic success of students (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). As noted in the literature, certain parental involvement practices benefit student achievement more than others (Epstein et al., 2009). A study conducted by D'Agostino, Hedges, Wong, and Borman (2001) found programs that attempted to involve parents through school-sponsored activities or governance structures had a negligible impact on student achievement. Conversely, D'Agostino et al. found programs that provided parents with resources and assistance they could use with children in the home were more likely to have an effect on students' academic progress.

In studying parents of minority groups, Beck and Murphy (1999) found site-based decision-making and attempts to include parents in school governance had only a small effect on student achievement. Likewise, a report published by Public Agenda Research (Farkas et al., 1999) highlighted findings from a survey of 1,000 public school

teachers and 1,220 parents of students who were enrolled in public schools at the time of the study. Findings revealed parents generally felt uncomfortable and unqualified to assume a role on site-based management teams, although parents' efforts in the home to teach children respect, discipline, and a love of learning were considered most important (Farkas et al.). Overall, past studies have indicated home-based parental involvement efforts seem to have a more positive effect on student achievement than school-based activities (Stelmack, 2005).

### *Traditional and Nontraditional Perspectives*

While parental involvement can be conceptualized from both traditional and nontraditional perspectives (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004), the most commonly cited studies in the literature primarily addressed traditional school-based activities (Crosnoe, 2006). Much has been written about traditional forms of parental involvement, but far fewer studies have addressed the nontraditional ways parents are involved in children's learning. Most notably, there is a dearth of literature that specifically addressed nontraditional forms of parental involvement in minority and marginalized communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; López et al., 2001; Olivos, 2006; Valdés, 1996).

*Traditional forms of parental involvement.* Traditional forms of parental involvement are based on values embedded in American school culture (Perea, 2004). Such values are primarily school-centered and carry an unspoken expectation that parents will have the flexibility and willingness to participate in schools when invited (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Olivos, 2006). Traditional forms of parental involvement engage parents in activities such as fund-raising, parent-teacher conferences, structured school events, and in decision-making when requested by the school (Delgado-Gaitan). These types of

activities are controlled by the school and often render parents passive in the process (Delgado-Gaitan). Traditional forms of parental involvement are generally easier for schools to implement because they are institutionalized and become routine over the years (Delgado-Gaitan). Parents' needs for translation, interpretation, childcare, and flexible meeting times are seldom considered in traditional forms of parental involvement because "schools do not feel that it is necessary to accommodate parents" (Delgado-Gaitan, p. 20).

*Nontraditional forms of parental involvement.* In nontraditional forms of parental involvement, parents take on a stronger egalitarian role in the school and broaden their involvement to include activities in the home (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; López et al., 2001). Nontraditional approaches value and strengthen the role of parents as active, rather than passive participants in the education of children (Delgado-Gaitan). In nontraditional forms of parental involvement, parents partner with teachers to make decisions about children's learning needs and help plan professional development for school staff, such as promoting strategies for teachers to develop partnerships with diverse parent groups (Epstein et al., 2009). Schools consider and address the needs of parents by communicating in a language and format parents understand, and meetings are planned to accommodate working parents' schedules, such as in the evening or on weekends. Childcare is always offered. Nontraditional forms of parental involvement also allow flexibility in scheduling to enable teachers to make home visits, which can foster communication and strengthen parent-teacher relationships (Delgado-Gaitan).

In both traditional and nontraditional forms of parental involvement, studies show parents value being an intricate part of the school environment and want to know more



about what children are learning in school (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999). More studies are needed to better understand not only *how* parents are involved, but also *why* they choose to be involved, and what motivates them to *stay* involved in public education, from preschool through college. One key factor underlying the motivation of parents to be involved at any level of a child's education is a core belief that parental involvement will indeed make a positive difference.

### *Parental Involvement Self-efficacy*

An individual's belief that he or she can effectively carry out an action is referred to as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994). In order for parents to strengthen their involvement in the education of children, they must first see themselves as possessing the necessary social or academic skills needed to execute specific involvement tasks (Deslandes & Bertrand, 1998; Hoover-Dempsey, Blassler, & Brissie, 1992; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Parental involvement self-efficacy is a parent's belief that he or she can successfully influence a child's education, and studies suggest this type of self-efficacy may impact the extent to which parents initiate their involvement (Deslandes & Bertrand; Hoover-Dempsey et al.; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997). Research indicates perceptions held by teachers and parents about parent efficacy are unrelated to gender, marital status, employment status, or family income; however, parent efficacy has been found to be positively related to parents' educational attainment (Hoover-Dempsey et al.). This finding suggests parent efficacy beliefs might be directly related to familiarization with an educational culture. Lacking in the literature are studies of parental involvement self-efficacy beliefs of immigrant parents

educated in countries other than the U.S., and studies of parents who received limited or no formal schooling at all.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identified the following three key concepts that influence choices parents make about becoming involved in their children's education: (a) how parents construct their role as a parent (influenced by cultural background), (b) how confident parents feel about their ability to help their children (sense of efficacy), and (c) whether parents feel invited, both by their children and the school. Of these three factors, invitation was often found to be the most important reason parents chose to become involved in children's schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler).

Studies indicate the home culture and parents' perceptions of schools are two powerful factors relevant to parental involvement (López, 2001; Scribner et al., 1999). López found migrant parents of academically successful students perceived they were highly involved in their children's educational lives, even if they did not regularly attend school functions. The migrant parents in the study conducted by López defined parental involvement as teaching children the value of education through hard work. By taking children with them to work in the fields, migrant parents hoped their children would understand the limited career options available to those who did not complete high school (López).

### *Promising Practices*

The literature discusses many different strategies for involving parents in public education, but the most promising practices appear to be those that engage parents and teachers as partners and those that build relationships based on mutual trust and respect

(Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein et al., 2009). Grounded in Epstein's parental involvement framework (1995), Stelmack (2005) identified ways schools gain the trust of parents such as: (a) creating a welcoming environment; (b) using frequent and various communication methods; (c) involving parents in decisions that affect their child; (d) learning about parents' strengths, skills, talents, and experiences; (e) providing strategies and resources for parents to support their children's learning; (f) initiating the process of building relationships with parents; and (g) having leaders who believe in parents as true partners in their children's learning. While each of these practices has merit, the effectiveness of these strategies often depends on the strength of the relationship between parents and teachers (Stelmack).

Much research has been devoted to helping teachers and parents improve communicate and strengthen partnerships (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein et al., 2009; Olivos, 2006; Stelmack, 2005; Valdés, 1996). Lacking, however, in the literature is a shared understanding of what constitutes effective parent-teacher partnerships, and what makes parental involvement meaningful, particularly from the frame of reference of migrant parents. Although multiple perspectives have been shared relative to parental involvement, the terms effective, meaningful, and partnership remain equivocal. As school demographics shift and diversity continues to grow across the nation, new studies are needed to increase awareness and deepen understanding about what makes parental involvement meaningful and effective, particularly for historically underserved families, schools, and communities.

Henderson and Mapp (2002) found successful schools share three key practices in engaging diverse families (a) they focus on building trusting, collaborative

relationships among teachers, families, and community members; (b) they recognize, respect, and address families' needs and any class and cultural differences; and (c) they embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared. Further research is needed to help identify meaningful and effective ways for schools, parents, and communities to work together across racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic divides to close the achievement gap between dominant, mainstream students and their marginalized peers.

### Parental Involvement in Latino Immigrant and Migrant Families

As the fastest growing minority group in the nation, Latino families live in every state, “but large concentrations of Latinos live in California, New York, Texas, Florida, Illinois, Arizona, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Colorado.... In some states the Latino population is largely migratory, working in agriculture and living in temporary, substandard housing camps” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 1). Latino culture is a fusion of cultures; it is not a race (Bordas, 2007). Latinos families “are linked to twenty-three countries where Spanish is the primary language and are related to the Portuguese and the Italians, who share their Mediterranean ancestry” (Bordas, p. 6) and similar values that center on the extended family, Catholicism, and a concern for the emotional aspects of human nature (Bordas). In the U.S., 80% of Latinos speak some Spanish in the home; 60 % are of Mexican descent, 10 % are Puerto Ricans, 9% are of Central and South American origin, and 3.4 % are Cuban-Americans (Bordas). Important to note, the fastest growing child population in the U.S. currently consists of Latino children born to Mexican immigrant families (Crosnoe, 2006).

Latino families, like all families, benefit when their strengths, culture, and efforts to support learning are understood, valued, and encouraged (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Perea, 2004; Valdés, 1996). For Latino immigrant families with limited English language skills, finding meaning and ways to connect with the U.S. school culture can be confusing and overwhelming (Delgado-Gaitan; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Perea). Like other immigrant groups, Latino immigrants experience language barriers and cultural differences of living in a new country. Latino immigrant parents can become culturally and linguistically isolated from their children's schools because of work schedules, limited transportation options, fears, and beliefs or values that sharply differ from those of a predominantly White, middle-class educational system (Delgado-Gaitan; Perea).

Lacking in the literature are studies that have examined the beliefs of Latino immigrant parents relative to parental involvement. This may be due to language and cultural barriers, high mobility, fears related to immigration status, and a dearth of validated assessment tools that can be used with this population. The number of Latino immigrant families continues to increase dramatically across the U.S. and parental involvement in this population warrants further study. Unfortunately, the bulk of past studies conducted on Latino immigrant families reflect a deficit paradigm which has resonated in the literature for over 3 decades (Flores, 1982, 1993; Olivos, 2006; Valencia, 1986, 1993).

### *The Deficit Paradigm*

The deficit paradigm is based on a belief that “culturally diverse communities are deficient in some way or another and must be provided compensation to make up for

these deficiencies” (Núñez, 1992, p. 39). Negative attitudes based on perceived deficits permeate schools and have persisted over time (Flores, 1982, 1993; Olivos, 2006; Valencia, 1986, 1993). Deficit thinking reinforces preferences and the unequal treatment of Latino students and sustains racial and discriminatory practices in society (Olivos; Valencia). Flores (1993) found some teachers even dehumanized Latino students and inappropriately labeled them as being mentally retarded, culturally and linguistically deprived, or at-risk, simply because they were Latino. The deficit paradigm even goes as far as suggesting the cause of low Latino student achievement is the students themselves (Valencia).

Latino and other minority parents confront the negative impact of deficit thinking that stems from mainstream parent groups; particularly White parents (Brooks, 2005). Studies have found some schools perceive a lack of parental involvement in Latino immigrant families and blame Latino parents for their children’s underachievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Olivos, 2006). New studies are needed to reexamine how schools view parental involvement in Latino immigrant families and to identify the ways Latino parents are involved in children’s learning, particularly in the home (López et al., 2001). To combat deficit thinking, studies are also needed to examine the social and cultural capital (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) Latino immigrant parents bring with them to the U.S., such as strengths, resiliency, and expressions of goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983) in parental involvement.

### *Cultural and Social Capital*

To offset deficit thinking, it is important to acknowledge all families have social and cultural capital that can be tapped to benefit learning. Cultural capital is the ability

of parents and students to comply with the dominant society's standards for interactions (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Social scientists have argued the capital immigrant families bring with them has a clear influence on their experiences in the U.S. (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Examples include financial resources, social class, educational background, psychological and physical health, and social support networks (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Unfortunately, many educators lack awareness of the cultural and social capital of minority families and the linguistic and socioeconomic differences that exist between minority families and dominant mainstream families (Brooks, 2005). Schools that are culturally responsive and respectful of the social capital and constraints of minority families are able to successfully engage minority parents as active participants in the education of children (Brooks).

#### *Cultural Misunderstandings*

In addition to an achievement gap, studies also suggest cultural gaps exist between the U.S. school system and Latino immigrant families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; López et al., 2001; Perea, 2004; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Because knowledge and beliefs about school systems are often based on lived experiences, the beliefs of immigrant parents may contradict the expectations of U.S. schools for parents to be actively involved in public education (Crosnoe, 2006; Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Many immigrant parents do not understand why U.S. schools expect them to advocate for the educational needs of children; conversely, they believe teachers are solely responsible for what goes on in the classroom, and that parents have no business in micromanaging schools (Olivos; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Immigrant parents may not feel secure in

questioning school authorities, especially if they themselves had limited formal schooling, or if they lack understanding of how the U.S. educational system functions (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco).

As a rule, immigrant parents believe strongly in the importance of schooling, but the value they place on education is not clearly transmitted to teachers, as Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) noted:

Many teachers interpret the general “hands off” approach to schooling among many immigrant parents as lack of interest in the child’s school progress. Nothing could be further from the truth.... for the vast majority of immigrant parents the opportunities afforded by schooling in the new country are a highly valued gift.  
(p. 150)

For Latino immigrant parents who work long hours or have multiple jobs, attending school activities might not be possible. Studies indicate teachers interpret immigrant parents’ lack of participation in school events as “indifference, disinterest, or incompetence” (Olivos, 2006, p. 65). This view is paradoxical for immigrant parents who believe teachers and educational leaders are well-prepared experts in the field and see no need or role for parents to be involved in schools (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Olivos, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco).

Some studies suggest Mexican immigrant parents are less involved than mainstream parents in the day-to-day activities of schools, regardless of involvement patterns outside the school (Crosnoe, 2006; López, Rodriguez, & Sanchez, 1995). Mexican immigrant parents may not be as familiar with the U.S. educational system as parents who were educated in this system, and they may be less aware of the importance



of reading activities and home learning practices that support children's success in school (Crosnoe). Despite the fact that Mexican immigrants care deeply about education, their parental involvement practices do not always align with parenting strategies highly valued by the U.S. educational system (Crosnoe).

Epstein (1995) found most educators enter low-income and diversely populated schools without an understanding of family backgrounds, concepts of caring, or a framework of partnerships. A lack of teacher understanding of immigrant parents' beliefs about parental involvement and experiences with schools can create barriers and conflicts for schools and immigrant families that lead to misinterpretations, poor communication, and impede the development of meaningful relationships and partnerships (Epstein). Anti-immigrant sentiment can also fuel the unequal treatment and discriminatory practices in schools and communities, and can hurt Latino immigrant families, particularly if they lack proof of U.S. citizenship.

### *Immigration*

Immigration is a politically charged issue that continues to polarize communities and ignite conflicts at national, state, and local levels. As a key policy concern, immigration remains "one of our nations' thorniest, most complex and politically charged issues (University of Denver, 2009, p. 6). A report published by the University of Denver (2009) recognized immigration as an "opportunity to be capitalized upon to our national benefit, rather than a reality to be ignored" (p. 6). The report stated the following:

The irony of immigration lies in our present inability to engage for the future an issue that has so profoundly shaped our past.... If we do not find a common

framework... we will likely be engaged by it without our consent, as the forces of global migration bear upon the United States. (p. 7)

Immigrants who come to the U.S. are “first and foremost motivated by economic opportunity, a faith and optimism in a better tomorrow, and strong family ties” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 55). For most, immigration results in opportunity and personal growth, but usually not without heavy costs (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco).

As one of the most stressful events a family can undergo, immigration alters the context of life through loss of community ties, jobs, customs, and often language (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). By leaving one’s homeland and culture, immigrants not only lose significant relationships with extended family members and trusted friends, “They also lose the social roles that provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world. Initially, without a sense of competence, control, and belonging, many immigrants will feel marginalized” (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, p. 70).

Immigration is part of a bigger force, global migration, a force that “may be managed, but is not likely to be stopped” (University of Denver, 2009, p. 4). Immigration can also be a transformative process with profound implications, not only for immigrant families, but also for their receiving communities (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). As growing numbers of people, driven by a desire to escape poverty, political upheaval, and natural disasters, migrate in search of better lives, global migration has become “a force of extraordinary power” (University of Denver, p. 4).

How educational leaders chose to respond to the challenges and opportunities presented by migration and immigration will, to a large extent, determine our nation's capacity to produce a well-educated workforce to compete in an increasingly complex and competitive global environment. Peter Senge (1990), a world leader in systems thinking, found people do not resist change, but they do resist being changed. The transformational changes brought about by immigration require mutual accommodation and negotiation as immigrant families attempt to integrate with mainstream U.S. culture and establish new roots in communities they will eventually call home (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In spite of how people feel about this complex issue, immigration remains "at the core of both the history and the destiny of the United States" (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, p. 36). As a general topic, immigration continues to spark national debates which become even fiercer when issues related to illegal immigration are raised.

*Illegal immigration.* According to a report published by the Pew Hispanic Center (Passal & Cohen, 2009), there were 11.9 million unauthorized immigrants living in the U.S. in 2008. While some unauthorized aliens enter the country illegally, others enter legally but become unauthorized when their visas expire and they remain in the U.S. Whatever term is applied, be it undocumented person, unauthorized, or illegal alien, "the fact remains that a great many individuals are living outside the boundaries of established American society, an inherently unhealthy situation" (University of Denver, 2009, p. 30). Not a homogenous group, illegal immigrants are made up of single men and woman as well as families with children. Some immigrant families have a "mixed-status" (University of Denver, 2009, p. 30), meaning they have at least one unauthorized

immigrant parent and at least one U.S.-born child. The Pew Hispanic Center (Passal & Cohen) reported 73% of the children of unauthorized immigrants were born in the U.S., which means they are U.S. citizens.

*Public sentiment toward immigrants.* Prior to 1965, the vast majority of immigrants came to the U.S. from Europe or Canada; whereas, today most emigrate from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia (Edmonston & Passel, 1994). Currently, the largest immigration stream of all flows directly from México (Crosnoe, 2006), and Mexican immigrants account for almost 25% of all Latinos in the U.S. Together with persons born in the U.S. of Mexican ancestry, Mexican immigrants comprise the Mexican- American population “which grew from 18.7 million in 1996 to 28.3 million in 2006. Almost 60% of this increase among Mexican-Americans came from U.S.- born individuals, and just over 40% from immigration” (Wallace, Castañeda, Guendelman, Padilla-Frausto, & Felt, 2008, p. 9).

Traditionally, perceptions and attitudes of the American people toward immigrants, particularly Mexican immigrants, tend to mirror the health of the U.S. economy (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). In reviewing U.S. public opinion polls on immigration, Espenshade & Beleanger (1998) studied national surveys conducted by 20 organizations over 30 years and found:

Historically, a very strong correlation exists between anti-immigrant sentiment and economic anxiety, particularly around unemployment rates. Put simply, when unemployment rates are high, anti-immigrant feelings are also usually high. Likewise, when unemployment rates drop and there is optimism about the economy, anti-immigration sentiment fades. (p. 41)

Public sentiment toward immigrants not only influences the job market, it also spills over into public schools. In spite of federal laws that guarantee immigrant students the same rights as U.S. citizens to a free, public education (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982), some still question whether educational rights should be extended to students who lack documentation as legal immigrants.

*Educational rights.* Contrary to public beliefs, Suárez-Orozco (1999) found the vast majority of immigrants in the U.S. do possess legal documentation and many others are awaiting their documentation requests to be processed by the U.S. government. While estimates have been made about the number and percentage of undocumented immigrant adult workers in the U.S., statistics related to the legal status of immigrant students in U.S. public schools do not exist. The reason these data are lacking is because schools cannot require or even request proof of legal immigration status to enroll students in public schools because that would be a violation of a student's educational rights (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

It is important to recognize not all Latino students are immigrants, and not all immigrants are undocumented. In fact, the growing numbers of young Latino children born in the U.S. to immigrant parents are, by virtue of their birthplace, U.S. citizens (Passal & Cohen, 2009). Regardless of one's documentation status, immigrant students are entitled to the same public educational benefits as any student born in the U.S. (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982).

Although U.S. Constitutional law protects the educational rights of all school-age children, debates about whether undocumented immigrant students should have the same rights as U.S.-born students persist. This dilemma was addressed and resolved by

the U.S. Supreme Court in a landmark case, *Plyler v. Doe* (1982), in which a Texas public school district wanted to specifically disallow undocumented Mexican immigrant children entry into their schools. In a deeply divided 5-to-4 vote, the Supreme Court found children who are illegally in the U.S. have the same right to a free, public education as legal immigrants and American citizens. Transcripts from *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) case stated:

The illegal alien of today may well be the legal alien of tomorrow ... without an education, these undocumented children, already disadvantaged as a result of poverty, lack of English-speaking ability, and undeniable racial prejudices . . . will become permanently locked into the lowest socio-economic class. (p. 2)

Arguments that undocumented aliens, because of their immigration status, were not persons within the jurisdiction of the State and therefore had no right to the equal protection of Texas law were rejected when the Supreme Court determined:

Whatever his status under the immigration laws, an alien is surely a “person” in any ordinary sense of that term. Aliens, even aliens whose presence in this country is unlawful, have long been recognized as “persons” guaranteed due process of law by the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments. (p. 2)

Recognizing undocumented immigrants as “persons,” the decision made in 1982 was the first time “the court found that the Fourteenth Amendment’s guarantee of equal protection should extend to anyone, citizen or stranger, who lived within the country’s boundaries” (Thorpe, 2009).

In addition to protecting the legal rights of all students, the case of *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) also raised ethical and moral questions about democracy and equality, as noted in the transcript:

Sheer incapability or lax enforcement of the laws barring entry into this country, coupled with the failure to establish an effective bar to the employment of undocumented aliens, has resulted in the creation of a substantial 'shadow population' of illegal migrants - numbering in the millions - within our borders. This situation raises the specter of a permanent caste of undocumented resident aliens, encouraged by some to remain here as a source of cheap labor, but nevertheless denied the benefits that our society makes available to citizens and lawful residents. The existence of such an underclass presents most difficult problems for a Nation that prides itself on adherence to principles of equality under law. (p. 3)

These points raised by the Supreme Court illustrate the deep connections between immigration, work, and public education in the U.S.

Recognizing public schools as the "most vital civic institution for the preservation of a democratic system of government, and as the primary vehicle for transmitting the values on which our society rests" (*Plyler v. Doe*, 1982, p. 3), the Court determined:

Education has a fundamental role in maintaining the fabric of our society. We cannot ignore the significant social costs borne by our Nation when select groups are denied the means to absorb the values and skills upon which our social order rests. In addition to the pivotal role of education in sustaining our political and

cultural heritage, denial of education to some isolated group of children poses an affront to one of the goals of the Equal Protection Clause: the abolition of governmental barriers presenting unreasonable obstacles to advancement on the basis of individual merit. By denying these children a basic education, we deny them the ability to live within the structure of our civic institutions, and foreclose any realistic possibility that they will contribute in even the smallest way to the progress of our Nation. (p. 4)

The decision in *Plyler v. Doe* (1982) made over 28 years ago continues to influence educational policies and practices today, and provides a legal foundation for schools when challenged by those who still feel some immigrant children are undeserving of public education.

Unlike in public education, immigration status does affect students' ability to access other public services, resources, and opportunities to improve the general quality of life (Chavez, 1992). In regard to children, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco (2001) noted:

Immigration can become traumatic for children when anti-immigrant disparagement and discrimination, as well as structural barriers, add to the already stressful nature of immigration. How does a child incorporate the notion that she is an alien, or an illegal – that she is unwanted and does not warrant the most basic rights of education and health care? (p. 7)

When older students first realize their undocumented status can keep them from attending higher education, they feel angry, hopeless, and depressed; many simply quit going to school in their senior year (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Because many



undocumented immigrant children remain in the U.S. and often become citizens, it is in the best interest of society they be given full access to public education and health services (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). The “desirability of providing various public services to illegal immigrants and the cost of doing so has been the subject of endless debate and innumerable studies” (University of Denver, 2009, p. 34). Some argue the cost for educating undocumented immigrant children is unwarranted; notwithstanding, the long term costs to society for not educating all children is far greater (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco).

### *Migrant Families*

Earning far below the poverty level set by the U.S. government, migrant farm workers have been described as perhaps the poorest and most marginalized group of workers in the nation (López et al., 2001; Parra-Cardona et al., 2006). Migrant families can become trapped in a cycle of poverty perpetuated by the unpredictable, seasonal nature of farm work (Vocke, 2007). The largest proportions of migrant farm workers in the U.S. are immigrants of Mexican origin (Parra-Cardona et al.), which might explain why studies of parental involvement in migrant families have predominantly focused on Mexican immigrant families (López et al.).

Studies show migrant farm workers from México have characteristics similar to other workers who emigrate from México: most are low-skilled laborers from rural areas with low rates of educational attainment and English proficiency, and high rates of poverty (Crosnoe, 2006). Certainly not all, but some migrant farm workers lack legal documentation, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to obtain needed services for their family members (Crosnoe).

It has been said that for people, as for plants, frequent repotting disrupts root systems (Putnam, 2000). Migrant families live on the margins of different cultures and communities where they work in temporary jobs, but the economic drive to continually move on hinders the likelihood of planting permanent roots. As newcomers to the community, migrant families are sometimes viewed as “undeserving foreigners” (Ferguson, Lavalette, & Whitmore, 2005, p. 132) who must first prove their entitlement in order to gain access to basic necessities, such as public housing, health care, employment, and social services. Believing that working hard is the best way to help children (López, 2001), migrant parents often work long hours and have multiple jobs, reducing the amount of time they have available to spend with their children (Bordas, 2007; Crosnoe, 2006).

Of great concern is the large number of migrant children pressured to work alongside their parents in the fields, under the same harsh conditions, because the small amount of extra money they generate is needed to supplement the family income (López et al., 2001). As “one of the most educationally deprived populations in the United States” (Vocke, 2007, p. 6), migrant children struggle to keep up with their peers in school. Sadly, the transient and marginalized life of migrant families has detrimental effects on migrant students’ health and education, as well as the development of their relationships with teachers and peers (Vocke).

Because migrant families move frequently across school district, state, and national borders, it can be difficult for parents and teachers to build and strengthen relationships. Studies show boundaries created by differences in language, culture, and life experiences tend to isolate migrant families from schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004;

Olivos, 2006; Valdés, 1996). To eliminate some of the barriers that impede academic success for migrant students, the federally funded Migrant Education Program (MEP) provides financial and human resources to help connect migrant families and school communities (U. S. Department of Education, 2003b). Similar to Title I, Part A of NCLB, the MEP includes requirements for schools to provide meaningful opportunities for parents to be involved in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services for their children (U. S. Department of Education). To accomplish this, the MEP includes provisions for migrant Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) to be developed at the state and local levels in programs that receive federal funding under the MEP. Programs administered under the MEP must encourage and support the participation of migrant parents in PAC activities so that the needs and ideas of migrant parents are addressed (U.S. Department of Education).

Unquestionably, migrant families have specific needs “particular to the conditions of migrancy that make parental involvement an increasingly complex process” (López et al., 2001, p. 258). Migrant families face challenges associated with an “experience of marginalization resulting from contextual and structural factors, such as racial and ethnic discrimination, lack of bilingual services, and health and economic disparities” (Parra-Cardona et al., 2006, p. 363). While the literature documents the many needs and barriers migrant parents confront in supporting children’s academic success, there is a paucity of studies grounded in a migrant-specific research context (López et al.). New studies are needed to help educational leaders, policy makers, parents, and other stakeholders initiate actions to create a more socially just and equitable educational system in which *all* students, particularly migrant students, have opportunities to succeed.

## Summary

Ensuring all students achieve academic success is a monumentally important task requiring the cooperation of those most influential in children's lives: their parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Numerous studies have documented the important role parents play in supporting children's success in school. The literature abounds with school-based studies focused on traditional forms of parental involvement, forms that are highly valued in the U.S. educational system. Far fewer studies have addressed the ways marginalized parents, particularly Latino immigrant and migrant parents, understand and practice meaningful parental involvement.

The potential power and influence immigrant and migrant parents have on the academic success of children is a phenomenon that has been ignored by many, and unfortunately, underestimated by most (Olivos, 2006). Studies of parental involvement in Mexican immigrant families have not kept pace with the rapid growth of this population. There is a paucity of literature that recognizes Latino immigrant and migrant parents as assets to student achievement. More studies are needed to identify the social and cultural capital of immigrant and migrant parents and the effective and meaningful ways parents *are* involved in public education, both inside and outside of the school building.

Lacking in the literature are studies that specifically address parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life. Little is known about how migrant parents understand, make sense of, and construct meaning in parental involvement. High mobility and differences in culture, language, and experiences with educational systems can create communication barriers between teachers and parents, making it difficult to build partnerships to support the academic success of migrant students. Shamefully,

deficit thinking and negative attitudes towards Latino immigrant and migrant families as people undeserving of public benefits, including public education, have persisted over time.

Qualitative and quantitative research methods each provide unique designs for studies that can add to the body of knowledge about meaningful parental involvement. Because the research problem in this study centered on a need for a deeper understanding of parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life, a qualitative approach provided the best fit. In the following chapter, the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodologies, and methods used to address the research problem and the questions raised by this inquiry are detailed.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter opens with a discussion of the epistemology, theoretical framework, methodologies, and qualitative methods used to gain a deeper understanding of meaningful parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life. Participant selection criteria, data collection and data analysis procedures, settings, and strategies used to enhance trustworthiness of the findings are explained in this chapter.

To address the research problem, the following research question was raised by this qualitative case study inquiry:

Q 1 How do migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement?

To gain a deeper understanding of the research problem, the following three sub-questions were also raised:

1A How do migrant parents practice meaningful parental involvement?

1B How do migrant parents express goodness in parental involvement?

1C What barriers impede meaningful parental involvement for migrant parents?

These questions guided my thinking as I designed this inquiry, collected and analyzed the data, constructed the findings, and portrayed the conclusions and recommendations.

## Qualitative Tradition

Past studies of parental involvement have generally been framed in quantitative terms that do not necessarily promote the empowerment of ethnically diverse parents as advocates for children's academic success (Olivos, 2006). Overall, findings from prior studies reflect school-centered definitions, values, and priorities, and include conclusions based on statistical data used to measure and evaluate parental involvement practices (Olivos). While statistics are convincing and convey important facts and information, qualitative data can also have a powerful impact on understanding phenomena, as Wagner et al. (2006) stated:

Seeing the faces, and hearing the stories, hopes, and opinions of those in our own community moves us emotionally, reminds us of the moral imperative behind our work, and enables us to see the information as living in three dimensions instead of just one. The stories, the faces, and the voices remain with us with an insistency that numbers can rarely inspire. (p. 135)

Because the focus of this inquiry centered on sense-making and gaining a deeper understanding of meaningful parental involvement, the methodologies and methods used to address the research questions were qualitative in nature.

Qualitative research has been defined as “an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Although time-consuming and often costly, qualitative approaches are needed “when not enough is known about a phenomenon for standardized instruments to have been developed” (Patton, 2002, p. 33). Understanding meaning in context is the key purpose of qualitative research, as Patton explained: “Psychometricians

try to measure *it*. Experimentalists try to control *it*. Interviewers ask questions about *it*. Observers watch *it*. Participant observers do *it*. Statisticians count *it*. Evaluators value *it*. Qualitative inquirers find meaning in *it*" (p. 1, emphasis in original). The "it" in this qualitative case study was meaningful parental involvement contextualized through the lens of migrant parents.

Qualitative researchers "*are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed*, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 1998, p. 6, emphasis in original). Using naturalistic designs, qualitative researchers study real word situations that unfold in real world settings, and remain open to whatever emerges (Patton, 2002). Observations take place in natural settings, and people are interviewed with open-ended questions asked in comfortable and familiar places (Patton). Because the qualitative research tradition focuses on understanding meaning in context, words, pictures, and artifacts are often used to convey rich, descriptive findings (Merriam).

Qualitative inquiry includes key philosophical assumptions based on a view that reality is constructed by individuals as they interact with their social worlds (Merriam, 1998). Because the researcher is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Merriam; Patton, 2002), it was important for me to reflect on my skills, limitations, biases, and personality before approaching this inquiry. Merriam listed the following three essential attributes for researchers to assess before considering a qualitative approach to inquiry: (a) Tolerance for ambiguity, (b) sensitivity to context and data, and (c) good communication skills. After much self-reflection and discussions with my dissertation committee members, I



chose a qualitative approach because it provided the best fit with my research questions, personal attributes, skills, and worldview. My rationale and assumptions are embedded in the following sections which detail the epistemology, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and methods used to address the research problem in this inquiry.

### Epistemology: Constructionism

Epistemology deals with the nature of human knowledge and embodies how we know what we know (Crotty, 1998). Constructionism, the epistemology most often cited in qualitative studies, is a view that *“all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context”* (Crotty, p. 42, emphasis in original). Constructionists believe meaning cannot be discovered or created; rather, it can only be constructed by humans as they engage with the world (Crotty). *“It is in and out of this interplay that meaning is born”* (Crotty, p. 45).

My epistemological stance in this inquiry centered on constructionism, and, as a constructionist, I view all reality as meaningful. I understand that as people, we all engage with and interpret our world, and we may construct different meanings about the same phenomenon (Crotty, 1998). Relevant to this inquiry, Latino immigrant and migrant parents, based on their unique experiences and interactions with their worlds, might construct meaning in parental involvement differently than other parents who do not share the same experiences. Moving frequently in search of temporary or seasonal work in agriculture presents a unique life context that might influence how Latino immigrant and migrant parents understand and make sense of parental involvement with the U.S.

public education system. As Crotty noted, “different people may well inhabit quite different worlds. Their different worlds constitute for them diverse ways of knowing, distinguishable sets of meanings, separate realities” (p. 64).

Constructionism and constructivism are terms often used interchangeably in the literature; however, Crotty (1998) differentiated these terms as two distinct epistemological considerations. Crotty viewed constructivism as “the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (p. 58) and constructionism a “collective generation [and transmission] of meaning” (p. 58). Constructivism was presented by Crotty as an individual experience, whereas, constructionism was viewed through social and cultural contexts. Social constructionism emphasizes “the hold culture has on us; it shapes the way in which we see things (even the way in which we feel things!) and gives us a quite definite view of the world” (Crotty, p. 58). Constructionists believe we are all introduced to a world of meaning through the complex and subtle processes of the cultures into which we are born (Crotty). Unlike constructivism which focuses on the individual, constructionism tends to foster the critical spirit by calling culture into question (Crotty). Based on these distinctions, constructionism provided the epistemological foundation upon which the theoretical framework of this inquiry rests.

#### Theoretical Framework: Critical Inquiry

Theoretical perspectives have to do with “our view of the human world and social life within that world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 7). Such perspectives reflect the philosophy, assumptions, and stance researchers bring to the research process and affect all aspects of research studies (Merriam, 1998). As a construct, parental involvement could be conceptualized from a variety of frameworks and theories, but based on my personal

beliefs and worldview, the perspectives in this study center on principles of social justice and equity in public education (Marshall & Gerstl-Pepin, 2005). These two principles, rooted in critical theory, were the underpinnings of the theoretical framework used to structure to this inquiry.

### *Critical Theory*

Critical theory has been described as ongoing projects that include reflection and action to create a free and just society, and central to this theory are the relationships between power, culture, privilege, and oppression (Crotty, 1998). Key concepts in critical theory relative to this inquiry include social justice, voice, equity, and social action for change (Crotty). Freire (1972a), a critical thinker, believed teaching is a political act that is never neutral, and he proposed educators focus on creating equity and social justice by changing systems of oppression within public schools and society. Expanding on Freire's philosophy, Crotty stated, "While critical inquirers admit the impossibility of effecting consummate social justice, they believe their struggle to be worthwhile. It can lead at least to a more just and freer society than we have at the moment" (p. 157).

### *Critical Inquiry*

As a form of research and a fundamental activity in democratic societies, critical inquiry calls current ideology into question and initiates action in the cause of social justice (Crotty, 1998). Karl Marx, the founder of Marxism, was described by Crotty as a revolutionary philosopher who "inspired and laid the foundation for this form of inquiry" (Crotty, p. 115). As a theoretical perspective, critical inquiry evolved from the thinking of a group of scholars in the 1920s collectively known as the Frankfurt School (Crotty). Members of this scholarly group, which included Horkeimer, Adorno, Habermas, and

Freire, helped develop the frameworks that continue to guide critical thinking today (Crotty).

Crotty stated, “inquiry spawned by the critical spirit ... invites researchers and participants (ideally one and the same) to discard false consciousness, open themselves to new ways of understanding, and take effective action for change” (p. 157). In critical inquiry, the researcher and participants are viewed as “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1972b, p. 31) and, as research partners, they learn from and with each other through a process in which they each grow. Critical theory helped inform my thinking throughout this study as I continuously reflected on my beliefs related to social justice and equity in public education. Used as building blocks, key concepts and constructs of critical theory were integrated in the construction of a framework for this inquiry. Resting upon an epistemological foundation grounded in constructionism, critical theory was used to structure the conceptual framework that supported the methodological design of this inquiry.

#### Methodologies: Case Study and Portraiture

Research methodology is a description, or plan, for how a particular inquiry will be carried out. In other words, methodology provides the design, or blueprint, for selecting and utilizing appropriate methods to address research questions. This section provides an overview and justification for the two methodologies used in this inquiry: case study and portraiture. As complementary methodologies, case study and portraiture aligned well with the epistemology and theoretical framework of this inquiry. In the following section, these two methodologies are detailed.

### *Case Study*

Case study has been singled out as a particularly useful form of research for promoting learning (Stake, 1995; Wagner et al., 2006). Unlike all other forms of qualitative research, case study addresses a single unit, or a bounded system (Creswell, 1998, 2005; Merriam, 1998). Creswell explained case study in the following statement:

Whereas some consider “the case” an object of study (Stake, 1995) and others consider it a methodology (e.g., Merriam, 1998), a case study is an exploration of a “bounded system” or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context.  
(p. 61, emphasis in original)

Creswell, Merriam, and Stake all used the term “bounded” to explain case studies as being constrained by limits, such as time and place. Because case studies are bounded, they have a clear beginning and ending point. Context is another important consideration in case study research because cases are always situated within a particular setting, which can be physical, social, historical, economical, or personal (Creswell).

Case studies can transport the reader into unfamiliar settings, or “allow us to experience situations and individuals in our own settings that we would not normally have access to.... to see something familiar but in new and interesting ways” (Merriam, 1998, p. 238). Ultimately, the goal of case study is to convey understanding, and in educational research, qualitative case studies can also extend knowledge in the field and improve practice (Merriam). Creswell (1998, 2005) highlighted the use of case study as a methodology to gain an in-depth understanding of a situation and the meaning it holds for those involved. Stake (1995) explained case study as “the study of the particularity and

complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi).

The design of case study includes extensive data collection from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Case study “involves the widest array of data collection as the researcher attempts to build an in-depth picture of the case” (Creswell, 1998, p. 123). While case study has a place in both quantitative and qualitative research (Yin, 2009), the exploratory and descriptive nature of qualitative case study methodology has particular value for the field of education research (Merriam), where the cases of interest are usually people and programs (Stake).

### *Portraiture*

Like case study, portraiture is another qualitative research methodology used to “capture the richness, complexity and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context, conveying the perspectives of the people who are negotiating those experiences” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Portraitists are researchers who make use of portraiture methodology to document the findings from their inquiries in portraits, or “life drawings” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 3). Portraits are documents or texts that come “as close as possible to painting with words” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 4). In the following statement, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis described the relationship between the portraitist and participants in studies where portraiture is utilized as a research methodology:

Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions – their

authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in a social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. The relationship between the two is rich with meaning and resonance and becomes the arena for navigating the empirical, aesthetic, and ethical dimensions of authentic and compelling narrative. (p. xv)

Elaborating further, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis emphasized how portraiture “seeks to illuminate the complex dimensions of *goodness*” (p. xvi, emphasis in original). Because portraitists assume the expression of goodness “will always be laced with imperfections” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 9), they do not impose their own definition of what is “good” on the inquiry, nor do they assume a shared definition of goodness even exists (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Portraitists do, however, believe goodness can be expressed in untold ways, and, as researchers, they aim to capture and portray goodness as expressed by participants in a particular setting or context (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Grounded in art and a science, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) defined portraiture as a research approach that integrates five essential features: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole. Embedded within each of these features are dimensions, functions, and key strategies used by the portraitist throughout the research process to interpret the particular feature (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Relative to this inquiry were four concepts defined in portraiture methodology: goodness, self, place, and voice. A description of each of these concepts follows.

*Goodness.* The discovery of goodness begins with a presumption that it does exist and is “there to be found – and, moreover, to be learned from” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 163). Through relationships with participants, the portraitist searches “for what is good, for what works, for what is of value – looking for strength, resilience, and creativity in the people, cultures, and institutions she is documenting” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 158). Goodness is “a complex, dynamic concept that embraces imperfection and vulnerability; a concept whose expression is best documented through detailed, nuanced narratives placed in context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 142).

*Self.* More than in any other form of research, the central and creative role of the self of the portraitist is made evident and visible, emerging as the “instrument of inquiry, an eye on perspective-taking, an ear that discerns nuances, and a voice that speaks and offers insights” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 13). The self of the portraitist is ubiquitous, and “her soul echoes thorough the piece” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 105).

*Place.* The portraitist is placed “in the picture - not in the center dominating the action and overwhelming the scene, but on the edge witnessing what is happening” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 59). Perched as a witness in the setting, the place and stance of the portraitist are written into the story, as if to say “from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives and biases I bring; this is the scene I select; this is how people seem to be responding to my presence” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 50).

*Voice.* The voice of the portraitist is omnipresent in the inquiry, “overarching and undergirding the text, framing the piece, naming the metaphors, and echoing through the



central themes” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 85). The researcher’s voice is ubiquitous, as Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis described:

The voice of the researcher is everywhere: in the assumptions, preoccupations, and framework she brings to the inquiry; in the questions she asks; in the data she gathers; in the choice of stories she tells; in the language, cadence, and rhythm of her narrative. Voice is the research instrument, echoing the *self* ... of the portraitist - her eyes, her ears, her insights, her style, her aesthetic. (p. 85)

Elaborating on the use of voice, Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis described the voices of the researcher and participants as being captured in a “dance of dialogue” (p. 103) in which the perspectives of each are revealed.

As in other forms of qualitative research, portraitists emphasize the “flexibility of research design and the iterative process of data collection and thematic development” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188). Emergent themes are used to structure findings in a rich narrative, a portrait known as the “aesthetic whole” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 243). However, “the identification of emergent themes does not reduce the complexity of the whole; it merely makes complexity more comprehensive” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 215). To be believable and make sense to the reader, portraits should cause a “click of recognition... a ‘yes, of course’ response rather than a ‘yes, but’ response” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 247). This yes, of course experience for the reader is what Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis defined as resonance.

In this study I attempted to integrate the essential features of portraiture to portray a new and deeper understanding of meaningful parental involvement from the frame of reference of migrant parents. My hope was to construct findings that would resonate with

three essential audiences: (a) The migrant parent participants in this study who will see themselves reflected in the story; (b) the reader who will view the portraits presented in this dissertation as authentic and trustworthy; and (c) myself, the portraitist, “whose deep knowledge of the setting and self-critical stance allowed her to see the ‘truth value’ in her work” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 247).

The two methodologies used in this qualitative inquiry, case study and portraiture, aligned with my epistemological stance and critical framework. As complimentary methodologies, case study and portraiture guided my choice of methods and helped shape their use in the selection of participants, collection and analysis of data, construction of findings, and in the portrayal of recommendations and conclusions. In the following section, methods used to address the research problem are explained.

### Methods

Techniques, procedures, and activities used to gather and analyze data are what constitute the research methods. In qualitative inquiry, methods are highly personal and interpersonal (Patton, 2002). Crotty (1998) noted, “The distinction between qualitative research and quantitative research occurs at the level of methods. It does not occur at the level of epistemology or theoretical perspective” (p. 14). Based on this logic, whenever the term qualitative is used in this dissertation, it is in reference to the research methods. A description of the methods I employed and justification for their use follows.

#### *Sampling*

Sampling techniques used in this study were purposeful, meaning non-probabilistic strategies were used to select a sample from which the most could be

learned (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling involves selecting cases that are information-rich because a great deal can be learned from them about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry (Patton, 2002). Studying information-rich cases can yield insights and in-depth understanding to illuminate the research questions under study (Patton). After considering the sampling strategies useful for purposefully selecting information-rich cases, I chose homogeneous sampling (Patton) as the strategy that best fit with the design of this inquiry.

*Homogeneous sampling.* Strategies used in homogeneous sampling include choosing a small, homogeneous sample to describe a particular subgroup in depth (Patton, 2002). Focus group interviews are one example of how homogenous sampling can be used to purposefully bring together participants with similar backgrounds and experiences to participate in a small group interview on specifically targeted or focused issues (Patton). In addition to facilitating group interviewing, homogenous sampling also reduces variation, simplifies analysis, and focuses attention on a specific issue affecting the group under study (Patton). For these reasons, I used homogenous sampling to purposefully select a sample of migrant parents to participate in a qualitative case study aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of meaningful parental involvement.

*Selection of Participants.* Six migrant parents were purposefully selected as participants because they had valuable information to share relevant to the purpose of the inquiry and the research questions raised (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002). Based on pre-established criteria, participants were selected because they were information-rich (Patton), not because they were representative of a larger group of migrant parents, or because their involvement in the education of children was typical, different, or

exemplary. The aim of purposefully selecting participants was to gain a deeper understanding of meaningful parent involvement within the unique context of migrant family life, not to make empirical generalizations about a broader population or phenomenon.

To gain perspective across the three school levels (elementary, middle, and high school), participants were selected as a migrant parent of a child or children enrolled in one of the three school levels. Six participants were purposefully selected from a pool of eight possible participants recommended to me by four Migrant Education Program (MEP) staff who worked with migrant families in the three communities where this study was conducted. The four MEP staff included three migrant recruiters, whose primary job involved making home visits to interview migrant parents, and one community liaison, whose primary job involved coordinating efforts to strengthen parental involvement in the MEP. As both the researcher and administrator of the MEP that employed the four staff members and that served the families included in this study, it was my ethical duty to fully disclose my dual role. I did so in my proposal to the Internal Review Board (IRB) of the university that approved this study, and by informing the participants as well as the staff who assisted in the selection of participants.

To initiate the process of participant selection, I scheduled an informal meeting with the four MEP staff to discuss the purpose of the study and enlist their support to identify potential participants. After sharing my pre-established participant selection criteria with the MEP staff, I asked them to recommend migrant parents who they believed met the criteria and who might have an interest in participating in this study. Because I wanted to learn from the perspectives of both mothers and fathers, I

encouraged the MEP staff to first consider families where both parents were present in the home.

*Selection Criteria.* To assist in the process of identifying potential participants, I reviewed the following pre-established selection criteria with the MEP staff: (1) Parents of children enrolled in the MEP for at least 6 months and no longer than 3 years; (2) parents who were comfortable sharing their opinions and responses to questions in group and individual settings; (3) parents who lived or worked in the geographical region where this study was conducted, and were likely to remain in the region for the duration of the school year; (4) parents whose income was primarily derived from temporary work in agriculture; (5) parents who had a child or children enrolled in at least one of three school levels (elementary, middle, or high school); and (6) migrant families with both the mother and father present in the home.

After sharing the study overview and selection criteria with the four MEP staff, names of migrant parents quickly began to surface. Almost simultaneously, two staff identified the same family, and one smiled as she exclaimed, “The entire study could be done on this family alone!” (C. Quintero, personal communication, November 12, 2008). Another staff supported her colleague’s recommendation saying, “Yes, that’s a great family because they have kids in preschool, middle, and high school” (C. Navarro Harris, personal communication, November 12, 2008). The community liaison identified another family she felt “would be an ideal” (G. Galindo, personal communication, November 12, 2008), because they had one child in preschool and three in elementary school. Agreeing, one of the migrant recruiters nodded her head as she added, “Yes! That’s another great family!” (C. Navarro Harris, personal communication, November 12, 2008). One

recruiter recommended a family with two students in high school and one in elementary school. She also identified a “back up” family if needed, but clarified, “the father is not always in the picture, so it might not work out” (R. Peñaflor, personal communication, November 12, 2008). As evidenced by their level of enthusiasm and ability to quickly identify potential participants, the MEP staff had developed close relationships with the migrant families in the communities where they were assigned to work.

After discussing the top 3 migrant families identified as potential participants for this study, the MEP staff and I quickly realized the 6 parents from the top 3 families each met all of the selection criteria. Collectively, the 3 couples nominated by the MEP staff had children in all three school levels (elementary, middle, and high school). In less than 30 minutes, we were able to identify 3 married couples as 6 potential participants for this research study.

*Invitation to participate.* I asked the MEP staff to personally contact the potential participants they identified to see if the parents might have interest in participating in a research study focused on parental involvement in the MEP. Through phone calls and home visits, the staff accomplished this task within a week. Upon learning all 6 of the potential participants expressed interest, I prepared a letter in English and Spanish to briefly explain the purpose of my study and to invite the potential participants to an informational meeting where they could learn more about the study (see Appendix A for English and Spanish versions). The invitational letter also explained why they had been selected as a potential participant, and stated that a 90 minute focus group interview would take place immediately following the informational meeting for parents who chose to participate in the study. The invitational letter also stated that childcare, food, and

reimbursement for travel (\$25.00 gas card) would be provided to each participant in appreciation for their time, effort, and expenses related to participation in a 90 minute focus group interview. These types of incentives are reasonable and allowable for parental involvement activities in the MEP (U.S. Department of Education, 2003b).

Based on experience with poor response rates when I mailed information to migrant parents in prior years, I was concerned the potential participants might not respond to my invitational letter if I sent it via the U.S. mail. Having worked many years with migrant parents in family literacy programs, I was aware some migrant parents had low literacy levels, which raised another concern for me about sending printed information through the mail. For these reasons, I asked the MEP staff to hand deliver the invitational letters to the parents they identified as potential participants. This personal approach allowed for any questions or concerns to be addressed on the spot by professionals who the migrant parents already knew. Through home visits, the MEP staff was able to communicate with the potential participants in a culturally responsive way, using a language and format that would help potential participants feel comfortable and safe. The MEP staff informed the potential participants that participation in the study would be confidential and voluntary, and that they could chose to participate, or not, after attending an informational meeting. I was told by the MEP staff the 6 potential participants asked only a few basic questions, such as when the study would begin and end, and how much time they would need to commit if they chose to participate.

The hand-delivered invitational letter included a reply form where potential participants were asked to confirm their intent to attend the informational meeting by marking the Si (Yes) line on the form (see Appendix A for English and Spanish

versions). I included a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the potential participants to send me their reply forms because I assumed they might want time to think about their decision. I was surprised that no one chose to respond in this manner. Instead, all 6 potential participants simply told the MEP staff they would come to the informational meeting. Two of the potential participants, who were spouses, marked the Si (Yes) line on their reply forms and handed the forms back to the MEP staff at the time of the home visit. In this way, I received confirmation from the MEP staff that all 6 potential participants had agreed to attend the informational meeting.

The date and time of the informational meeting and subsequent focus group interview was scheduled to take place 2 weeks after the invitational letters were hand delivered to the 6 potential participants. Had any of the 6 potential participants declined the invitation to attend the informational meeting, I would have again sought the assistance of the same four MEP staff to identify additional potential participants. Fortunately, this was not necessary because all 6 of the parents initially identified as potential participants agreed to participate in the study after they attended the informational meeting.

### *Participants*

Participants in this study included 6 migrant parents, 3 mothers and 3 fathers from 3 married couples. Though not included in the selection criteria, all 6 of the participants were born in México and each couple had children who were born in México and in the U.S. In this regard, the families included in this study were binational families with mixed nationalities. Conjointly, the 6 parent participants had 13 children who ranged from 3-to-25 years of age. At the time of this study, 2 of the 13 children had already



graduated from high school, 10 were enrolled in grades spanning preschool to high school, and 1 was a 3-year-old child not yet enrolled in school. Each participant self-identified as a person of Mexican origin and used the terms immigrant, migrant, and Latino interchangeably when sharing about themselves and their families. All participants received their formal education in México, some finished middle school, but none had completed high school.

Participants aspired to become U.S. citizens, and at the time of this study, a few had citizenship applications still pending the review process. They all spoke Spanish as their primary language and had varying degrees of limited English language skills. The 3 fathers each worked full time in temporary agricultural jobs, and 1 of the 3 mothers was also employed part time in the same line of work. The other 2 mothers were homemakers, and, as such, they were not employed outside of their homes. Participants ranged in age from early 30s to mid 40s, and all had been living in the U.S for at least 5 years, but none more than 12 years. Since entering the U.S., each couple had moved multiple times as migrant farm workers in search of agricultural jobs to sustain their families. At the time of this study, participants lived in 3 small, rural, agricultural communities located within a 35 mile radius.

In order to protect confidentiality, participants were asked to self-select a pseudonym that was used throughout this study. To introduce the reader to each participant as an individual with unique perspectives relative to the research problem, I created participant portraits which are presented in chapter four. In the participant portraits, participants are introduced as parents of a child or children in one of the three school levels (elementary, middle, and high school). The 3 couples portrayed in the

portraits are referenced throughout this dissertation as Airolg and Kike (parents of elementary school students), Chayo and José (parents of a middle school student), and Lucy and Lupe (parents of high school students).

Because context is such an integral part of case study and portraiture inquiry, it is essential for the reader to have an understanding of the various settings where data were collected. To create resonance and contextualize this inquiry for the reader (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), two portraits are presented in the following section to illustrate the physical and historical settings where data were gathered, and to foreshadow emergent themes.

### Context

In qualitative inquiry, context becomes a rich resource for examining, documenting, interpreting, and understanding human experiences (Patton, 2002). Context is a crucial ingredient of portraiture, as Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) described in the following statement:

By context, I mean the setting – physical, geographical, temporal, historical, cultural, aesthetic – within which the action takes place. Context becomes the framework, the reference point, the map, the ecological sphere; it is used to place people and action in time and space and as a resource for understanding what they say and do. The context is rich in clues for interpreting the experience of the actors in the setting. We have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context. Portraitists, then, view human experience as being framed and shaped by the setting. (p. 41)

The importance of context in qualitative research, and particularly in studies using portraiture methodology, is paramount; therefore, it is essential the researcher contextually describe the settings in which data were collected.

### *Settings*

In portraiture, the importance of local context cannot be overestimated (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The portraitist contextually describes the history and culture of the physical setting and uses metaphors to hint of “central themes that will be further developed and enriched throughout the portrait” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 59). Merriam (1998) stressed a “detailed description of particulars is needed so that the reader can vicariously experience the setting of the study (p. 238). Set against a dynamic backdrop of local context, the following two portraits were created to draw the reader into the physical and historical settings of the county where this inquiry unfolded.

*Physical setting.* Looking west, the sun began its decent over the majestic purple mountains, casting rays of mango and papaya across a neon blue sky. Although it was the middle of summer, patches of crystal white snow hugged the peaks and wrinkles of the mountain’s east face. A gentle breeze stirred the air, carrying with it a pungent aroma of the day’s onion harvest resting in neatly arranged burlap sacks in a nearby field. On some days the aroma was not as pleasant, especially when odors from the local feedlots and dairy farms drifted into town. Visitors and newcomers to the county frequently asked, “What’s that smell?” They were usually surprised when the locals politely, but matter-of-factly responded, “That’s the smell of money.”

Cattle raising and farming made up the backbone of the county’s economy which ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the state and 5<sup>th</sup> in the nation for agricultural products sold. Blanketed by

fertile irrigated farmlands and extensive rangeland, the county covered over 4,000 square miles and was home to approximately 250,000 residents. The main cash crops included corn, alfalfa, sugar beets, pinto beans, onions, and potatoes. Agriculture supported much of the local economy, but the county's real wealth resided in large scale dairies, feedlots, and one of the biggest meat packing plants in the nation. Although beef ruled, the production of lambs, turkeys, hogs, poultry, and dairy products also provided income for land owners and the workers they employed. Much of the labor required for harvesting the crops, feeding and slaughtering the animals, and eventually processing and packing meat, was provided by temporary migrant workers who moved in and out of the county each year hoping to find jobs, albeit it for low wages.

According to 2008 statistics, 27% of the county's residents were identified as Hispanic, a figure much higher than the national rate of 15% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). At the time of this study, demographics from the county's largest school district showed Hispanic students were the majority population, comprising 53% of all students enrolled. In the 2007-2008 academic school year, there were close to 1,000 migrant students in the school district, the highest concentration of migrant students in any region of the state in which this inquiry was conducted (L. Tovar, personal communication, February 1, 2010).

*Historical setting.* At the time of this study, fear permeated the homes and lives of migrant and immigrant families in the county, particularly those who lacked proof of legal immigration status. Memories of the large scale immigration "raid" on the meat packing plant 2 years earlier were still raw. The county's Mexican immigrant community, which included a large number of devout Catholic families, was stunned by the devastating immigration raid that took place December 12, 2006 within sight of a crowd

of worshipers celebrating the most sacred of all Mexican holy days, the feast of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (The Virgin of Guadalupe).

Subsequent deportations and incarcerations of undocumented workers “caught” in the raid attracted the attention of local and national news and left many migrant and immigrant families stripped of the meager income they depended on for survival. A community that traditionally profited on the backs of low paid workers suddenly experienced a loss of workers as immigrant families began to disappear over the Christmas holiday. The local economy weakened, and growing numbers of immigrant parents pulled their children out of schools and moved away without leaving a forwarding address. The coldest days of winter set in, immobilizing immigrant families who, because they had no income, were unable to pay their rent and utility bills.

Less than 2 years after the raid on the meat packing plant, “sweeps” of smaller businesses in the county reopened the stress wound, particularly for immigrant families of Mexican descent. In one such “sweep” nearly 5,000 confidential tax records were seized from a private business that provided tax services for many of the county’s Spanish-speaking clients. Although two district judges ruled the search of the tax records had been illegal, immigration battles persisted in the community and eventually escalated to an appeal at the state’s Supreme Court. Such was the political climate and landscape of the county in December 2008 when I approached this study, hoping to find a sample of migrant parents who would feel comfortable enough to participate in a research study, and who would trust me enough to serve as a messenger in sharing their story.

## Data Collection

Data collection in case study research usually draws from multiple sources, including interviews, observations, documents, artifacts, and audiovisual materials. It has been said a picture is worth a thousand words, perhaps explaining why “qualitative fieldwork increasingly includes photography and videography” (Patton, 2002, p. 281). In this inquiry, some of the richest data collected were the participants’ *diarios* (journals) and photographs taken to capture the essence of what meaningful parental involvement looked like through their lens.

The techniques used to gather data in this inquiry, and even the very information I considered worth gathering, were determined by my theoretical perspective, research questions, and the sample I selected. Based on these factors, sources of data included 2 focus group interviews, 17 one-on-one interviews, over 50 hours of observations made in a variety of natural settings, multiple documents (including participants’ journals), and over 200 digital photographs taken by the participants. Data were collected over a 6 month period of time, from December 2008 through June 2009, through prolonged engagement in academic, workplace, and family settings. The data sources, dates of data collection, and the amount of time spent in the data collection process is summarized in Table I.

Table I

*Summary of the Data Collection Process*

Data Source	Date of Collection	Time Spent (in minutes)
Interviews <sup>a</sup>		
Focus Group #1 <sup>b</sup>	12/20/08	90
Focus Group #2	06/16/09	90
One-on-One #1		
Airolg/Kike	01/17/09	60/60
Chayo/José	01/11/09	60/30
Lucy/Lupe	01/13/09	60 <sup>c</sup>
One-on-One #2		
Airolg/Kike	03/19/09	60/60
Chayo/José	03/24/09	60 <sup>d</sup>
Lucy/Lupe	03/23/09	45/45
One-on-One #3		
Airolg/Kike	05/28/09	60/60
Chayo/José	05/22/09	45/30
Lucy	05/31/09	60
Lupe	06/03/09	45
Observations <sup>e</sup>		
Academic settings		
Regional PAC meeting	01/24/09	150
Parenting class	01/30/09	160
State PAC conference	01/06-07/09	960
Parent-teacher conferences	03/05/09	300
Regional PAC meeting	03/14/09	240
ESL class for parents	04/14/09	60

*Table I (continued).*

*Summary of the Data Collection Process*

Data Source	Date of Collection	Time Spent (in minutes)
Observations <sup>e</sup>		
Workplace settings		
Feedlot	03/22/09	120
Large Dairy	04/14/09	45
Small Dairy	04/17/09	60
Family Settings		
HS Graduation Party	05/24/09	90
Family Barbeque	05/31/09	60
Documents <sup>f</sup>	12/20/08 – 06/30/09	360
Audio Visual Materials		
Photographs <sup>g</sup>	03/19/09 – 06/16/09	180

<sup>a</sup>*Observational data were also collected at each Interview.*

<sup>b</sup>*Lupe was unable to attend Focus Group Interview #1.*

<sup>c</sup>*One-on-One Interview #1 with Lucy and Lupe was a paired-interview.*

<sup>d</sup>*José was unable to participate in One-on-One Interview #2.*

<sup>e</sup>*Data were also collected through Documents obtained in settings where Observations were made.*

<sup>f</sup>*Documents included federal laws and regulations, school policies, flyers, newsletters, information sent from schools to parents, handouts from events, and participants' journals.*

<sup>g</sup>*All photographs were taken by participants, with the exception of a few taken by the researcher when requested by a participant. All photographs and diskettes became property of the participants.*



### *Interviews*

Interviewing is “probably the most common form of data collection in qualitative studies in education” (Merriam, 1998, p. 70). To conduct a good interview, researchers must be interested in what people have to say and believe the thoughts and experiences of those being interviewed are worth knowing (Patton, 2002). Interviews must be approached with the utmost respect for the people who are willing to give up their time to help others understand their world (Patton). Researchers demonstrate respect by establishing an interview climate that facilitates open responses and by customizing an effective interviewing style and question format for the particular respondents (Patton). Sensitivity to participant’s needs is even more important when conducting cross-cultural interviews, such as the interviews conducted in this study. In working with different cultural groups and across languages, researchers must find culturally responsive ways to establish trust and respectfully engage the participants (Patton).

Questions are at the heart of interviews. By asking genuinely open-ended questions, participants have an opportunity to respond in their own words and to express their own personal perspectives (Patton, 2002). In-depth interviewing “opens up what is inside people” (Patton, p. 407). Unless otherwise noted, all of the quotations used in this dissertation were taken verbatim from the transcripts of the focus groups and one-on-one interviews which were all digitally recorded and transcribed in Spanish. Every attempt was made to share participants’ words in the language they were spoken, Spanish, followed by my English translation.

Although the main purpose of interviewing participants is to gather data, not to change people, interviews are also interventions and, as such, they can affect people, as Patton described:

A good interview lays open thoughts, feelings, knowledge, and experience, not only to the interviewer but also to the interviewee. The process of being taken through a directed, reflective process affects the persons being interviewed and leaves them knowing things about themselves that they didn't know – or least were not fully aware of – before the interview. (p. 405)

I recognized that by interviewing participants I was also intervening in their lives, which raised ethical dilemmas related to my power and the power of interviews (Patton, 2002).

Reflecting on my ethical framework, I tried to anticipate hypothetical situations by asking, “What would I do if ...” and I considered how I might respond. Some decisions did not require much consideration. For example, as a mandatory reporter I was legally required to report any disclosure of sexual assault or abuse to the appropriate authorities, and participants were made aware of my professional responsibilities in this area early in the study. My responses to other hypothetical situations were not as clearly predetermined. As a neutral but interested listener, could I simply ask my questions and leave? What if participants wanted advice or information; could I justify intervening in any way? Would my dual role as the researcher and MEP administrator conflict in the interview process? If participants felt safe and were open and willing to talk, would the power of interviewing place them at risk for saying things they never intended to share (Patton)? It was important for me to consider the possibility such situations might arise and to plan an ethical response. In fact, on a few occasions participants did ask for my

advice on how to access needed resources, such as health care and social services for their families. I addressed this by allowing time after each interview to listen to concerns and questions participants raised that were beyond the scope of this inquiry.

Subsequently, I coordinated referrals and follow up care with appropriate staff and community agencies in my position as the administrator of the MEP that served the families that participated in this study. In this way, I was able to balance my dual roles.

Two types of interviews were used in this inquiry: focus group and one-on-one, or individual, interviews. In each of the interviews conducted, I committed to building trust and respect with the participants. Because all interviews were conducted in Spanish, my second language, I wanted to be sure I correctly interpreted words participants used from their frame of reference, not mine. I speak and understand Spanish, so I did not need to rely on interpreters or translators to conduct the interviews. This was a great benefit, because interpreters sometimes summarize and explain participant's responses rather than giving a full, complete translation of responses as verbatim as possible (Patton, 2002). In such situations, the interpretation "contaminates the interviewee's actual response with the interpreter's explanation to such an extent that you can no longer be sure whose perceptions you have – the interpreter's or the interviewee's" (Patton, 2002, p. 392). Fortunately, I was able to avoid this potential problem by communicating directly with participants in their native language.

The purpose of conducting interviews is to "capture how people view their world, to learn *their* terminology and judgments, and to capture the complexities of *their* individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348, emphasis in original). Having bilingual skills was a definite advantage because some words and ideas simply

can not be translated from one language to another. I use Spanish on a daily basis in my personal life and in my work, and it felt very natural for me to communicate with participants in Spanish. Having Spanish language skills also enabled me to detect nuances in conversations and to ask for clarification whenever I needed help in understanding the unique cultural meaning of special terms used by participants in the focus groups and individual interviews (Patton). This became especially important when participants made jokes or when they occasionally used slang words. The next section provides a description of how I obtained informed consent from the participants.

### *Informed Consent*

Originally, I anticipated obtaining informed consent from all 6 of the potential participants at the informational meeting; however, Lupe was unable to attend the meeting because he was called into work. A few weeks later, prior to conducting Lupe's first one-on-one interview, I obtained his informed consent while making a home visit. Per requirements of the IRB of the university that approved this study, informed consent was obtained from participants prior to the collection of any data (See Appendix B for English and Spanish versions). The following section includes details of how informed consent was obtained at the informational meeting.

*Informational meeting.* At the opening of the informational meeting, I introduced myself and two MEP staff, Olga and Blanca (pseudonyms), both well-known in the migrant community. Olga and Blanca agreed to help with the logistics of the informational meeting and to observe the focus group interviews so they could later assist with the data analysis through peer examination. After introducing ourselves, I held up a copy of the invitational letter that had been delivered to the potential participants a few weeks earlier, hoping to refresh everyone's memory about the purpose of the meeting. I

reviewed how and why they, as migrant parents, had been selected as potential participants for a research study. I disclosed my dual role as the director of the regional MEP that served their families and as a researcher and doctoral student from a local university. After giving a brief overview of the research problem and the purpose and nature of my study, I provided a written copy of sample interview questions I would probably ask in future focus groups and individual interviews (see Appendix C and D for English and Spanish versions). I explained procedures I would take to protect confidentiality, the general nature of my proposed activities, and an estimate of the amount of time participants would need to commit in the study. I asked if anyone had questions or concerns, and none were raised.

Before distributing the informed consent, I asked the potential participants if they preferred a copy of the form in English, Spanish, or both (see Appendix B for English and Spanish versions); everyone requested the Spanish version. I provided each potential participant two copies of the consent form, one for their record and the other to be signed and returned to me. Remembering prior meetings where migrant parents shared that, because of limited literacy skills, they did not feel comfortable reading legal documents, I asked Olga to read the Spanish version of the consent form aloud to the group. This enabled the potential participants to follow along on paper while at the same time hearing the written words spoken in their native language. In this way, participants did not have to publicly disclose any reading difficulties they might have had. I encouraged the potential participants to share any questions or concerns before asking them to sign the informed consent, and again none were raised. As the 5 migrant parents handed me their signed informed consents, I realized their role had officially shifted from that of potential

participant to my research partner. The following section details how data were collected in the two focus group interviews.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

As a form of qualitative research, focus groups are essentially group interviews that rely on the interactions of participants based on topics supplied by the researcher (Morgan, 1997). The researcher serves several functions in focus groups interviews, such as moderator, listener, observer, and analyzer and uses open-ended questions that “beg for explanations, descriptions or illustrations” (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 37). One participant’s response to a question can trigger memories and thoughts that spark ideas from others, helping the researcher more fully explore a broad range of perceptions (Krueger & Casey).

Focus group interviews are made up of small groups of people with certain characteristics that provide qualitative data in a focused discussion to help understand a specific topic of interest (Krueger & Casey, 2009; Morgan, 1997; Patton, 2002). While there are no set rules for determining group size, typically focus group interviews include between 5 and 10 participants (Krueger & Casey; Patton). Larger groups tend to limit opportunities for all participants to share their insights and observations, and smaller groups limit the range of experiences shared (Krueger & Casey). Generally, focus group interviews last 1-2 hours and provide “high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, p. 386). The main point of focus group interviews is that they are focused, as Patton stressed:

The power of focus groups resides in their being focused. The topics are narrowly focused, usually seeking reactions to something (a product, program, or shared

experience) rather than exploring complex life issues with depth and detail. The groups are focused by being formed homogeneously. The facilitation is focused, keeping responses on target. Interactions among participants are focused, staying on topic. Use of time must be focused, because the time passes quickly. (p. 388)

Morgan (1997) identified the hallmark of focus group interviews as “their explicit use of group interaction to produce data and insights that would be less accessible without the interaction found in a group” (p. 2).

As a method for collecting qualitative data, focus group interviews can be especially useful when researchers want to know more about the range of ideas or feelings people have about something, or when there is a need to understand differences in perspectives between groups or categories of people (Krueger & Casey, 2009). A focus group has “the capacity to become more than the sum of its parts, to exhibit a synergy that individuals alone don’t possess” (Krueger & Casey, p. 19) and they work best when participants feel comfortable, respected, and free to express their opinions without being judged. Focus group interviews can “give voice to groups that would not otherwise be heard.... and can help us hear the voices of socially and marginalized groups” (Morgan, 1997, p. 20). Being part of a collective interview group can also create a sense of safety, confidence, and camaraderie for people who might feel individually vulnerable and cautious about sharing experiences in one-on-one interviews (Patton, 2002). As a data collection method, focus group interviews aligned with the epistemology, theoretical framework, and methodologies of this inquiry.

Two focus group interviews were conducted, the first at the beginning of the study and the second 6 months later at the close of the study. The aim of the first focus

group interview was to increase participants' awareness of the research topic and generated a starting point for the subsequent one-on-one interviews. The second focus group interview provided an opportunity for participants to collectively share their experiences and reflections as participants in the study. The second focus group interview also provided an opportunity to begin the process of co-constructing findings with participants. During the 6 months that passed between the first and second focus group interviews, I conducted a series of 3 individual interviews with each participant. Instead of presenting the focus group and individual interviews chronologically, the 2 focus group interviews are described back-to-back in the following section to provide the reader with a more comprehensive, and organized look at this rich data source.

*Focus group interview #1.* The first focus group interview took place immediately after the conclusion of the informational meeting where informed consent was obtained. The interview was conducted in a private, comfortable conference room in a central location where migrant parents regularly met for MEP activities. The interview took place on a cold and dark Saturday morning in the middle of December, the weekend of the winter solstice. I arrived an hour early to set up the conference room, wanting parents to feel comfortable as they participated in a 90 minute group interview.

Pushing two large tables towards the center of the conference room, I reminded myself I would be speaking only Spanish for the next few hours. Shifting to my second language required me to make a conscious effort to stop thinking in English so that my thoughts and words could flow smoothly in Spanish. As I aligned the two large *mesas* (tables), I began to think about seating arrangements. Choosing the most comfortable *sillas* (chairs) from those available in the room, I strategically arranged *nueve sillas y dos*



*mesas* (nine chairs and two tables). I placed my *grabadora* (digital recorder) in the center of one table hoping the new batteries I installed *anoche* (the night before) would last at least 90 minutes. Just in case, I also placed a second *grabadora* (digital recorder) close to the first. While I pondered the probability of two recorders failing at the same time, Olga entered the conference room shivering as she greeted me, “*Buenos días María Elena. ¡Hace mucho frío!*” (“Good morning Mary Ellen. It is really cold out!”), (Olga, December 20, 2008). Having skills as a professional transcriber and translator, Olga agreed to observe the focus groups, transcribe all of the digitally recorded interviews in Spanish, and help with data analysis through peer examination. When I asked Olga what we would do if both of the digital recorders failed, she smiled, shook her head as she unbuttoned her coat and replied, “We always worry about the wrong things” (Olga, December 20, 2008).

Olga, a great planner and organizer, brewed the coffee, plugged in a pot of water for hot chocolate, and removed a bundle of foil-wrapped burritos from a plastic insulated case used to transport food. She arranged the smaller burritos on a platter explaining they were *para los niños* (for the children). The larger, adult-sized burritos were identified by the words *chorizo* (sausage) and *huevo con papa* (egg and potato) printed in red marker across the foil wrappers. Worried people might not show up, I shared my concern with Olga who replied from across the conference room:

Of course they will come! Look, we have food, childcare, and gas cards. Why are you worried? We know how to get people to show up for meetings. Besides, Blanca called everyone last night to remind them and they said they would come. Don't worry, they'll be here soon! (Olga, December 20, 2008).

I looked at the clock and hoped Olga was right. It was 9:40 a.m. and the informational meeting was scheduled to start in 20 minutes.

As I checked to make sure I had enough pens and copies of the informed consent in both English and Spanish, I heard children's laughter rolling down the hallway. Two migrant parents, Airolg and her husband Kike, were the first potential participants to arrive, along with their 4 children who ranged in age from 4-to-12 years. Airolg proudly handed me a tray of homemade *buñelos* (crullers) which she made and brought to share with the group. *Buñelos* were a favorite treat Airolg enjoyed making during the Christmas season. Thanking her for the goodies, I placed the *buñelos* next to the steaming pots of coffee and hot chocolate as Kike approached and asked what he could do to help. Kike wanted to make sure I knew how much he valued punctuality, and said, "*Siempre tratamos de llegar temprano porque a mí no me gusta llegar tarde*" ("We always try to arrive early because I don't like to be late"), (Kike, December 20, 2008).

Blanca, a MEP community liaison, entered the conference room at precisely 10:00 a.m. She, like Olga, had also agreed to observe the focus group interviews and help with data analysis through peer examination. Olga, Blanca, and I believed that being present to hear, see, and feel the responses of participants in the focus group interviews would enhance our ability to later make sense of the data and to begin to identify emergent themes. Blanca greeted Airolg with a hug as Chayo and José arrived, along with 3 of their 4 children. Chayo and José's teenage daughter, who previously agreed to care for the younger children during the focus group interview, was escorted by Blanca to a room close by where games and art materials were set up for the children. As parents served their families breakfast, Lucy entered the room at 10:15 a.m. with 3 of her 5

children, ages 10, 16, and 18. Arriving a little late, Lucy publicly explained why her husband Lupe was not able to come, saying he was called into work earlier in the morning. The other four parents nodded affirmatively, seeming to understand and agree that work was a high priority and could not be missed.

The conference room warmed up quickly as 5 parents, 10 children, 2 MEP staff, and I enjoyed tasty burritos, warm beverages, and each other's company. In conversation, some of the children chose to respond in English, even when they were addressed in Spanish, but all of the parents and MEP staff communicated in Spanish. The children moved in and out of two languages, often mixing English and Spanish in the same sentence. Noticing the clock, I announced the informational meeting would soon start. Blanca took a 3-year-old girl and a 4-year-old boy by the hand and led all of the children to the childcare room. Lucy's two teenagers left saying they would also help to take care of the younger children. The door closed and the conference room suddenly became still and quiet. Relieved my brain had made the switch from English to Spanish, I began to relax and realized Olga was once again right; sometimes I do worry about the wrong things!

After obtaining informed consents at the conclusion of a 30 minute informational meeting, I transitioned to the focus group interview by thanking the participants for agreeing to participate in a university sponsored study. I explained the purpose of focus group interviews and emphasized focus groups work best when everyone uses their voice to contribute to the discussion. I defined my role as the moderator of a group interview and clarified Olga and Blanca were there to observe, not participate, in the group interview.

Before turning on the two digital recorders, I informed participants the interview would be recorded and transcribed by Olga, and that everyone would receive a copy of the transcript to review. To help protect confidentiality, participants were asked to introduce themselves by a self-selected pseudonym and to share something positive about their family. After all participants had the opportunity to speak, I raised semi-structured questions to probe perceptions and experiences related to meaningful parental involvement (see Appendix C for English and Spanish versions). Because the exact wording and order of the questions in semi-structured interviews are not pre-determined, I was able to respond to situations, emerging worldviews, and new ideas as they surfaced in the interview (Merriam, 1998).

One of my primary goals for the first focus group interview was to engage participants in a process to co-construct meaning about parental involvement. It was not important that participants agreed or reached consensus on how parental involvement was defined, rather, I wanted their collective input to help contextualize meaningful parental involvement within the unique context of migrant family life. I approached this by first asking participants how they understood the words *involucramiento de padres* (parent involvement), and then by asking what made parental involvement, as they understood it, *significativo* (meaningful). As the group became comfortable discussing individual perspectives, I encouraged each participant to share an example, or a story, about how their involvement helped one of their children succeed in school. They eagerly shared their thoughts and experiences and listened respectfully as others spoke. I quickly realized participants had a great deal to say and noticed how comfortable they appeared communicating in a group setting. The clock reminded me how fast time passes, and

when I advised participants the focus group interview would end in 15 minutes, Chayo laughed jokingly and exclaimed, “*¡Apenas estoy empezando!*” (“I’m just getting started!”), (Chayo, December 20, 2008).

Before ending the first focus group interview, I congratulated participants for the wonderful examples and stories they shared and asked if they would be willing to take photographs of meaningful parental involvement in their everyday activities. Everyone seemed delighted when I said each of the 3 families would be given a used digital camera to keep. The regional MEP program had a surplus of used digital cameras purchased 7 years earlier with funds from a private grant source. Because equipment, such as digital cameras, becomes outdated and is removed from inventory after 5 years, allowing participants to keep the used digital cameras was a reasonable and allowable practice.

I shared my hope that photography would enable participants to capture actions and moments in their everyday life that might otherwise go unnoticed in this study. Participants were told they could each print up to 50 photographs (4” x 6”) throughout the course of the study, and that I would ask them to share some of their photographs in one-on-one interviews where we would use photo elicitation. As a research technique, Harper (2002) described photo elicitation as a simple idea of inserting photographs into interviews. Harper explained how photo elicitation is used in research in his following statement:

The difference between interviews using images and text, and interviews using words alone lies in the ways we respond to these two forms of symbolic representation. This has a physical basis: the parts of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the parts that process verbal information.

Thus images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that [sic] do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words. These may be some of the reasons the photo elicitation interview seems like not simply an interview process that elicits more information, but rather one that evokes a different kind of information. (p. 13)

Participants in this study not only learned about digital photography, they also learned how to use their voices through photo elicitation to tell the stories behind the images they captured in their photographs.

After explaining the purpose of taking photographs, participants were told all of their photographs would become their personal property and I would need their signed consent to include any of their photographs in my dissertation or future publications (see bottom of Appendix B for English and Spanish versions). Expecting participants' photographs might include visual images of their children, I explained a written assent of minors would be needed from participants' children 10 years of age or older (see Appendix E for English and Spanish versions), and a verbal assent of minors would be needed from their younger children (see Appendix F for English and Spanish versions). Later, after discovering participants also wanted to include photographs that included visual images of other adults, such as teachers, friends, and relatives, as well as other children, such as relatives and classmates, I submitted a request for change in protocol to the IRB. Once the IRB approved my revised protocol, I provided three additional consent forms (see Appendices G, H, and I for English and Spanish versions) to each participant and I explained why and when these consents would be needed. I also explained how

they, as the participant-photographer, were required to obtain signed consents from the people whose visual images they captured in photographs. Participants were told they had the option to allow, or not allow, any of their photographs to be used in this or future studies. Regardless of their decision, my hope was that participants would empower themselves by using their voice (Freire, 1972a) to recognize, honor, and illuminate goodness in parental involvement (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1983). I had no doubt goodness in parental involvement could be captured by migrant parents through the lens of a camera, and I believed goodness would be best expressed and understood when migrant parents gave it voice.

The focus group interview lasted longer than I anticipated because participants wanted to talk afterwards, not only with me, but with each other. Before everyone left, I scheduled home visits with each family to conduct the first in a series of three individual interviews. Because the first focus group interview was conducted during the Christmas holiday week, I wanted to schedule the first individual interviews immediately after the holiday season. Participants informed me the holiday season officially ended January 6<sup>th</sup>, *día de los reyes magos* (day of the three wise kings), so I scheduled the first home visits to take place in mid January. I let participants know I would call and remind them about their scheduled interviews a few days before visiting their homes.

Participants smiled as they wished each other *feliz navidad* (merry Christmas) as Olga handed each of the mothers a bag filled with the left over burritos and *buñelos* (crullers). Signaling the meeting had officially adjourned, Blanca opened the door and the energy of 10 lively children soon permeated the conference room. Bidding each other

*adiós* (goodbye), parents and children buttoned and zippered their winter coats and prepared to brave the cold north wind that was howling outside.

*Focus group interview #2.* The second focus group interview was convened 6 months after the first on a hot summer evening in middle of June. Recalling how the first focus group interview took place on the weekend of the winter solstice, it seemed more than a coincidence the second focus group interview was scheduled only a few days before the summer solstice. Participants elected to meet at 7:00 p.m. on a Thursday evening because it was the only time in the month of June when everyone was available. After a week of strange weather that brought heavy rains and hail to the region, the heat of summer had suddenly arrived and the sun was still floating high in the evening sky.

Feedback from the first focus group interview indicated participants found the building to be comfortable and convenient, so the second focus group interview was conducted in the same location, but in a larger conference room. Since the second focus group interview was the final event and culmination of the study, I wanted it to also feel like a celebration. Knowing some participants would be coming directly from work and would probably be hungry, Olga and I arrived early to set up a taco bar, cake, and ice cream. The large conference room provided ample space for families to socialize and enjoy dinner before the children were escorted across the hall to a playroom. I appreciated the offer of Chayo and José's teenage daughter to care for the younger children, just as she did during the first focus group interview.

As the families arrived, everyone seemed genuinely pleased with the food selection, smiling and making positive comments about the variety of toppings, salsas, and guacamole. Lupe, who was unable to attend the first focus group interview, was



introduced to the group by his wife Lucy. Having participated in all of the other research activities, Lupe appeared at ease as he connected and conversed in Spanish with the other participants. Airolg and Kike introduced their 13-year-old niece who was visiting them from out of state. As we were enjoying dessert, Airolg and Kike's 4-year-old son ran up from behind and surprised me with a big hug, laughing as he shouted, "Thanks for getting my favorite kind of ice cream!" (child, June 16, 2009).

The structure of the second focus group interview was similar to the first: participants knew the interview would last no longer than 90 minutes and they would each receive a \$25.00 gas card in appreciation for their time, effort, and expenses related to participation in a 90 minute focus group interview. In their prior individual interviews, I told participants I would share some of the emergent themes in the last focus group interview and that I would ask for their reactions to my initial interpretation of the data. Through member checking, I hoped participants would help co-construct the findings.

As the children were leaving the room, I thanked the participants for the many hours they donated to the study and for coming to the final event. After 6 months of interviews, they were well accustomed to being digitally recorded and knew they would receive a copy of the interview transcript within a week. Following my interview protocol (see Appendix C for English and Spanish versions), I used a flexible, semi-structured format to ask a few open-ended questions to elicit reactions to some of the sub-themes that emerged from data collected over the prior 6 months. I also wanted participants to share their ideas and thoughts about how the results of this study could be used to improve practices in the MEP, strengthen parental involvement, and to help more migrant students succeed in school.

I shared with participants my deep sense of responsibility for portraying their stories and asked for their assistance to make sure *we* got it right. I reviewed the many activities that had taken place since our first focus group interview and summarized a few things I learned from experiences with each individual participant. We discussed the various ways data was gathered through interviews, observations in their homes, work sites, and school settings, and from their journals and photographs. Two participants voluntarily brought their journals to the focus group interview and proudly made them available for others to see. After sharing observations I made on visits to dairy farms, José chuckled and reminded me I certainly did learn a lot of things over the course of this study, “*¡incluyendo como ordeñar vacas!* (“including how to milk cows!”), (José, June 16, 2009).

I asked the participants to provide feedback on some of the themes that were beginning to emerge from the data, and they responded positively, each recognizing their individual contribution to the aesthetic whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Lupe appreciated knowing the data obtained from individual participants would be combined, and shared his belief that collectively, the findings would reflect a strong message about the value Latino immigrant parents place on education. When I told Lupe I anticipated my dissertation might reach 200 - 300 pages, he said it really would not matter how long or short it was, what would matter most is that people read it and that it did not just get filed away.

In the 6 months that passed between the first and second focus group interviews, I conducted a series of 3 one-on-one interviews, 2 months apart, with each participant in their home. Using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix D for English and

Spanish versions), my original plan was to conduct 18 individual interviews, 3 with each of the 6 participants; however, because José was unable to participate in his second interview, a total of 17 individual interviews were completed. In the following section the one-on-one interviews are detailed.

### *One-on-One Interviews*

Qualitative researchers begin the inquiry with an assumption the perspectives of others are meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit (Patton, 2002). Through interviews, researchers find out things that cannot be directly observed; interviews allow researchers to enter into another person's perspective and help "find out what is in and on someone else's mind, to gather their stories" (Patton, p. 341). In qualitative case study, interviews are conducted to discover and portray multiple views of the case (Stake, 1995). The most common type of interview is a person-to-person encounter where the researcher seeks to obtain a special kind of information needed for understanding the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1998). In this study, the terms person-to-person interview, individual interview, and one-on-one interview are used interchangeably.

For the convenience of participants, one-on-one interviews were scheduled at times when both parents were available to be interviewed during the same home visit. Most of the interviews took place on weekends and in the evening, although some participants preferred to be interviewed during morning hours when children were at school. Individual interviews were scheduled to last no more than 60 minutes and were conducted back-to-back with each of the 3 couples. The order of the interviews was decided between the couples.

Individual interviews were conducted in a natural environment, usually the family room or kitchen of participants' homes. It was not unusual for spouses, children, relatives, and pets to come in and out of the room during the interviews; they seemed curious about what was going on. All of the one-on-one interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in Spanish, and participants were provided a copy of the transcript of their interview.

Knowing unrecorded memories fade fast, I committed to writing field notes and documenting my reflections in an "impressionistic record" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 188) as soon as possible, usually within 2 hours of each interview. After leaving participant's homes, I found a quiet place where I could park my car for at least 30 minutes to record my observations and reflections. In later data analysis, I found those notes and reflections to be valuable sources of information because they contained insights and descriptions of behaviors, both verbal and nonverbal, that helped me make sense of the data. Post interview notes also helped me monitor the data collection process and analyze information as it was received. I realized how important it was to allow sufficient time to reflect on and learn from the interviews while details were still fresh in my mind. Because each interview served a different purpose related to data collection, the 3 one-on-one interviews are described separately in the following sections.

*One-on-one interview #1.* Within 3 weeks of the initial focus group interview, I made home visits to conduct the first in a series of 3 one-on-one interviews. The first interviews were conducted in the middle of January, and each took 30-60 minutes to complete. After interviewing the 3 participant couples, I provided training on the use of the digital cameras. Participants were each given a blank, hard-covered journal and were

encouraged to document their experiences and reflections throughout the study. I provided two glue sticks as well, and suggested participants consider including some of their photographs in their journals.

The first series of home visits were the longest, 3-4 hours each, because of the amount of time required to conduct two individual interviews and provide training on the digital cameras. During two of the first home visits I was invited, and expected, to join in a family meal. As I completed the first series of one-on-one interviews, I realized it was futile to put a time limit on how long I thought a home visit *should* take. I was humbled as I continued to discover things take as long as they need to take, which was usually much longer than I ever expected. Each of the 3 families was gracious and accommodating, making it easy to spend 2, 3, or even 4 hours on a home visit. I appreciated the many opportunities home visits provided for gathering data, not only through the interviews, but also through rich observations made in natural settings.

Because Lupe was unable to attend the initial focus group interview, I met separately with him during the first home visit to explain the purpose of the study and why he was selected as a potential participant. Anxious to get started, Lupe summarized details of the study that his wife Lucy had shared with him after she participated in the first focus group interview. Lupe told me he read Lucy's transcript from the first focus group interview and had agreed to use the name Lupe, a pseudonym selected by his wife Lucy. He shared that his motivation to participate in the study stemmed from a belief the study would help other families. As he signed the consent form, Lupe looked up at me and said he expected to benefit by participating in the study, but he wanted me to know

that I too would benefit from his participation. My first impression of Lupe was that he was confident, funny, uninhibited, and ready to speak his mind.

Before beginning Lucy and Lupe's interviews, I noticed their two high school students lingering in the background, patiently waiting for me to unpack their parents' digital camera. Emi, a high school senior, said she wanted to be included in the training so she could help her parents if they experienced any problems with the camera. Because Lucy and Lupe were selected as parents of high school students, it seemed reasonable to include their teenagers in the training since, as children, they would most likely be included in their parents' photographs. Leaning over the back of a sofa, Lucy and Lupe gazed across their children's shoulders and watched attentively as Emi inserted a floppy diskette into the camera and confidently began photographing the living room furniture. Lupe was especially pleased to see how easy it was to save and delete files and to learn the camera included a rechargeable battery.

Knowing the first home visits would be long, in the interest of time I asked Lucy and Lupe if they preferred to be interviewed together, instead of individually. One of the reasons I offered this option was because I suspected Lupe might feel more comfortable in a paired-interview with his wife, since he did not have the opportunity to participate in the first focus group interview. Accepting it as a good idea, Lucy and Lupe listened intently to each other's responses to the open-ended questions I raised in their paired-interview (see Appendix D for English and Spanish versions).

Following my semi-structured interview protocol, I asked participants to describe a time they helped one of their children succeed in school, and what was particularly easy or hard about the experience. I also asked them to tell me about their own experiences as

young students in México and ways their parents helped them with their schooling. Participants shared deeply about their personal experiences and memories of their childhood, and they became animated and enthusiastic as they told their stories, some very funny, some quite sad. At one point in Kike's interview he began to cry as he spoke about a difficult time in his life when he dropped out of middle school because of family problems. Lupe told a humorous story about a time in his childhood when he threw a rock that broke a school window. Lupe's father, summoned to the school by his teacher, was asked to pay for the broken window, but could not afford to do so because he had so little money. Lupe said his father resolved the difficult situation by justifying his belief that teachers, not parents, were responsible for what happened in school. He used this story as an example of what parental involvement looked like in his education in México.

At the conclusion of the first individual interviews, participants were told they could request technical assistance throughout the study if they had any questions or problems related to their digital cameras. Because an instruction manual (in English and Spanish) was provided, participants (or their children) were usually able to trouble shoot and resolve small problems. Participants were each given six diskettes to store their photographs and were asked to let me know when a diskette was full. I told them I would come to their homes to pick up the diskettes, or, if it was more convenient, they could bring their diskettes to my office where their photographs would be printed while they waited. Participants understood the diskettes were their personal property and would be returned to them along with their printed photographs. Because I would not make, or keep, any copies of their photographs, participants knew they would need to provide me a photograph, along with all required signed consent forms, if they chose to have any of

their photographs included in this dissertation or future publications (see Appendices B, E, F, G, H, and I for English and Spanish versions).

*One-on-one interview #2.* The second individual interviews were conducted in March, 2 months after the first interviews. The primary purpose of the second individual interview was to review photographs taken by participants over the prior 2 months to reflect what meaningful parental involvement looked like in their everyday lives. The second interview was guided by one overarching question related to the meaning captured in their photographs (See Appendix D for English and Spanish versions). In essence, the second individual interview was an opportunity to use photo elicitation interviews to gather information-rich data relevant to the research questions.

The second series of individual interviews was organized much like the first: the interviews were conducted back-to-back during home visits, and each interview lasted no longer than 60 minutes. Participants appeared more relaxed during the second home visits, and I wondered if that had to do with the personal nature of sharing personal photographs. Two of the mothers, Chayo and Airolg, smiled proudly as they handed me their *diarios* (journals) filled with photographs and many neatly written pages of self-reflections. José, on the other hand, spoke softly as he told me he did not have any photographs to share, thus eliminating his second individual interview. Reminding me he spent 72 hours a week working at a small dairy farm, José explained that any photograph reflecting his involvement would have to be taken at his work site, and he was unable to photograph himself while milking cows. I jokingly suggested his wife Chayo and I go to the dairy farm to photograph him. Much to my surprise, José grinned and replied, “*Buena idea!*” (“Great idea!”), (José, March 23, 2009). A few weeks later, after obtaining



permission from his supervisor, Chayo and I visited the small dairy farm where José worked and we took photographs, per José's request, of parental involvement in action, as defined by José. In his third and final individual interview, José used the photographs taken that day to explain how he made sense of meaningful parental involvement through his hard work.

As I approached the second interviews with the other two families, I noticed participants had stacks of loose photographs. Throughout the interviews, they shuffled through their stacks, carefully selecting one photograph at a time. Two participants from different families, Lucy and Kike, each said they hoped to find time before the final interview to arrange their photographs in their journals. Lupe, on the other hand, said he probably would never use his journal because it was much easier for him to talk than to write.

At the conclusion of the second interviews, I complimented participants for taking such beautiful photographs and encouraged them to continue to take even more, since 2 more months remained in the study. Excited about her daughter Emi's upcoming high school graduation, Lucy anticipated having "*muchas fotos muy bonitas*" ("lots of beautiful photographs"), (Lucy, March 23, 2009) to share at her final individual interview. Chayo and Airolg also had ideas of upcoming events they wanted to capture in photographs. Through a number of different examples, participants shared how photography provided an opportunity to document and express parental involvement in new ways that felt comfortable, safe, and meaningful.

*One-on-one interview #3.* The third and final individual interviews took place in late May and early June as the school year drew to an end. The purpose of the final

individual interview was for participants to share new photographs taken over the prior 2 months, and what they hoped their children might think about years in the future when they looked at the photographs. Again, referring to my semi-structured protocol, I asked open-ended questions (see Appendix D for English and Spanish versions) about the relationships between migrant parents and teachers, and ways to strengthen parental involvement in the MEP. I was most surprised by the participants' profound responses to my final question: Do you have any comments you would like to share, or any questions about this study, since this is our last interview? Each participant expressed deep gratitude for being included in the study, and some described moments that transformed the way they thought about parental involvement. Kike, who eventually did create a journal, used spiritual references saying "*mi diario es como mi biblia*" ("my journal is like my bible"), (Kike, May 28, 2009). Referring to specific photographs glued in his journal, Kike described how his photographs reflected the importance of having family values and instilling in children, from a young age, the value of a good education. He said he fully expected to share his journal in future years with "*los hijos de mis hijos*" ("my children's children"), (Kike, May, 28, 2009).

Lucy was deeply sentimental during her third individual interview as she recalled emotions she felt at her only daughter's high school graduation and subsequent party. She was very grateful to have photographs of her relatives who traveled from as far away as México to attend Emi's celebration because high school graduation is "*algo muy grande*" ("something very big"), (Lucy, May 31, 2009). When I asked her to tell me all about it, Lucy's eyes began to tear as she shared memories of Emi as a baby. She recalled the many struggles and joys she and her daughter experienced together "*en el camino a la*

*graduación*” (“on the road to graduation”), (Lucy, May 31, 2009). Proudly holding up a photograph of Emi in her graduation cap and gown in front of her own face, Lucy proclaimed, “*Así es mi involucramiento!*” (“This is what my involvement looks like!”), (Lucy, May 31, 2009).

José was happy I had the opportunity to observe him in his work and that he finally had photographs to share. In addition to the photographs taken at the dairy farm, José also shared other photographs with images of him sitting at the kitchen table helping his children with school work. As in all the other interviews, Chayo had a lot to say about her experiences in this study and the lessons she learned, particularly from keeping a *diario* (journal). Chayo’s proudly showed me her journal which included a section labeled *Dedicatoria* (“Dedication”) where she wrote the following: “*Este trabajo está dedicado a mi familia, y a María Elena*” (“This work is dedicated to my family and to Mary Ellen”), (Chayo’s journal, May 22, 2009). In the dedication section, Chayo thanked her husband, her four children, and me, for providing her opportunities to realize the importance of parental involvement, and how the sacrifices she makes each day have a positive influence on her children’s education and life.

In addition to focus groups and individual interviews, observations also provided another means of revealing “the unique complexity of the case” (Stake, 1995, p. 63). While interviews present critical information about participants’ perceptions, what people report in interviews are always “selective perceptions” (Patton, 2002, p. 264). To gain a more holistic perspective, case study researchers move beyond the selective perceptions of others and gather additional data through direct observations (Patton). Descriptions of

how data were collected through direct observations in natural settings are presented in the following section.

### Observations

As a primary source of data in qualitative research, direct observations provide a “firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest, rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview” (Merriam, 1998, p. 94). Firsthand experience with participants in a natural setting allows the researcher “to be open, discovery oriented and inductive because, by being on-site, the observer has less need to rely on prior conceptualizations of the setting” (Patton, 2002, p. 262). By “getting close” to participants through firsthand experiences, qualitative researchers gain personal knowledge that later becomes part of the data analysis process (Patton).

Stake (1995) described naturalistic observation as “the primary medium of acquaintance” for qualitative researchers who “try to observe the ordinary ... long enough to comprehend what ... ordinary means” (p. 44). In collecting information as an observer, the stance of the researcher can range from being a full participant, where the investigator is a member of the group being observed, to simply being a spectator (Merriam, 1998). Patton (2002) described the extent of the researcher’s participation as a continuum with a great deal of variation. My stance as the researcher in this study was that of “observer as participant,” as Merriam described in the following statement:

The researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer. Using this method, the researcher may have access to many people and a wide range of

information, but the level of the information revealed is controlled by the group members being investigated. (p. 101)

Through “prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field” (Creswell, 1998, p. 201) as a participant-observer, my sense of place, people, time, and context began to shape (Stake).

Directly observing participants for over 50 hours in a wide variety of natural settings provided unique and rich opportunities to observe parental involvement practices of migrant parents in everyday life. For example, by allowing me to conduct interviews in their homes, participants welcomed me into the center of their family life. After completing the interviews during the home visits, I was graciously invited to spend additional time with participants and their families to enjoy a meal or to simply just visit. The many hours of unstructured time spent at home visits presented invaluable opportunities to make observations in a space that was natural and safe for the participants. Prolonged engagement in the field provided ample time to gather information-rich data through observations in other natural settings as well, such as academic environments, work sites, and family celebrations. Because it is essential for the reader to have a deep understanding of the contexts in which data were gathered, I created three portraits to help the reader vicariously experience some of the settings where observational data were gathered. The three portraits presented in chapter five portray the settings where observational data were collected at an elementary school during parent-teacher conferences, on a dairy farm, and at high school graduation party.

In addition to interviews and observations, documents and audiovisual materials can also be a valuable source of data in case study research. Learning how to use, study,

and understand documents is an essential skill needed for qualitative inquiry (Patton, 2002). Documents can help uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem (Merriam, 1998). They can be a “ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (Merriam, p. 112). Documents provide information about things researchers cannot readily observe, and they may “prove valuable not only because of what can be learned from them but also as stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observation and interviewing” (Patton, p. 294). The following section includes a description of the documents and audiovisual materials collected as data in this inquiry.

#### *Documents and Audiovisual Materials*

Qualitative researchers collect both public and private documents, as well as physical materials sometimes referred to as artifacts (Merriam, 1998). Public documents include records such as informational flyers, agendas, and minutes from meetings, while private documents, which are more personal in nature, include such things as journals, diaries, scrapbooks, letters, and e-mails (Creswell, 1998; Merriam; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). Personal documents reflect the perspectives of participants and are a “reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (Merriam, p. 116).

Audiovisual materials are another useful source of information to help qualitative researchers understand the central phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2005). This form of data includes images and sounds, such as photographs, videotapes, digital images, paintings, and pictures (Creswell). Some audiovisual materials are already included in the research setting, but others are researcher-generated and are created by the researcher or

the participants after a study has begun (Merriam, 1998). For example, participants might be asked to take photographs to reflect their perspectives or exemplify their experiences in the study (Merriam). Photo elicitation is a research technique in which researchers review photographs, either taken by participants or given to them, and ask participants to discuss the contents (Creswell; Harper, 2002).

In this study, I collected both public and private documents, as well as audiovisual materials. Examples of public documents included agendas and handouts from parent meetings and conferences, weekly newsletters sent home from schools to parents, flyers from school-sponsored parent events, school district parental involvement policies, and federal laws and regulations related to parental involvement in the MEP. These types of documents were easy to access because they are public information and are considered to be open records.

Examples of private documents collected and reviewed in this study were the *diarios* (journals) kept by 5 of the 6 participants, and my own researcher journal, which Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis (1997) referred to as an “impressionistic record” (p. 188). In my researcher journal, I recorded my observations and reflections, trying to capture them when they were “still fresh” (Stake, 1995, p. 62). I attempted to write field notes immediately after completing interviews and making observations, at a time when I could vividly recall details. I found that when I made the time to do this, the details were much sharper in my mind, almost as if they were in color. The more time lapsed, the more the colors and details faded to black and white.

Reflective journaling (Janesick, 1999) provided a space and place for me to question my assumptions, explore my biases, and examine my power in this study.

Through reflective journaling, I wrote *what* I was thinking about, as well as *how* I thought about what I was thinking about. Self-reflection and journaling helped increase my awareness of my own contributions to the construction of meaning, and the impossibility of participating in this inquiry outside of the subject matter.

*Audiovisual materials.* Perhaps the richest source of data collected in this study was the photographs taken by participants over the course of 6 months. Photography provided a means for each participant to capture images of what meaningful parental involvement looked through their lens. In this way, participants used photographs to illustrate their views on the representation of their social reality (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Participants had control over the images they chose to capture and how they chose to share the meaning of their photographs through photo elicitation. Due to the photograph's particular form of representation, photo elicitation produces a unique kind of data by evoking feelings and memories (Harper, 2002). As audiovisual material, photographs enriched the context of this study by creating a collaborative relationship between me, the researcher, and the 6 participants. This form of collaboration was best described by Harper, who viewed photo elicitation as an ideal model for research, because "when two or more people discuss the meaning of photographs, they try to figure out something together" (p. 23). While interviews and observations helped facilitate understanding, it was through the technique of photo elicitation that participants and I seemed to feel most comfortable in sharing and co-constructing meaning.

In summary, data were collected in this inquiry from a wide array of sources over an extended period of time. Data sources included 2 focus group interviews, 17



individual interviews, over 50 hours of observations made in a variety of natural settings, multiple documents, and over 200 digital photographs taken by the participants. Photo elicitation provided a unique and rich opportunity to gather data on how migrant parents understand and construct meaning of parental involvement through the use of photographs. In the following section, the data analysis process is detailed.

### Data Analysis

Compelling data is needed to address research problems and generate sufficient urgency to create change. Stakeholders can connect around data if it is specific and relevant to their needs and interests, but data also needs to be persuasive, both logically and emotionally (Wagner et al., 2006). Using a flexible, qualitative research design, data analysis in this inquiry was not an isolated event, but rather an ongoing, integrated, iterative, and generative process. By immersing myself in the details and specifics of the data, I was able to explore important patterns, themes, and interrelationships with participants.

Analysis involves taking something apart and then giving meaning to the parts, and as Stake (1995) said, “analysis goes on and on” (p. 71). Through a process of pulling data apart and then putting them back together again, I searched for relevant meaning by keeping the spotlight focused on the case and key issues defined by the research questions. Following a qualitative approach, I engaged in deep thinking as I gathered and reflected on the data to gain a deeper understanding of what makes parental involvement meaningful for migrant parents.

Stake (1995) claimed understanding does not just suddenly happen, but by engaging in deep thinking, it “creeps forward” (p. 73). Through a combination of

qualitative techniques commonly used in both case study and portraiture, data from interviews, observations, documents, and photographs were deconstructed, coded, and analyzed inductively. Ongoing coding fueled the analysis process as I worked through iterative cycles of induction and deduction to holistically elicit meaning and insights from the texts. Utilizing a critical framework, I listened for the voice behind each response and observation as I moved back and forth, consolidating, reducing, and interpreting the data (Merriam, 1998). Because data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously, I remained open to unexpected finding and dissonance (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1997) as I attempted to make sense of the case through direct interpretation of events and situations as they were observed. Through journaling, I was able to explore and analyze my assumptions, biases, power, and dual role as the researcher and administrator of the MEP that served the families of the participants in this study (Janesick, 1999).

Although data analysis was an ongoing, iterative process, the 6 month data collection phase eventually came to an end and retrospective analysis began. During and after data collection, the analysis process included synthesizing, sorting, organizing, and coding data from interview tapes and transcripts, observational narratives, participants' journals and photographs, documents, and my field notes. Through a tedious process of repeatedly listening to over 17 hours of recorded interviews, and re-reading hundreds of pages of interview transcripts, the data slowly began to take shape as subtle meanings and complex perspectives emerged.

In trying to make sense of the data, I used categorical aggregation to look for a collection of instances that could be clustered together (Creswell, 1998). By sorting, coding, grouping, and classifying the data according to themes, the voices and

perspectives of participants surfaced. Triangulating data from multiple sources allowed themes and patterns to emerge and eventually converge (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Coding, collapsing, and aggregating the sub-themes helped me frame discussions with participants and professionals in the field for the purpose of member checking and peer examination. Based on my critical framework, participants were actively involved in a process to co-construct meaning. The findings from this inquiry, presented in chapter six as four major themes, were co-constructed through a collaborative process of dialogue and critical reflection in which participants and I were viewed as “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1972b, p. 31).

In designing this study, I originally planned to use computer software, such as NVivo, to help with data analysis; however, for a variety of reasons, I changed my mind. Computer software does not analyze qualitative data; it only helps to manage it. As a novice researcher with limited experience in the use of sophisticated data management software, I lacked the skills, technical support, financial resources, and time needed to develop proficiency in the use of a new software program. Data collection and analysis were somewhat complicated by the fact I regularly moved in and out of two languages, Spanish and English. Not wanting to distance myself from the data, I felt the need to customize a process that allowed me to think in one language and write in another. Instead of using unfamiliar software, I chose instead to create my own computer-based system for organizing and analyzing the data. I did this by storing a variety of texts, such as interview transcripts and observation notes, in electronic files. Working in *Microsoft Office 2003*, I coded texts by using the “Insert Comment” feature and I organized sub-themes alphabetically in an electronic file I created using the “Table” feature. The active

and personal process of creating my own system for collapsing and coding data kept me close to the data. The electronic files I created also served as an audit trail to detail how data were collected and analyzed to produce findings that hopefully make sense for the reader, because ultimately, it is the reader who must judge the findings to be trustworthy (Merriam, 1998).

### Trustworthiness

To advance knowledge and practice in the field of education, research studies must be “rigorously conducted; they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, educators, and other researchers” (Merriam, 1998, p. 199). In applied fields such as education, professionals must have confidence that research is conducted ethically, and they must also be able to trust the results (Merriam). In qualitative terms, this means research results must be trustworthy. Lincoln and Guba (1985) established four useful strategies for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research: Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Descriptions of how each of these four strategies was applied in this inquiry are presented in the following sections.

#### *Credibility*

Credibility in qualitative research deals with true value (Guba & Lincoln, 1985), or how research findings match reality. An underlying assumption of qualitative research is that “reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered” (Merriam, 1998, p. 202). Through data collection and analysis, I gained a deeper understanding and insight about how migrant parents construct reality – how they see, understand, and make meaning of parental involvement in their day-to-day lives. Based on my critical view of migrant parents as

experts of their life experiences, findings from this inquiry were grounded in participants' perceptions of, and reflections on, their reality.

As a qualitative case study researcher and portraitist, I was the primary instrument in the collection and analysis of data. My interpretation of participants' reality was accessed directly through interviews, observations, and by studying a variety of documents and audiovisual materials (Merriam, 1998). Having close contact with the participants and the data helped strengthen credibility in this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) listed the following six criteria to produce credible findings: Prolonged engagement, reflexivity, triangulation, member checking, peer examination, and clarification of researcher's biases. A discussion of each criterion follows.

*Prolonged engagement.* Because the nature of case study includes extended time in the field for the collection of data from multiple sources, prolonged engagement was built into the early design of this inquiry. Data collection took place from December 2008 through June 2009, essentially, the second half of one academic school year. Investing 6 months in data collection provided time needed to strengthen individual relationships with each of the 6 participants. As a methodology, portraiture stems from the relationships established between the researcher and participants, and because my relationships with participants were built on mutual trust and respect developed over time, I was able to probe deeply in the interviews and I felt comfortable freely asking for clarification as needed. The more than 50 hours I spent making observations in the field provided rare glimpses of participants' social reality. Spending 6 months collecting data with the participants allowed ample time to collect data from a wide array of sources. The many hours we spent together in interviews and in natural settings afforded unique

opportunities for me to experience the social reality of participants from their frame of reference.

*Reflexivity.* Reflexivity helped me better understand my own biases, assumptions, and power in this study. In addition to keeping field notes, I maintained a personal journal to reflect upon my thoughts, concerns, and reactions to experiences as they surfaced. Reflective journaling (Janesick, 1999) helped me think through dilemmas and potential conflicts, such as my dual role and my power as both the researcher and MEP administrator. As a highly reflexive methodology, portraiture includes continuous self-reflection and self-disclosure of the researcher's place and stance (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). As a portraitist, I needed to reflect on my "perch and perspective" to help the reader understand how, "from where I sit, this is what I see; these are the perspectives and biases I bring" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 50).

*Triangulation.* To achieve trustworthiness, discipline and protocols are needed to "get it right" (Stake, 1995, p. 107). Triangulation includes gathering data from multiple sources using a variety of methods. Data source triangulation is used to "see if what we are observing and reporting carries the same meaning when found under different circumstances" (Stake, p. 113). Triangulation provides a means of validating trustworthiness by comparing data with other evidence to cross check data, confirm emerging findings, verify accuracy, and discover alternative explanations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998; Stake; Yin, 2003).

In this inquiry I compared data from interviews and direct observations to see if emergent findings remained the same "at other times, in other spaces, or as persons interact differently" (Stake, 1995, p. 112). Additionally, I compared data from documents

and audiovisual materials, such as information sent from schools to parents, federal laws and regulations, school policies, agendas and minutes from parent meetings, and participants' digital photographs and journals. To increase confidence in my interpretation of the data, I also used methodological triangulation (Stake). For example, I made home visits *after* conducting a focus group interview, and reviewed documents related to school-sponsored parent events *after* I observed the events and interviewed the participants. By triangulating data from multiple sources and fully explaining how findings were derived from the data, credibility was improved (Merriam, 1998).

*Member checking.* To help triangulate data, participants were actively involved in a technique known as member checking (Stake, 1995). Member checking improves credibility because, when participants are included in determining the findings, researcher biases is limited (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Participant involvement in the research process included reviewing interview transcripts and critiquing drafts of my writing and early interpretations of emergent themes. This helped to assure their perspectives and voices were accurately portrayed. All communication was shared with participants in their native language, Spanish. In these ways, member checking added credibility to the data and helped in the portrayal of findings that respectfully reflected participants' reality and frame of reference.

Member checking was especially important in this study because participants and I worked in two languages, Spanish and English. Aligned with my theoretical framework, critical dialogue was essential. Communication with participants was in Spanish, but this dissertation was primarily written in English. It was important for me to use member checking and view participants as "equally knowing subjects" (Freire, 1972b, p. 31)

throughout all phases of this inquiry. Respecting culture and native language were essential ingredients of authentically portraying the participants' stories.

*Peer examination.* Credibility was also enhanced by asking colleagues and experts in the field to comment on findings as they emerged (Merriam, 1998). I used peer examination to review interview transcripts, observation field notes, patterns, and emerging themes. I sought input from the state and national directors of the MEP, and maintained regular communication with my research advisor who provided critique throughout the analysis process. I also used the assistance of a bilingual professional from México to transcribe the recorded interviews in Spanish and to critique emergent themes. This helped assure all transcripts and my initial interpretations of the data were culturally and linguistically accurate.

*Clarification of researcher's biases.* Because it is difficult to prevent or detect researcher induced bias in qualitative studies, it is important researchers clarify their assumptions, worldview, and theoretical orientation before a study is conducted (Merriam, 1998). My personal stance included a strong belief in public education as a primary means for promoting democracy and a just society. In working with migrant families as a MEP administrator for over 22 years, I witnessed the struggles of migrant families against oppression related to class, race, ethnicity, language, and immigration status. My interpretation of the marginalization and oppression of migrant families stems from hundreds of stories and experiences migrant parents shared with me over the course of many years. The meaning I have constructed from their struggles resonates and reinforces my beliefs and worldview about social justice and equity in public education.



As an administrator in the MEP, I recognized my dual role and power as the researcher and program administrator. I strictly adhered to the research process approved by the IRB of the university that approved this study, and I continually reexamined ethical considerations related to my position and power. I maintained a researcher journal (Janesick, 1999) and sought critical input from the participants and other experts in the field. In no way did I use my administrator position to influence the participants, staff, or outcomes of this study. I shared all aspects of this inquiry with my immediate supervisor as well as the state director of the MEP in the state where this inquiry was carried out. Most importantly, I tried to conduct this study in ways that respected the culture and protected the dignity of the participants and their families. I did this by trying to create safe, welcoming environments to validate participants' culture, experiences, wisdom, and expertise as research partners from whom much could be learned.

### *Transferability*

A commonly cited limitation of qualitative research relates to external validity, or the extent to which findings from one study can be applied or generalized to other situations (Merriam, 1998). Patton (1990) argued qualitative research should “provide perspective rather than truth ... context-bound extrapolations rather than generalizations” (p. 491). In the qualitative tradition, findings are not generalized; rather, they are transferred by the reader to other similar situations. Naturalistic generalization is facilitated by providing information that can be easily assimilated with existing knowledge to help the reader construct the meaning of the case (Stake, 1995). Stake refers to this process as transferability, and in regard to qualitative case study he explained:

The real business of case study is particularization, not generalization. We take a particular case and come to know it well, not primarily as to how it is different from others but what it is, what it does. There is emphasis on uniqueness, and that implies knowledge of others that the case is different from, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself. (p. 8)

To enhance the possibility of findings from this study being transferred to other situations, I used thick, rich descriptions to enable the reader to judge how closely other situations match those of the participants in this study (Patton, 2002). Through the use of portraiture, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations were portrayed to facilitate naturalistic generalization, or transferability, for the reader.

### *Dependability*

Dependability or consistency in qualitative research relates to the results obtained and whether or not the results match the data (Merriam, 1998). Limitations in qualitative research pertain to consistent and dependable results; not on finding the same results should the study be replicated. In fact, replicating a qualitative study may never yield the same results, because the nature of the qualitative tradition is highly contextual (Merriam). For the conclusions of this study to make sense to the reader, the findings must be consistent with the data collected (Merriam). Techniques or criteria used in this study to ensure dependable results included explaining my researcher stance, triangulation, and creating an audit trail (Merriam). Following is a description of how I applied these three techniques.

*Explaining the researcher's stance.* Detailing my personal stance, clarifying my biases, explaining my relationship with participants, and applying theoretical perspectives

of a critical framework, all helped to improve dependability in this inquiry. Dependability was also enhanced by providing a detailed description of the criteria used to purposefully select participants for this study.

*Triangulation.* In addition to improving credibility, triangulation also improved dependability by helping the reader make sense of the findings. Trustworthiness was enhanced by triangulating data collected from multiple sources and by analyzing data using multiple methods.

*Audit trail.* Because qualitative studies are not designed for replication, researchers must clearly document how they arrived at the results. This is accomplished by providing great detail on how data were collected and analyzed, and how decisions were made throughout the study (Merriam, 1998). To create an audit trail, I took copious field notes and recorded my observations in detail as soon as possible after each event. I included descriptions, direct quotations, sketches of the environment, and my observer comments. I continually asked myself, “What might that mean?” as I attempted to analyze and understand emerging themes. Journaling provided additional documentation for an audit trail (Janesick, 1999), along with interview transcriptions, documents collected, my computer-based files for managing data, and my electronic calendar. The audit trail improved dependability by tracking the data that was used to portray comprehensive, holistic, and expansive findings (Merriam, 1998).

### *Confirmability*

Confirmability means the researcher can confirm or demonstrate that findings are grounded in the data and that interpretations based on the data are logical (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba identified three criteria for enhancing confirmability:

triangulation, reflexivity, and confirmability audit. The first two criteria, triangulation and reflexivity, were previously detailed relative to credibility and dependability. It is noteworthy to again mention the value of triangulation and reflexivity to enhance confirmability. The third criteria, confirmability audit, relates to information contained in an audit trail. Following is a description of how confirmability audits pertain to this inquiry.

*Confirmability audit.* The purpose of a confirmability audit is to assess the degree to which data and findings are grounded in real life experiences and actual events, rather than the researcher's perceptions and biases (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Auditors must be able to sample findings and trace them back to raw data. Confirmability audits are not designed to confirm whether or not participants' perceptions are accurate or true reflections of a given situation, but rather to ensure findings accurately capture *their* perceptions, as opposed to those of the researcher. I followed procedures outlined by the IRB for maintaining and securing data. Methods and procedures were thoroughly detailed in both my IRB proposal and this dissertation to create a clear audit trail if needed for a future confirmability audit. The data I collected, considered to be evidence in a confirmability audit, were organized in such a way that sample findings could easily be re-analyzed and traced back to the data sources if ever required.

### Summary

In this chapter, I detailed the qualitative design used in this of inquiry to address the primary research question: How do migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement? Constructionism provided the epistemological foundation upon which a critical theory framework rests. The methodological design

included both case study and portraiture. Participants were 6 migrant parents, or 3 married couples, purposefully selected to include mothers and fathers of migrant children enrolled in elementary, middle, and high school. Data were collected over a 6 month period of time from multiple sources: 2 focus group interviews, 17 individual interviews, over 50 hours of direct observations made in natural settings, documents, and audiovisual materials, including over 200 photographs taken by the participants. Data analysis involved a combination of qualitative techniques common to both case study and portraiture research.

To enhance trustworthiness of the findings, it is essential the reader have a deep understanding of the local context. By creating three participant portraits presented in chapter four, I aimed to build a connection between the reader and the participants. My hope was that the reader would come to know each participant as a migrant parent with unique perspectives relative to the research problem. Additional portraits are also presented in chapter five as an invitation for the reader to vicariously enter a few of the settings where observational data were gathered.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARTICIPANTS IN CONTEXT

The participants in this study were 6 migrant parents, or 3 married couples, who had each emigrated from México to the U.S. within the preceding 12 years. They shared a collective sense of purpose for coming to the U.S., one that resonated with Crosnoe's (2006) following depiction of Mexican immigrant families:

Day after day, week after week, year after year, Mexicans migrate to the United States through various methods and points of entry, in search of better jobs, expanded opportunities, greater freedoms, new experiences, and things far less specific, such as hazy, ill-defined, but powerful images of a better tomorrow. In short, they come to improve their lives by making a journey that covers a relatively small geographic space but a great social and economic chasm. Importantly, they come with their children, those already born and growing, those about to be born, those who will be born at some point in the future. These children, in fact, are often the primary motivation for immigration and become the receptacles of their parents' American dreams. Above and beyond their expectations of what they may gain for themselves in their new country, Mexican immigrants look to their children's futures as the true, enduring payoff of their journey and of all the trials and tribulations that this journey entails. (pp. 1-2)

Much like the parents described by Crosnoe, the 6 participants in this study left their homes in México and traveled north in search of a better life for their families. They, like millions of other immigrants who came before them, “defy the odds by choosing to leave their places of birth and plot a new course in a foreign land (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001, p. 13).

To enhance the reader’s understanding of this inquiry and help build a connection with the participants, parent portraits are presented in this chapter. In addition to introducing the reader to the participants, the portraits also foreshadow major themes, the findings from this inquiry, which are presented in chapter six. Grouped as spouses, participants are introduced as migrant parents of a child or children in one of the three school levels: elementary, middle, or high school.

### Parent Portraits

#### *Elementary School: Airolg and Kike*

Airolg and Kike were parents of 4 elementary school-age children, ages 4, 6, 8, and 12. Their three youngest children were born in the U.S. and their oldest child was born in México. Eleven years earlier, Airolg and her baby daughter stayed behind in rural México when Kike left for *el norte* (the north) in search of work. It took almost a year for Kike to save enough money to cover the costs of travel and purchase visas for Airolg and his baby daughter to enter the U.S. Strong in faith and a belief that *Dios siempre nos cuida* (“God always takes care of us”), (Airolg, January 17, 2009), Airolg and Kike left México and immigrated to the U.S. guided by an optimistic spirit. In spite of the many hardships they continued to face as migrant farm workers, Airolg and Kike maintained a positive and hopeful attitude.

Kike proudly welcomed me as a guest in his home, which he referred to as *mi traila* (my trailer), a small mobile home parked at the end of a cul-de-sac in a mobile home community located on the outskirts of a semi-rural town of approximately 18,000 residents. Kike, Airolg, and their four children had been living in their two bedroom *traila* (trailer) since their last move 2 years earlier. Their two oldest girls shared one of the two small bedrooms, and the two youngest boys slept on a bunk bed in the living room during the summer, but due to poor insulation, in the cold winter months the bunk bed was moved into the girl's bedroom where it was warmer.

Airolg was a stay-at-home mom in her late 30s. She was tall and had long, straight, dark brown hair which she planned to grow until it measured at least 12 inches. At that time, she said she would make a pony tail, cut it off, and donate a foot of her hair to *Locks of Love*, an organization that made wigs from human hair for children suffering from cancer. Airolg enjoyed helping others and believed all parents should model volunteerism, reach out to people in need, and be positive role models for children so they learn and grow up to become good people.

Airolg saved almost all of her children's school work and prominently displayed it on the dark veneer panels of the living room walls. Humble and soft-spoken, she enjoyed dancing and arts and crafts. In the second focus group interview, Airolg shared how uncomfortable she felt speaking in public and said, "*A mí se me hace más fácil expresarme por escrito que hablando, soy muy penosa. Me ponen a hablar enfrente de cinco, diez personas, y ya estoy toda colorada*" ("It's easier for me to express myself in writing than by speaking, I get very nervous. If I am put in front of a group of 5 or 10 people, I turn completely red"), (June 16, 2009). In describing the support and resources



she received from the Migrant Education Program (MEP), Airolg said she was generally uncomfortable asking for help because she felt there were always other families who needed it more.

Wanting to lose some of her excess weight, Airolg planned to start an exercise routine when her youngest son entered kindergarten. At the time of this study, she spent a great deal of time inside her *trailer* (trailer) because she did not have a driver's license and consequently, she did not drive. She worried a great deal about her husband Kike's health because he suffered a life-threatening illness the prior year. During her third individual interview, Airolg stated, "*Sin salud no hay nada, y si a él le llega a pasar algo pues, yo pienso que si a alguien en la familia le llega a pasar algo, desestabiliza emocionalmente una familia*" ("Without health we have nothing, and if something happens to him, well, I think if something happens to anyone in the family, the family becomes emotionally destabilized"), (May 28, 2009). To explain the critical role parents play in sustaining the health and well-being of the family, Airolg referred to Kike as the "*padre y pilar de la familia*" ("father and pillar of the family"), (March 19, 2009). Not only was the family hurt by the loss of income and soaring medical bills when Kike became seriously ill, they also experienced emotional and psychological trauma associated with caring for a loved one whose life was connected to an oxygen tank.

Airolg deeply appreciated the many opportunities available to her children through the U.S. public education system. She tried to instill a sense of responsibility in each of her four children, and expected her two older girls to *cuidar* (take care of) their first grade brother, on the school bus, in the lunch room, and on the play ground.

Having established a strong relationship with the bilingual secretaries in the school office, Airolg wanted the school staff to know they could count on her to help out whenever possible. She claimed she never missed a parent meeting and said it bothered her the majority of parents showed up for classroom parties, but were noticeably absent at most of the parent information meetings. Airolg always attended school events with her husband because she depended on Kike for transportation; there was no public transportation in the semi-rural area where they lived. Limited in her ability to communicate in English, Airolg also relied on Kike to interpret for her because he had stronger English language skills.

Kike was tall and had big brown eyes. He was highly attentive and leaned forward in conversations, suggesting he did not want to miss a single word. Kike worked on a feedlot where thousands of cows were fed. His work was strenuous and included driving a front loader to move tons of grains from tall mounds into the bed of a giant dump truck. Switching back and forth between the driver seats of a front loader and dump truck, Kike maneuvered large vehicles through a maze of corrals on a feedlot. As he unloaded a mixture of grains into the feeding troughs, dozens of cows poked their heads through wooden fences waiting for a turn to be fed. Not only did Kike know how to drive and maintain large machinery, he also used a computer to calculate how much grain to mix, how much *vitaminas y medicinas* (vitamins and medicines) to add, and how much *comida* (food) to dispense to the cows. Kike's job was to fatten the cows corralled in different sections of the feedlot. When the animals reached a pre-determined weight, they were sold to the nearby meat packing plant and were slaughtered. Kike's other job

responsibilities included cleaning manure out of the corrals, treating sick animals, and removing carcasses of dead cows.

Per Kike's request, I made a field visit to observe him in his workplace where I was invited to ride along with him in the dump truck and observe as he distributed *comida* (food) to the cows. The work was grueling and the air was filled with dust and a heavy stench. The truck shook and bounced each time Kike shifted gears to navigate the muddy paths that crisscrossed the immense feedlot. By experiencing his work first hand, I came to understand what Kike meant when he said his kidneys took a beating all day.

Of the 6 participants in this study, Kike had the best command of the English language. Although I always communicated with him in Spanish, Kike occasionally switched to English, especially when his children were present. He believed his children were happy to hear him speak English, and he wanted to strengthen his English language skills so that he could improve his communication with teachers and hopefully find better work opportunities in the future.

In his first individual interview, Kike explained how he dropped out of middle school in Mexico and entered the workforce to help support his family during "*un tiempo muy difícil*" ("a very difficult time"), (January 17, 2009). With tears in his eyes, he shared that his grandmother was once a *curandera* (natural healer) and that he had dreams of someday becoming a doctor. Sadly, he acknowledged he would never be able to achieve that dream. Instead, he hoped his children would be able to go to college in the U.S. and have career options he could only once dream about.

Holding on to a vision of hope is what motivated Kike to be involved his children's education. Chronic health problems made some days more difficult than

others. A year earlier, Kike almost lost his life when he developed a large blood clot that collapsed his left lung. He no longer needed to take medication to thin his blood, and he was slowly regaining his strength, but the damage to his lung was permanent. Kike continued to show signs of shortness of breath and pain, despite efforts he took to hide these symptoms from his family.

Airolg and Kike viewed parental involvement as a critical component of their children's academic success. They each learned lessons from their own parents' lack of involvement in their education when they were young students in México, and they wanted their children to have better options than what had been available to them. Believing all children benefit from early childhood education, Airolg and Kike worked hard to find transportation for their youngest son to attend preschool. The public preschool did not provide transportation, which created a significant educational barrier since Airolg did not drive, and Kike could not bring his son to school because he had to be at work long before the preschool doors opened each morning. Starting a petition, Airolg and Kike obtained signatures from other parents in similar situations. They presented their request to school district administrators for a bus to enable children from their neighborhood to attend preschool. Unfortunately, their request was denied due to budget shortfalls. However, by working closely with one of the preschool teachers, Airolg and Kike eventually resolved their transportation problem by connecting with another parent of a child in the preschool who, for \$20.00 a week, was willing to transport their son to school. This cost created a financial hardship, but Airolg and Kike felt it was a sacrifice worth making because they believed preschool was *primordial* (fundamental) for children to succeed academically. They were quite pleased their efforts

produced a relatively simple solution to what initially seemed like a difficult problem.

Airolg summarized her feelings saying she could not just sit around with her arms folded waiting for someone else to come and solve her problems and stated, “*¡Dios nos dio un cerebro y hay que usarlo!*” (“God gave us a brain and we need to use it!”), (March 19, 2009).

#### *Middle School: Chayo and José*

Middle school is a difficult time, not only for children, but also for parents, because the decisions children make at this stage of life have long lasting effects. These were the sentiments of Chayo, an outspoken mother of a son enrolled in a middle school located in a small, rural, agricultural community with approximately 1,400 residents. In addition to having a son in middle school, Chayo and José had three other children, one in high school, one in preschool, and a 3-year-old not yet enrolled in school.

Standing next to her high school daughter, Chayo was often mistaken as her daughter’s sister instead of her mom. Having married just before her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, Chayo presented herself as a young mother who, like her daughter, paid close attention to her hair and make up. She took great pride in her personal appearance and the upkeep of her home, and proudly shared that most of her clothing and furniture were yard sale purchases or donations. As a stay-at-home mom, Chayo created a warm, comfortable, family atmosphere in the small, modest, rented house where her family had been living for two years. Multiple framed pictures of extended family members from México filled the shelves of the living room. Cosita, Chayo’s 33<sup>rd</sup> birthday present to herself, was a Chihuahua puppy that barked incessantly and ran circles around Chayo’s feet as she moved quickly throughout the house. Much like Cosita, Chayo’s energy was intense.

Always busy with activities related to her children's schooling, she asked a lot questions and maintained direct eye contact when she engaged in conversation.

Chayo invested a great deal of time identifying opportunities to help her family and other immigrant families from her *comunidad* (community). Living only a few blocks from the middle school, she often visited her son's school where she was well recognized by the staff. Saying she understood more English than she was able to speak, Chayo did not hesitate to converse with teachers, front office staff, administrators, and school board members. She was highly motivated to improve her English language skills, and led an initiative that resulted in the creation of an English as a Second Language (ESL) program for migrant parents in the school district. Chayo described how she found her voice when she met with the school district superintendent to advocate on behalf of 20 other stay-at-home moms, who, like herself, wanted to improve their English. The superintendent responded favorably and provided not only a classroom for an adult ESL program, but also a part-time teacher and childcare. Pleased with the outcome of her efforts, Chayo hoped the school district would increase the number of days for the parent ESL class from 2 to 3 days a week the following year. As president of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) of the regional MEP, Chayo continually searched for solutions to problems and advocated for change so that *todas las familias ganan* ("all families benefit"), (Chayo, March 24, 2009).

José, the polar opposite of Chayo, was quiet and reserved and responded to questions using the least number of words possible. Like Chayo, José was also in his mid 30s. He worked 12 hour days, 6 days a week, milking cows on a dairy farm located 20 miles from his home. José did not mind the hard work, but he wished he could find

another job that did not require him to work 72 hours a week; he yearned for time off to *convivir* (share time together) with his family. As the sole source of income for a family of six, José worked long hours under difficult conditions to make sure his children had what they needed to succeed in school. He found it difficult to stretch his paycheck to provide for the basics, never mind the extra things his children wanted, such as music, art supplies, and computers. Acknowledging his middle and high school children had far more opportunities in U.S. schools compared to the schools they attended in México, José lamented U.S. society was “*tan materialista*” (“so materialistic”), (December 20, 2009).

José wanted his four children to understand that getting an education was their only hope of finding a better job than what was available to him. Although his work schedule did not allow time to attend after-school activities, he enjoyed *educando* (guiding) his children about life. When he returned home from work each night, he made it a point to ask each of his four children about their day and he tried to find ways to support their interests. In his first individual interview, José shared it was sometimes difficult for parents to express or explain to children “*todo lo que hacemos para ellos*” (“all that we do to for them”), (January 11, 2009). When asked what meaningful parental involvement meant for him, José simply replied, “*el trabajo y los sacrificios*” (“work and sacrifices”), (January 11, 2009).

One of the biggest challenges Chayo and José faced was meeting the complex health needs of their middle school son who suffered from diabetes and vision problems. Bills for thousands of dollars in hospital expenses and ongoing medical care continuously piled up. Even the lower-cost health care offered at the community clinic was often unaffordable for Chayo, José, and their two oldest children, because they all lacked health

insurance. In contrast, the two youngest children, ages 3 and 5-years old, who were both born in the U.S., had medical insurance that provided full access to health services.

Having children born on different sides of the border created dilemmas for Chayo and José. As parents, they wanted to protect their family from the tensions and resentments that can surface when children have different levels of privilege based on their immigration status, such as access to health care. Chayo and José's efforts to maintain a strong, united family, in spite of their mixed-status, sheds light on how binational families struggle and cope with myriad challenges associated with immigration.

#### *High School: Lucy and Lupe*

Having two sons who had already graduated from high school, Lucy and Lupe were united in their determination to see their third child, Emi, a senior in high school, graduate in 2009. Emi, the middle child of five siblings, was Lucy and Lupe's only daughter, and she was often held up as a role model for her two younger brothers, one a junior in high school and the youngest in elementary school. Having a great sense of humor, Lucy and Lupe laughed frequently and always had a joke to share. In addition to their five children, they also had two grandchildren from their oldest son.

Small in stature, Lucy had a big heart and took great pride in sharing her family's story. In her early 40s, she was small in stature and was usually seen with a smile on her face and a twinkle in her eyes. Soft spoken and humble, she described how important it was to keep her family united. Lucy worked hard at trying to reduce stress in her home by making sure everyone had time to relax and *convivir* (spend time together). She, like other Latinos, shared a love of family celebrations and believed *la vida* (life) should be enjoyed, in spite of life's challenges (Bordas, 2007).



Lucy was a stay-at-home mom and was grateful her large, extended family lived near by. She was very close to her mother and sisters, also immigrants from México, who lived within minutes of each other in a small, agricultural community of approximately 3,000 residents. Lucy maintained an impeccably clean home and was an excellent cook. She prepared homemade meals everyday and was happy to feed whoever happened to come through the front door. Aromas of peppers, onions, spices, and meats cooking slowly on the stove filled the air the first time I opened the white picket gate and walked up the path to her rented home. Although it was difficult to pay all the bills and cover the expenses for the many things her children needed for school, Lucy somehow found the means to provide delicious and nutritious meals for her growing family.

Remembering how hard life was 12 years ago when she lived in Durango, México, Lucy recalled staying behind with her mother-in-law and her four young children as Lupe headed north in search of work in the U.S. There were days when the food simply *se acabó* (ran out). Painful memories still lingered of the hunger she experienced years ago when she gave the last few tortillas in the house to her children. She remembered the long year she spent waiting for Lupe to save enough money to bring her and their four children north. Holding on to faith and hope, Lucy and her children eventually crossed the U.S.-México border, a 2,000 mile boundary extending from California to Texas, and reunited with Lupe. One year later, Lucy and Lupe welcomed their fifth and youngest child, who, by virtue of his birthplace, was the first U.S.-born citizen in their family. Although Lucy described her current life as much more plentiful than the hard times she experienced in México, she continued to struggle to provide and

care for her five children and two grandchildren who *siempre vienen primero* (always come first).

Lupe, Lucy's husband, was in his mid 40s and was often seen wearing a cowboy hat and boots. Like his wife, Lupe was short in stature and had a great, but subtle, sense of humor that could escape ears not attuned to hidden meanings buried beneath the surface of his jokes. Lupe's technical training in México included studies in animal sciences; however, he did not believe any of the low wage jobs he obtained in agriculture, dairies, and construction compensated for his skills or the work he performed. As the sole source of income, Lupe worried about being able to provide for his family.

Lupe, like Lucy, valued the time he was able to spend with his family. A self-proclaimed expert cook, Lupe specialized in preparing homemade *chicharrones* (pork rinds). One Sunday afternoon at a family barbeque, I observed Lupe in a corner of his backyard cooking pieces of pork crackling in a large, solid copper kettle suspended over a ring of fire. I watched as he straddled the kettle, extending both of his arms as he stirred the bubbling contents with a long wooden paddle. Focused and using deep concentration, Lupe methodically monitored the pork rinds until they were crunchy and most of the fat was rendered out. After draining the meat from the melted *manteca* (lard), he proudly tossed the fresh, crispy *chicharrones* (pork rinds) into a large, white, plastic bowl set along side a yellow ceramic dish filled with spicy homemade salsa. Urging everyone to hurry and eat the *chicharrones* (pork rinds) while they were still hot, Lupe frowned when I told him I was a vegetarian; he insisted I take some *para llevar* (to go) for my husband.

Lupe accompanied Lucy to school events when he was able, and he was genuinely interested in his children's academic preparation. He shared examples of the

struggles migrant parents face in motivating teenagers to apply themselves in school so that they can one day reach a goal he was never able to accomplish: graduate from high school. Lupe described how difficult it can be for migrant parents to give children the things they need, much less additional things they want, namely to be like *los demás* (other students). He shared that he did not have enough money to buy name brand clothes or a car for his children to drive to school; consequently, unlike many of their peers, Lupe's teenagers rode the school bus. He knew his children felt sad knowing how tight money was; there were times when they just wanted to drop out of school and find a job to help generate income.

During his first paired-interview with his wife, Lupe said when children have a good attitude and want to go to school, "*todo está muy bonito*" ("everything is good"), (January 13, 2009), but when they lose their motivation, get bad grades, or skip classes, it becomes very difficult for parents to turn things around. Describing how hard it was to support his children to the point of high school graduation, Lupe stated, "*no es sólo el trabajo del joven, sino, de los padres también*" ("it's not just the student's work, but the parents' work as well"), (January 13, 2009). Lupe was proud of the fact that Emi, his third child and *única hija* (only daughter), was about to graduate from high school, and joked about bringing framed graduation photographs of his two older sons to Emi's graduation ceremony, just to show the world that he had three success stories.

Much like other Mexican immigrant children, the first four of Lupe and Lucy's five children entered the U.S. education system with "wildly different life circumstances than their peers" (Crosnoe, 2006, p. 6). Lupe explained how difficult it was to support an (im) migrant child to graduate from high school, but when they do graduate, he believed

the student's success was also a reflection of the parents' successful involvement. At the conclusion of their paired-interview, Lucy smiled, nodded, and waited for Lupe to finish speaking before she added the final remark, "*Pusimos nuestro granito de arena para que se logre eso*" ("We did our small part to support that [achievement]"), (January 13, 2009).

### Summary

In qualitative research, the importance of fully describing context can not be over-emphasized, particularly when case study and portraiture methodologies are utilized. The portraits presented in this chapter provide a glimpse into the lives and personalities of the 6 migrant parents who generously shared their time and perspectives as active participants in this study. The purpose for creating these portraits was to draw the reader into the context of the inquiry by building a connection with the participants. Additional portraits are presented in chapter five to invite the reader into three settings where observational data were gathered: an elementary school building, a dairy farm, and a high school graduation party. My hope in creating these portraits was for the reader to vicariously experience the context of this inquiry.

## CHAPTER V

### SETTINGS IN CONTEXT

Through the use of portraiture, qualitative researchers “document and illuminate the complexity and detail of a unique experience or place, hoping that the audience will see themselves reflected in it, trusting that the readers will feel identified” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 14). Aiming to enhance resonance and identification for the reader, I created the three portraits presented in this chapter to help the reader “feel as if he or she is *there* ... feel placed in it, transported into the setting (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, pp. 44-45, emphasis in original). By contextualizing the settings, I hoped “to create a picture into which the reader will feel drawn ... to see, feel, smell, and touch the scene (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 59).

In portraiture “the place and stance of the researcher are made visible and audible, written in as part of the story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 50). New to research and portraiture methodology, I needed to first look within my own self and life experiences before I could sketch myself into the scene. Perched in different settings, I felt my stance shift back and forth as I moved between the roles of silent observer and active participant in the data gathering process. In each setting, I found myself observing not only the participants in context, but also my own reactions to those observations as they occurred. As the portraitist, it was essential for me to recognize and make my personal context explicit.

In the portraits that follow, participants are featured as couples interacting in one of three different settings. The first portrait depicts an academic setting, an elementary school, where I accompanied Airolg and Kike to four of their children's parent-teacher conferences. The second portrait captures a picture of parental involvement in the workplace, two different dairy farms, where Chayo and José invited me to observe them in their jobs. The third portrait depicts a family celebration, a high school graduation party, hosted by Lucy and Lupe to honor and celebrate their daughter Emi's academic success. Collectively, the three portraits presented in this chapter paint a colorful backdrop to contextualize the findings of this inquiry which are presented in chapter six.

#### Data Collection Portraits

##### *Academic Setting: Parent-Teacher Conferences*

Airolg smiled as she handed me a folded 3" x 5" sheet of paper torn out of a small spiral bound notebook with the words *Conferencia Marzo /05/09* (Conference March 5, 2009) neatly printed and underlined. Below this heading were two columns listing the names of her four children and their corresponding appointment times for spring parent-teacher conferences. Because all four children attended the same elementary school, the appointments were conveniently scheduled back-to-back. The small sheet of paper was an invitation and a reminder for me to accompany Airolg and Kike to their children's conferences. Knowing how much she and Kike valued their relationships with the school staff, I thanked Airolg for offering me the opportunity to be part of such an important event. Planning ahead, Kike had already requested, and was granted, the day off from work. As with all school activities, Airolg and Kike attended their children's conferences together, not wanting to miss a single detail.

Following Airolg's suggestion, I arrived at her home 30 minutes prior to the first scheduled conference. Slowing my car as I approached the end of the cul-de-sac, I noticed the two youngest boys running down the three wooden steps that led from the front door of the trailer to the dirt landing below. I heard one of the boys squeal, "Señora Good, you're going to school with us!" (young boy, March 5, 2009), as I maneuvered and parked my car under the large, leafless tree hovering over the side of their trailer. The older girls, 8 and 12-years-old, greeted me at the front door with far less enthusiasm. I suspected they probably wished they were still in bed, since parent-teacher conference day meant there were no classes and it was still early morning.

Airolg quickly ushered me inside and pulled the aluminum door shut to keep the cold March draft outside. While combing her four year old son's hair, she directed the girls to hurry and brush their teeth. Turning his head to channel his voice down the trailer's narrow hallway that connected the living room and bathroom, Kike proclaimed, "*¡Vámonos, ya es tarde!*" ("Let's go, it's getting late!"), (March 5, 2009), reminding everyone about the importance of punctuality. Airolg joked about it being good for me to observe how crazy it can be trying to get four children out the door at the same time. As we shuffled down the wooden steps, Airolg instructed the two boys to climb into their booster seats in the back seat of Kike's truck. Because the seven of us could not all fit in one vehicle, the girls asked if they could ride with me in my car. Nodding affirmatively to give permission, Airolg made direct eye contact with each girl and firmly stated, "*¡Compórtense bien!*" ("Behave yourselves!"), (March 5, 2009).

With the two girls secured by seat belts in the back seat of my car, I followed the lead of Kike's truck out of the mobile home park and estimated it should take no longer

than 10 minutes to reach the elementary school. As we turned left down a quiet country road, the 12-year-old girl suddenly blurted out that she recently got in trouble in school and was sure her teacher would tell her parents about it. Looking in my rear-view mirror, I noticed a frown on her younger sister's face who mumbled, "I think I'm in trouble too because I threw up in gym class yesterday" (girl, March 5, 2009).

For a brief moment I was transported back into my own childhood and a wave of uneasiness set in. I remembered the stress provoked by parent-teacher conferences, which, in my days were always held in the evening, and never included students. I recalled the anxiety that kept me awake at night, and how much I dreaded the report that would come from my mother the next morning over breakfast cereal. The verdict was usually consistent, "Your grades are good but your conduct is unsatisfactory. You just need to settle down in class and pay more attention." I took a deep breath and silently empathized with the two girls whose images were framed in the rear-view mirror of my car. My thoughts then drifted to Airolg and I felt a new connection to her, not as a researcher or MEP administrator, but as a mother.

Reflecting on the countless number of school conferences I had attended over the course of 15 years with my own 3 children, I wondered what Airolg might be thinking as our 2 vehicles entered the school parking lot. Being an educator, I also thought about the teachers inside the school building and the difficult, but necessary, conversations they would lead throughout the day. Overwhelmed by a deluge of memories and feelings, I exhaled and considered how context and perspective fit as I adjusted my stance and settled into my role as a researcher in a school setting.



In her book, *The essential conversation: What parents and teachers can learn from each other*, Lawrence- Lightfoot (2003) described the parent-teacher conference as a ritual that provokes angst, as noted in her following statement:

Parent-teacher conferences, then, are crucial events because there is so much at stake for the children who cross family-school borders, because they arouse so much anxiety and passion for the adults, and because they are the small stage on which our broader cultural priorities and values get played out. In each of these ways, this tiny twice-yearly ritual takes on a huge significance that can be overwhelming for the participants. (p. xxii)

Memories of my own experiences with parent-teacher conferences as a child, parent, and educator surfaced as I parked my small car next to Kike's large white truck. I recalled the demographics I found on the school's website the night before: Enrolling close to 500 students, 80% were economically disadvantaged and over 85% were Hispanic. I commented to Airolg how new the school still looked despite the fact it opened a few years ago, and she replied, "*Si, nos gusta mucho nuestra escuela*" ("Yes, we really like our school"), (March 5, 2009). Kike held the front door open for Airolg, the children, and me to enter the lobby area where I was introduced to the school secretary and principal, both standing in the hallway greeting parents as they moved throughout the building. Not wanting to be late for the first conference, Kike quickly ushered us down the preschool corridor, as we walked briskly to keep up with his fast pace.

Realizing I was bilingual, the preschool teacher asked if I would mind interpreting for Airolg and Kike so that the assigned interpreter could leave and assist in another

conference. I was told interpreters were in short supply and high demand. While I did not initially want to move out of my role as an observer, I reluctantly agreed to serve as the interpreter, primarily because Airolg encouraged me to do so.

Sitting on a small chair designed for the body of a 4-year-old, I began to feel like I was on the “tiny stage” (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003, p. 218) Lawrence-Lightfoot used to metaphorically describe parent-teacher conferences as a place where cultural priorities are translated into dialogue. Switching back and forth between two languages, Airolg and Kike listened carefully as I interpreted the preschool teacher’s assessment of their youngest child’s progress. Because Kike understood more English than he spoke, he was able to follow the teacher’s comments and nodded appropriately as she shared information. Conversely, Airolg experienced a short delay in the conversation because she had to wait for me to interpret from English to Spanish. Lowering her head and raising her eyebrows, Airolg looked perplexed when I relayed a concern of the teacher about an incident that occurred a day earlier during preschool math. After the teacher told the class not to eat the small candies used in a counting exercise, her 4-year-old son broke the rule and ate the candy. Kike and Airolg turned their faces away from the teacher and gazed non-judgmentally at their child whose secret had been exposed. Without saying a word, they communicated to the teacher that their son’s behavior would improve. Signaling 20 minutes had passed, the door flung open and another family entered the classroom. Thanking the preschool teacher for her time, Airolg took her youngest son by the hand and rushed to follow Kike out the door. The seven of us made our way to the first grade classroom located on the opposite side of the building.

Inviting us to take seats at an adult-sized table, the first grade teacher initiated the conference by summarizing reading and math scores. After showing Airolg and Kike their son's grades, the teacher said she had no concerns and congratulated the family for maintaining their native language, Spanish, in their home. She also complimented the two older sisters, saying they frequently checked in on their younger brother, on the playground, as well as in the lunch room. Airolg and Kike smiled and seemed very pleased with the teacher's report. I asked in Spanish if Airolg or Kike had any questions or concerns to share with the teacher, and Kike, looking somewhat taken back by my question, smiled and said there was no reason for any concern since his son had perfect grades. Later in the day, in a more private conversation over lunch, Kike shared his opinion that it was the classroom assistant, not the teacher, who should get most of the credit for teaching his son to read. He wondered about the role of the teacher, because, from his perspective, it seemed like the classroom assistant did most of the work.

The girls' conferences did not go as well as their brothers'. As we entered the third grade classroom, all four children were handed books and were asked to sit outside in hallway. Right on schedule, a physical education teacher and a counselor appeared and took their seats next to the classroom teacher at a large round table. The staff shared a collective concern that centered on the girl's refusal to participate in gym class, particularly when students were required to run. With a serious look on his face, one teacher said, "She keeps saying she's sick and that she throws up a lot" (physical education teacher, March 5, 2009). Serving as the interpreter, I relayed Airolg's response that her daughter had a persistent cough that might provoke vomiting. Airolg wanted the school staff to know her daughter had a doctor's appointment that very afternoon to

evaluate the cough. Over half of the conference time was dedicated to a discussion about the girl's health and the possibility of her problem being more emotional than physical.

Acknowledging his daughter was overweight, Kike wondered aloud if she might be self-conscious about her body image. The physical education teacher stressed how important exercise was for all children, and emphasized it was especially important for students with weight problems. Airolg calmly stated that, from a very young age, her daughter never liked to run, but she did enjoy jumping on trampolines and swimming. The classroom teacher ended the conference complimenting the girl's good behavior in class and her genuine concern for her younger brother. In conclusion, the classroom teacher summarized how well the girl got along with others, but then added she did not try as hard as she should. Airolg and Kike lowered their eyes, seemingly uncomfortable with the last bit of information shared. When the conference ended, they quickly exited the classroom saying they did not want to be late for the fourth and final conference which was located on the second level of the building.

Climbing the flight of stairs to the fifth grade classroom, Kike held on to the railing, paused, and sighed before saying, "*Pues, ésta será la más difícil*" (Well, this one is going to be the hardest), (March 5, 2009), and his parental intuition was correct. It did not take long before the 12-year-old girl burst into tears when her teacher relayed what she called two disturbing incidents. The first had to do with "sneaking Pepsi into the classroom and claiming it was water" (teacher, March 5, 2009), but the second concern was even more serious. I was asked to translate a letter written by the girl to apologize for copying another student's work. Both parents shook their heads and looked as if they too wanted to cry. In what seemed to be an attempt to restore the mood, the teacher changed

her tone and said the girl was usually very sweet. Emotionless, Kike looked directly into his daughter's eyes and flatly stated her sweetness would not get her very far without an education. The tension softened and the girl stopped crying when the teacher shared how well she was doing in math. Airolg explained that she wanted to help her daughter with math homework, but the girl would not allow her to do so because the way she was taught math in México was very different from the way it was taught in the U.S. The teacher encouraged Airolg to continue to work with her daughter at home, reinforcing that the girl would not be confused by learning to do math in multiple ways. Airolg smiled and nodded her head as if to communicate to her daughter, "See, I told you so!"

Everyone seemed relieved when parent-teacher conference day finally came to an end and we could all finally go home. As my car crossed over the speed bump marking the entrance to the mobile home community, the 8-year-old girl, again seated in the back of my car, opened the window saying she felt sick. Her 12-year-old sister said she was glad it was over and seemed relieved her troubles were now out in the open. In harmony, the two girls exhaled and said, "*Gracias Señora Good*" (Thanks Mrs. Good), as they unbuckled their seat belts and exited the car. Needing to hurry to another appointment, I bid a quick goodbye to the family. Kike thanked me for joining him and Airolg in parent-teacher conference day and said "*todo salió como yo sabía*" ("things turned out just like I knew they would"), (March 5, 2009). Elaborating, Kike said he was not surprised to hear his sons were doing well in school, and his daughters had some problems. Airolg, nodding in agreement as Kike spoke, waited until her husband finished his thought, and then added, "*Todavía tenemos mucho que hacer*" ("We still have a lot of work to do"), (March 5, 2009). As I maneuvered my car out of the cul-de-sac, I caught a glimpse of

Kike in the rear-view mirror of my car, and watched as he climbed the three wooden steps and then disappeared into his *traila* (trailer).

*Workplace Setting: Two Dairy Farms*

With deep appreciation, I eagerly accepted the invitations of Chayo and José to make observations at the *lecherias* (dairy farms) where they each worked. Located only minutes from her home, Chayo was employed by a large dairy operation as a part-time *limpiadora* (cleaning lady). Having a flexible schedule, she worked approximately 10 hours a week cleaning the break room, lobby, rest rooms, and the front entrance area of the dairy. Chayo was happy to have a part-time job with flexible hours which allowed her work around her children's school schedules. The income she generated was essential to the family budget, but she, like her husband José, believed it was more important for her to be at home with the four children who needed her support.

Chayo's work schedule included a few hours on weekday afternoons and on Sundays. She earned \$8.00 an hour when she worked *sola* (alone), and \$9.00 an hour when Daniel, her middle school son, assisted as her *ayudante* (helper). Chayo paid Daniel the \$1.00 an hour extra that she earned when he helped her, and he in turn used the money to compensate her for his monthly cell phone bill. Appreciating the one-on-one time she was able to spend with her son working at the dairy, Chayo believed Daniel was learning important lessons about the value of hard work. By experiencing first hand the harsh conditions under which his mother and father worked, Chayo hoped Daniel would be motivated to apply himself in school so that he might have better career options in his future.

Because Daniel liked working with animals, Chayo tried to guide him to understand how having an education would enable him to obtain a better job at the dairy in the future; he might even become a manager or supervisor someday. She reminded her son how hard his father worked as an *ordeñador* (milker) at a different dairy, and how little José earned in return for the many hours he worked each day. Believing children learned best from real life experiences, Chayo felt it was important children understand their parents' sacrifices. Not only did Daniel work with his mother at the dairy, but during the summer months he also worked along side her in the fields harvesting crops. Chayo described the heat, dust, and pains she and Daniel endured together from sunrise to sunset, just to earn a little extra money in the summer growing season.

Although she described her job as dirty, smelly, and difficult, Chayo took great pride in the fact she was the only female employed inside the large milking facility. Her work tools included rubber gloves, an industrial size push broom, cleaning solutions, and a collection of rags. After clocking in, Chayo began her work routine hosing down and sweeping the concrete floors surrounding the giant *rueda* (wheel), a moving carousel where dozens of cows lined up 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to be milked. Neither she nor Daniel seemed bothered by the foul odors that overpowered my senses and left me feeling nauseous. I wondered how long it took dairy workers to stop noticing, or at least adjust to, the fetid smells emitted from a combination of wet cows, milk, mud, and excrement.

After obtaining permission from the owner of the dairy, Chayo gave me a personal tour, an insider's view, of all aspects of work at the *lechería* (dairy farm). Sharing detailed information, she explained the components of the large milking system,

which to me, resembled a merry-go-round for cows. I watched as long lines of fat dairy cows paraded into the immense milking room from an outside holding pen, stopping only when they reached the gate separating them from the immense milking carousel. In a continuous cycle, dozens of cows moved on and off the *rueda* (wheel) that continuously rotated around the room. Respectfully greeting each of the male workers stationed around the wheel, Chayo explained to me how the cows' udders needed to be cleaned before the milking apparatus was attached. Once cows were hooked up to the apparatus, milk was collected and moved through a network of pipes to a large refrigerated tank where it was stored until trucks carried it away for processing. Drawing my attention to a computer screen, Chayo explained how the volume of milk collected from each cow was measured in pounds.

Looking for Daniel, we found him pushing a wet mop across the dank tile floor inside a small rest room. I took notice of his brown rubber boots which reached up to his knees, and was again reminded about the messy nature of his line of work. Chayo's rationale for exposing her son to difficult work conditions began to make more sense. Espousing a belief that experience was the best teacher, Chayo wanted her children to understand *her* reality and the options, or lack thereof, they would later have in life if they did not complete their education. Grinning, Chayo said her high school daughter was a diligent student because "*ella no quiere trabajar tan duro como nosotros*" ("she doesn't want to work as hard as we do"), (April 14, 2009). Admitting she could be somewhat over-protective in some areas, Chayo shared she did not want her children to be sheltered from the harsh realities of migrant labor. She believed children needed to learn about the importance of work from a very young age, and for that reason, she even brought her two



youngest children, 3 and 4-years-old, to work with her on Sundays. Mimicking her 3-year-old daughter's response to the "stinky smells" at the dairy, Chayo pinched her nose, closed her eyes, puffed her cheeks out, and held her breath. Not yet in preschool, Chayo's youngest child had already learned lessons about hard work and sacrifices migrant parents make to give their children a chance at a better life.

José was also employed at a dairy, but one much smaller than the large scale operation where Chayo worked. Unlike his wife, José had a fixed schedule and worked more than full time hours with little flexibility in the tasks he performed. On a cold and rainy Friday afternoon in April, Chayo, Daniel, and I drove down a long, muddy, rural road that led to the small dairy farm where José had been working for 2 years. There was no elaborate milking system, and instead of a team of men working on a rotating carousel, José was one of only two employees who each worked 12 hour shifts because cows needed to be milked during the day and night. José was responsible for milking hundreds of cows and he controlled a process which repeated every 20 minutes or so. By pushing a button, he operated two gates, one on each side of the barn, allowing 12 very large cows to enter the milking stalls under his ever-so-watchful eye. Two rows of cows, six on each side, filed into the milking room where they assumed their places in the stalls. José inspected and cleaned each cow's udders before attaching a milking apparatus that resembled a suction device connected to a long, thick hose. Instead of rotating around a wheel, the cows at José's dairy remained very still in their stalls where they were automatically milked by the suction machine. I watched as Daniel, who appeared at ease, wandered outside the barn to the holding pen where the next dozen cows waited patiently for their turn to enter the milking barn. Noticing how comfortable Daniel appeared, I

assumed he was not a newcomer to the setting. Neither José nor Chayo seemed concerned about their son wandering about in the rain with the cows.

When José pushed the button, a loud buzzer sounded and two gates opened. Daniel entered the barn leading a dozen cows as they assumed their places in line. Following his father from stall to stall, Daniel monitored the digital screens which indicated the volume of milk produced by each animal. When the milking cycle was completed, Daniel marshaled the cows towards the exit of the barn, clapping his hands and making loud whistling noises to hurry the stragglers along. Following Daniel's movements with her eyes, Chayo proudly shared, "*Es muy bueno el con los animales*" ("He is very good with the animals"), (April 17, 2009).

After observing three full milking cycles, José encouraged me to try something I had never experienced before: milking a cow by hand. Chayo, José, and Daniel laughed with delight as I pulled on a cow's teat and sprayed a stream of warm milk across my shoes. It did not take long for me to realize how very isolated José was in his work setting. Spending 12 hours a day, 6 days a week, alone in a barn with cows separated José from any meaningful interaction with other adults. As I stood beside him in the center of the cold milking area, I began to understand why it was so difficult for José, and other migrant parents who worked in similar settings, to learn English. Working from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., six days a week, afforded no time to attend ESL classes. Additionally, the solitude of being alone for very long periods of time eliminated any possibility of José developing English skills in his workplace. Usually his face looked quite serious, but when I told José I finally understood what he had been trying to explain to me over the past 4 months in the interviews, he broke into a broad smile. While José felt a great need

to improve his English language skills, spending the bulk of his waking hours alone with cows cut him off from any meaningful dialogue or engagement with others.

José frequently used the words *puro trabajo* (hard work), but I did not fully comprehend the significance of these words until I observed him in the context of his work. Grateful to have a job, José was not afraid of hard work, he simply wished he could find employment where he would *only* have to work 40 hours a week so that he could have more time to *convivir* (share time) with his family. Until that day, the extent of his involvement in his children's education will continue be reflected in photographs that captured what José called "*puro trabajo*" ("nothing but hard work"), (April 17, 2009).

*Family Setting: A High School Graduation Party*

The internal compass of my mind guided my car north and I sensed I was getting close to *The Closet*, a popular restaurant and lounge located 14 miles from Lucy and Lupe's home. The big day finally arrived and Emi graduated from high school the evening before; it was now time to celebrate. Hearing Spanish *ranchera* (country) music, I steered my car into a gravel parking lot located on the east side of a single story, wooden building with the words *The Closet* painted in big black letters on a sign. Tucking a graduation gift for Emi into my purse, I walked around the side of the building and noticed Lupe standing outside the front door talking on a cell phone. Smiling as he spotted my approach, Lupe waved his arms as if to say, "Right this way!" Lupe pushed the door open, directed me inside, and continued his phone conversation, giving directions to someone who sounded like they might be lost.

It took a few seconds for my eyes to adjust to the darkness inside *The Closet*. I first noticed brightly colored strobe lights flashing from the stage where a disc jockey

(DJ) was seated. As the door closed slowly behind me, I moved into the crowded lounge filled with over 100 people gathered to celebrate Emi's achievement and newly acquired status as a high school graduate. Within seconds, I was spotted by Lucy who made her way through rows of tables and chairs to greet and thank me for coming to "*la fiesta de mi hija*" ("my daughter's party"), (May 24, 2009). I told Lucy she looked *muy sexy* (very sexy) in her green satin dress, and she laughed as she gave me a warm hug. Taking my hand, Lucy led me from table to table, introducing me to her parents, in-laws, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends of Emi. Lucy's sister told me I arrived *en buen tiempo* (at a good time), because the *comida* (dinner) was just about to end and the *baile* (dance) would be soon under way.

Lucy escorted me to a buffet table covered with trays of meats, rice dishes, beans, salsas, vegetables, salads, and desserts. Urging me to hurry and fill a plate, Lucy established a chair next to her sons where I was encouraged to sit and enjoy a plate of delicious, colorful food. When I asked Lucy who prepared the food, she gave me a puzzled look, and, as if to suggest I should have known, she pointed towards her sisters and mother and matter-of-factly replied, "*todas nosotras*" ("all of us women"), (May 24, 2009).

After congratulating Emi and giving her a graduation gift, I meandered around the room and noticed what appeared to be an important area along a side wall. The first thing that caught my attention was Emi's graduation cap and gown suspended on a hanger on a wall above a large table covered with artifacts. Feeling drawn towards the prominent area, I made my way to the table and I was again greeted by Lucy who oriented me to each of the items displayed on the altar-like table. Placed in the center was a large poster

board canvassed with photographs of Emi taken over the past 18 years of her life. Gently touching the edge of a faded photograph of Emi as a baby, Lucy said it had been taken in México years before her family came to the U.S. Filled with nostalgia and emotion, Lucy summarized Emi's life through the photographs mounted on the poster board. As if to stop the tears from flowing, Lucy turned her face towards a smaller table and directed my attention to a large rectangular cake decorated with fresh strawberries. Looking far too pretty to eat, the cake was surrounded by beautifully wrapped gifts, cards, a trophy, a framed certificate of accomplishment, and of course, Emi's prized high school diploma. Lucy made it clear to me the artifacts on the display table symbolized not only Emi's academic success, but also *her* success as a parent, having supported her daughter through many difficult years in school. She wanted me to know that some of her family members had traveled from as far away as México to be a part of Emi's celebration. The cost, time, and effort required to travel on multiple buses from Durango, México to the middle of the U.S. was significant, especially in light of the advanced ages of Emi's grandparents. In addition to food, music, and gifts, family unity was an essential ingredient of this family's graduation *fiesta* (party).

The volume of the music suddenly increased as I moved my gaze from the artifact table to the dance floor where I noticed a crowd of people gathering, many with babies in their arms. Lupe approached me and I made a comment about how the babies did not seem to mind the loud music. Laughing, and almost shouting so that I could hear him above the loud music, Lupe replied, "*¡Así aprenden la cultura!*" ("That's how they learn about our culture!"), (May 24, 2009). After playing a few songs, the DJ announced it was time for the special ceremonial dance of *la festejada* (the honored guest). Emi, donned in

her graduation cap and gown, assumed her special place in the center of the dance floor. A spot light captured her swaying to the beat of the music as the audience laughed, sang, and clapped. Within seconds, Lupe reached over and took his only daughter by the hand and proudly escorted her across the floor as Lucy and Emi's four brothers joined in the family dance. Before the next song began, a crowd of people had gathered, hoping for a chance to dance with *la festejada* (the honored guest). Clearly, this was Emi's moment to shine. Lucy and Lupe, not wanting to be the center of attention, humbly made their way towards the edges of the dance floor and then looked back at Emi. The essence of their love and pride was captured in the shadows cast by their daughter as she twirled under the strobe lights marking the epicenter of a celebration of meaningful and successful parental involvement.

### Summary

Perched in academic, workplace, and family settings, I attempted to contextualize for the reader what I saw, heard, felt, tasted, and smelled in the process of gathering data in this inquiry relevant to meaningful parental involvement in migrant families. Through the three portraits presented in this chapter, my aim was to create a sense of placement, to ground the reader in a few of the settings where data were collected, and, as Stake (1995) described, “develop *vicarious experiences* ... a sense of ‘being there’” (p. 63, emphasis in original). The portraits presented in this chapter were created to draw the reader deeper into the inquiry by contextualizing the settings to help the reader make sense of the findings, which are presented as themes in chapter six. Reflecting a co-constructed fusion of reality, the four major themes of this inquiry were distilled from the many sub-themes that emerged throughout the process of data collection and analysis.

## CHAPTER VI

### SENSE-MAKING AND THE CO-CONSTRUCTION OF MEANING

The research problem addressed in this qualitative case study centered on a need for a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand and make sense of meaningful parental involvement. Utilizing case study and portraiture methodologies, data were collected from a wide array of sources through prolonged engagement in the field. The process of data collection and analysis was continuous and simultaneous (Merriam, 1998), and honored participants and the researcher as “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1972b, p. 31). Through dialogue and critical reflection, participants and I worked together as research partners to co-construct the findings presented in this chapter as four major themes.

Using portraiture, I aimed to contextualize the lived experiences and perspectives of 6 migrant parent participants to help the reader identify and connect with their stories. As a novice portraiture, I had to learn to direct my attention to listen carefully “*for* a story, rather than *to* a story” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 120, emphasis in original) as I collected and analyzed the data. While many stories were shared throughout the course of this case study, the findings presented in this chapter are a synthesis of seven voices, those of six migrant parents and my own.

This chapter opens with an introduction to the findings co-constructed from the data. In the sections that follow, findings from this inquiry are presented as four major

themes purposefully introduced in a specific order to show how they overlap and build upon each other. To help the reader make sense of the findings and to improve trustworthiness, extensive quotes are used throughout this chapter to support each of the four themes. Because all communication with participants was conducted in Spanish, and because participants wrote in Spanish in their journals, whenever quotes are used they are presented first in Spanish and are then translated into English. All translations were completed by me, the research, and were reviewed for accuracy by three bilingual professionals of Mexican origin. This chapter concludes with an interpretive commentary highlighting the salient points discussed. The reader is then transitioned to the conclusions and recommendations which are portrayed in chapter seven.

### Findings

The findings co-constructed from this inquiry reflect four major themes: (1) Migrant Parents as Mexican Immigrants, (2) Academic Ethos, (3) Critical Relationships, and (4) Empowerment. Embedded within each of these themes were many sub-themes, or building blocks, that were used to support and structure the findings. To help manage the data and organize sub-themes as they emerged, I compiled the sub-themes alphabetically in a format presented as Figure 1.



A	Academics, Achievement, Adaptations, Advocacy
B	Behavior, Bilingualism, Binational, Borders
C	Culture, Communication, Community, Celebration, Caring, Collaboration, Children, <i>Convivir</i> (Spending Time Together), Connection
D	Dreams, Differences, Dialogue
E	Educate, Education, English, Enrichment Activities, Extended Family, Expectations, English as a Second Language (ESL), Early Childhood Education
F	Family, Friends, Food, Fun, Future
G	Guide
H	Hope, Home, Helping Others, Home-based Activities, Health
I	Immigrants, Interpretation, Isolation, Interconnections
J	Journaling
K	Knowledge
L	Language, Life-long learning
M	Meaning, Mobility, México, Migrant Education Program, Motivation
N	Networking
O	Opportunity, Optimism
P	Perspective, Perseverance, Papers (Immigration Documents), Priorities, Power, Presence, Pride, Photography, Protection
Q	Questioning, Quality of Life
R	Respect, Role Models, Responsibility, Resources, Ready-to-Learn, Reflexivity
S	Sacrifice, Siblings, Sharing, Spanish, Spanglish, Struggles, Security, Schools, Self-Confidence
T	Trust, Togetherness, Translation, Time, Transportation, Teachers, Teaching
U	Understanding, United States, Unity
V	Values, Voice
W	Work, Wages

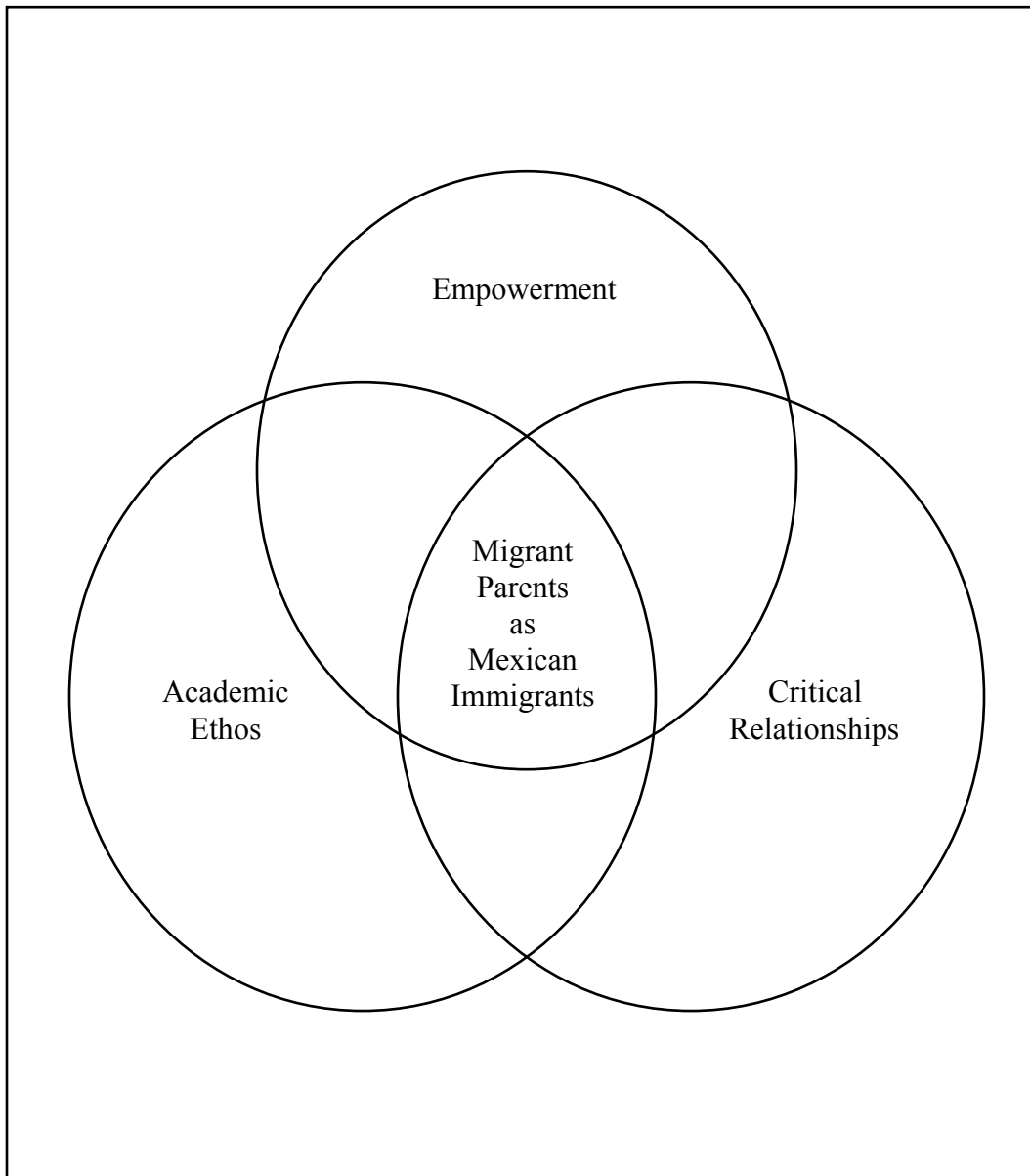
Figure 1. Sub-themes grouped alphabetically.

By coding, collapsing, and aggregating sub-themes, the findings, or four major themes, were co-constructed with participants. Figure 2 illustrates the four major themes with embedded sub-themes.

<b>MIGRANT PARENTS AS MEXICAN IMMIGRANTS</b>
Adaptations, Bilingualism, Borders, Binational, Culture, Dreams, Differences, English as a Second Language, Future, Health, Hope, Immigrants, Interpretation, Isolation, Language, México, Mobility, Motivation, Opportunity, Optimism, Perspective, Perseverance, Papers (Immigration Documents), Quality of Life, Sacrifice, Spanish, Spanglish, Struggles, Translation, United States, Work, Wages
<b>ACADEMIC ETHOS</b>
Academics, Achievement, Educate, Education, English, Enrichment Activities, Expectations, Early Childhood Education, Guide, Home-based Activities, Life-long Learning, Priorities, Ready-to-Learn, Schools, Transportation, Teachers, Teaching, Values
<b>CRITICAL RELATIONSHIPS</b>
Behavior, Communication, Connection, Community, Celebration, Caring, Collaboration, Children, <i>Convivir</i> (Sharing Time Together), Extended Family, Family, Friends, Food, Fun, Home, Helping Others, Interconnections, Migrant Education Program, Networking, Protection, Presence, Pride, Resources, Respect, Role Models, Responsibility, Siblings, Sharing, Security, Trust, Togetherness, Time, Unity
<b>EMPOWERMENT</b>
Advocacy, Dialogue, Journaling, Knowledge, Meaning, Power, Photography, Questioning, Reflexivity, Self Confidence, Understanding, Voice

*Figure 2.* The four major themes with embedded sub-themes.

A Venn diagram, presented as Figure 3, was created to portray the interconnections between the four major themes.



*Figure 3.* Interconnections between the four major themes.

*Migrant Parents as Mexican Immigrants.*

Foundational in this study were issues related to the fact participants were both migrant parents and Mexican immigrants. Although not included in the selection criteria, all 6 participants were first generation Mexican immigrants. Within the prior 12 years, each participant bid goodbye to their extended family and friends, some never to be seen again, and emigrated north. Feeling compelled by life's circumstances, each found their way across the U.S.- México border, all of the mothers with at least one child in tow. Like other immigrants who came before them, some crossed the border with an entry visa in hand. Others paid a relatively large sum of money to a *coyote* (smuggler) who transported them across the border. Some found their own path, following in the footsteps of their ancestors, *los braceros* (Mexican farm laborers brought to the U.S. from México between 1942-1964 through the Bracero Program created by the U.S. and Mexican governments). Feeling homesick, each participant yearned to someday return to México *para visitar la familia* (to visit their family), although none planned to do so in the near future, because the costs and risks associated with re-entering the U.S. at this point in history *ya no vale la pena* (are no longer worth it).

In addition to having a child or children who were born in México, each of the immigrant couples in this study also had at least one child who was born in the U.S. The families created by the immigrant parents were, what I termed, binational families, a blend of two nations. Speaking varying degrees of English and Spanish, participants and their children often mixed the two languages and spoke Spanglish, a hybrid language that combines English and Spanish to create words that are of neither language, or words that have elements of both (Stavans, 2003). Sharing concerns that she and her children were

losing their ability to speak Spanish at a high level, Chayo lamented the following in her first individual interview (January 11, 2009):

*Lo que más me hace falta es que no se les olvide el español en un nivel más alto. Para mí es muy importante el español, porque son nuestras raíces, nuestras costumbres, son este, nuestros ideales. Entonces, a la vez también se me hace muy importante, porque una persona que sabe los dos idiomas es como tener un tesoro extra, aparte del que ya tiene. Entonces, para mí es muy importante que sepan los dos idiomas y los sepan bien. Saberlos leer, escribir, hablarlo a la perfección, porque luego ya aquí y luego pasa, y sí pasa, porque a mí me está pasando, estamos cambiando palabras. Mezclamos en inglés con el español y creamos nuevas palabras como “parquearse.” Estacionarse, la palabra correcta es estacionarse. Y luego también los he oído “tochar.” ¿Qué es tochar? No me “toches,” dicen ellos. ¿Qué es eso? Es no me toques. Otro ejemplo es cuando la gente dice que ésta “wachando.” ¿Qué es eso, “wachando?” Viendo, no “wachando.” Sí, cambian mucho, y le digo me pasa a mí, entonces, tengo una ayuda ahí extra. No más es cuestión de levantar el teléfono y hablarle a mi hermana en México, quien es maestra de español, para que me saque de dudas.*

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The thing I am most concerned about is that my children will forget their Spanish, especially high level Spanish. For me, Spanish is very important because it is our roots, our customs, and well, our ideals. It is also very important because a person who knows both languages is like having a treasure beyond what you already have. So for me, it is very important [my children] know both languages, and that they know them both well. Knowing how to read, write, and speak perfectly well, because after being here [in the U.S.] for awhile, it does happen, and it is happening to me, we change the words. We mix English with Spanish words and we create new words like “parquearse” [Spanglish word created from the English words to park]. *Estacionarse* (to station, or to park a car), the correct word is *estacionarse*. I have also heard people say “tochar” (Spanglish word created from the English words to touch). What does “tochar” mean? Don’t *toches* (touch) me, they say. What is that? They should say don’t *toques* (touch) me. Another example is when people say they are “wachando” [Spanglish word created from the English word to watch). What does “wachando” mean? The correct word is *viendo* (watching), not *wachando*. Yes, we change a lot of words, and I have to say it is happening to me too, but I have extra help from someone [in México]. It is just a matter of picking up the telephone and calling my sister in México who is a Spanish teacher, and she clarifies any doubts I may have [about using Spanish words correctly].

Because Chayo was concerned her family was losing high level Spanish, she took action and conferred with her sister, a teacher in México, whenever she had doubts about using

the Spanish language correctly. For Chayo, Spanglish was not a language she wanted her family to acquire.

On and off, most of the participants used Spanglish in their interviews as well as in their journals. Kike frequently used the word *raitear* (Spanglish word created from the English words “to give a ride to”) to explain how he and his wife Airolg found another parent to *raitear* (transport) their 4-year-old son to preschool. Aside from Chayo, none of the other participants seemed aware they were using Spanglish. When I shared my observations that participants were combining English and Spanish words, they seemed genuinely surprised, which suggested to me they did not know it was happening.

Maintaining native language skills (Spanish) was important for all 6 immigrant participants, but, at the same time, they also placed a high value on learning English. The children of the participants in this study made it abundantly clear to their Mexican immigrant parents the importance of being able to communicate in English when living in the U.S., as Airolg shared in the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008):

*Por ejemplo, en mi caso es que, pues bueno, mis hijos quieren hablar puro inglés aunque yo creo que casi todos estamos rodeados de gente que habla en español. Pero si ellos saben que alguien habla inglés, ellos prefieren hablar en inglés, aunque ellos hablen español. Y luego, como yo me mantengo diciéndoles, “hablen español porque tienen que aprender español,” para que sigan aprendiendo español, para que así sigan estudiando, consigan un mejor trabajo, o para que no pierdan el idioma. Y me contestan, “Mami, pero tú también tienes que aprender inglés, ¿eh?”*

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For example in my case it is, well okay, my children want to speak only English even though I believe we are all surrounded by people who speak Spanish. If they know that a person speaks English, they prefer to speak English, even though they speak Spanish. I keep telling them, “speak Spanish because you have to learn the Spanish language,” so they can continue studying [Spanish] to find a better job, so they don’t lose their native language. And they reply to me, “Mommy, but you also have to learn English, right?”

As if to reinforce Airolg's comments, Lucy (December 20, 2008) added the following:

*Si, si, de hecho sí. Y les digo, a ver, "Yo quiero saber de qué están platicando." Y luego lo que nos dicen es, "Pues ve a la escuela para que sepas el inglés." "No," les digo, "Ustedes deben hablar español para que no se les olvide." Muchas veces uno no habla mucho el inglés por lo mismo, para que ellos por lo menos se comuniquen con uno y hablen con uno en español. Porque no se les tiene que olvidar, porque si hablan los dos idiomas va a ser más fácil que agarren un trabajo mejor. Y así, no se les olvida su idioma natal.*

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Yes, yes, that is the way it is. And I tell my children, "look, I want to know what you are talking about" [when her children speak in English]. And then what they tell us [parents] is, "Well go to school and learn English." "No," I say, "You should speak Spanish so that you don't forget it." A lot of times we [parent] don't speak much in English for that very reason, just so that they [children] at least communicate with us [parent] in Spanish. Because they just can't forget it, because if they speak two languages it will be easier for them to find a better job. And in that way, they will not forget their native language.

Kike further elaborated on his wife Airolg's comments acknowledging children had their parents' best interest at heart, as reflected in his following comments made at the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008):

*Ellos más bien lo hacen también en base a que no quieren que batallemos también nosotros para tratar de hablar con los maestros. Porque muchas de las veces va uno a la escuela, necesita traductor, o simplemente no hay traductores disponibles y tiene uno que esperar a que se desocupe un traductor. Y así ya también muchas de las veces al estar traduciendo una persona, no es lo mismo al estarlo escuchando uno y saber qué es lo que está diciendo aquella persona porque el traductor muchas de las veces no dice las palabras que está diciendo la maestra. Y ahí es donde muchas de las veces vienen los malos entendidos, o muchas veces uno piensa que están diciendo una cosa mal o equis. La niña más grande es la que me dice, bueno, ella aún estaba muy chiquita, ella lo que tiene es que, se preocupa un poco más por nosotros por el hecho de que quiere que también salgamos también adelante en el trabajo o con las demás personas. Porque sabe que si yo puedo hablar un poco más inglés, puedo comunicarme más con mis patronos y con otras personas. Ven el valor de saber los dos idiomas.*

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They [children] do this because they don't want us [parents] to struggle when we try to communicate with their teachers. Because when we go to their school we need an interpreter, and many times there simply are no interpreters available so we have to wait until someone becomes available. And often when a person interprets for you, it is not the same as hearing it for yourself and knowing precisely what the other person is saying, because the interpreter does not use the exact words of the teacher. And that's how misunderstandings occur, or there are times you think they [interpreter] might be saying something wrong, or saying something else. Our oldest daughter is the one who tells me, okay, even when she was very young, she was, she worried a bit about us [parents], because she wants us to be able to advance in our jobs and in relationships with all people. Because she knows that if I can speak better English, I can improve my communication with my employers and with others as well. They [children] see the value of knowing two languages.

All 6 participants made attempts to learn English by attending different types of English as a Second Language (ESL) classes provided by school districts, community organizations, and the Migrant Education Program (MEP). Unfortunately, ESL classes were not always scheduled at times and locations that were accessible, especially for parents who worked long hours on weekdays and weekends. In regard to learning English, in the second focus group interview José explained how his work schedule created a barrier for him to attend classes and said, "*No es por no querer, es por no poder*" ("It's not that I don't want to, it's that I'm not able"), (June 16, 2009). Airolg also explained how hard it was for her to learn English, sharing the following statement in the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008):

*Para mí ha sido un poquito difícil el inglés. Que no me entra el inglés, no me entra. Entonces ahí yo, yo tengo que aprender inglés para poderles ayudar a mis hijos con sus tareas. Aunque ellas me traducen lo que tienen de tarea, no es lo mismo. No es lo mismo que yo sepa leerlo. Entonces en eso, si se me dificulta.*

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For me, learning English has been somewhat difficult. It just doesn't get through for me, I just don't get it. But I have to learn English to be able to help my children with their homework. Even though they [children] translate for me what



they have for their homework, it's not the same. It's not the same as me being able to read it myself. So, in that regard it has been difficult for me.

Clearly, learning English was a goal and a high priority for all of the participants; however, there were many complicating factors, or barriers, that got in the way.

As migrant farm workers, each of the 3 couples had moved numerous times with their families in search of work. Participants sincerely appreciated the many educational opportunities available to their children in the U.S., and in spite of the high costs of purchasing school supplies, clothes, sports gear, computers, musical instruments, and health services, they all agreed the U.S. educational system offered far more opportunities than what was available to them in México. The following excerpt, taken from the transcript of the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008), helps explain why participants chose to emigrate from México to the U.S.:

*Lucy: Nosotros nos venimos también por la misma razón, por las oportunidades. Para nosotros poderles dar más oportunidades de estudiar, porque pues sí, allá las escuelas son más caras y allá no hay mucho trabajo. Y éramos seis en la casa y teníamos que salir adelante. Porque no hay mucho, nosotros vivíamos en un pueblito y no había más que pura labor, puro campo. Y po's allá el trabajo para las mujeres no hay.*

*Airolg: Como dice ella en cuestión educativa, allá la escuela no es gratis, desde preschool hasta la superior.*

*Lucy: Tiene uno que cooperar en todo, desde un par de zapatos, porque si no tienes zapatos, pue, no vas a la escuela. Un lápiz o un cuaderno, tiene uno que comprarlo todo. Y aquí pues es nomás llevar a los niños a la escuela.*

*Chayo: Desde el uniforme es obligatorio.*

*Lucy: Si, es obligatorio y aquí, po's aquí gracias a Dios le dan a uno todo. Nomás pone a los niños uno en la escuela.*

*Kike: El salario tiene mucho que ver. Porque, por ejemplo, aquí, no digamos que gana uno mucho, pero en comparación a México. Aquí por ejemplo, pues si, se ayuda uno con lo que gana una de las personas, pero en México tienen que trabajar las dos personas, y ni aún así se alcanzan. Muchas de las veces o compran comida, o compran el uniforme, o pagan colegiatura, o compran regalos de navidad. Es muy caro, el sueldo de una persona equivale a 50 dólares [U.S.]. El gas está muy caro allá, un tanque de gas grande le costará de pérdida*

unos 300 pesos, y en la maquiladora ganan 500 pesos, que son 50 dólares [U.S.]. O sea, estarían comprando el gas y también, por ejemplo, en estas fechas es cuando sube un poco más el consumo del gas y es donde gastan más gas. Tienen que apretarse un poco más el cinturón, para poder comprar el gas y calentar sus casas.

Lucy: *Se ve la diferencia.*

Airolg: *Y en México suben mucho los precios. Por ejemplo la gasolina subió, subió, y subió y así se queda el precio. No es como aquí, aquí la gasolina subió y subió, pero bajó.*

Lucy: *No, y luego allá sube la mercancía, sube la comida, la gas y todo eso, pero los sueldos no suben. El sueldo siempre es el mismo y los precios van pa'riba y menos y menos se acabala uno.*

María Elena (investigadora): *Entonces lo que yo entiendo es que aunque a veces aquí sufren por un lado, ganan por el otro, y ganan más que lo que pierden.*

Kike: *Hay formas de poder solventarse, o sea si necesita aquí uno comida, va al banco de comida o a una asociación y los apoyan. Si necesita uno ropa, también. Las escuelas, hay muchas escuelas, por ejemplo donde están mis hijos ahorita, ya sea la secretaria o los maestros si ven que no traen el uniforme los niños, les preguntan por qué y si ellos dicen que no tienen, ellos mismos se los proporcionan los uniformes a los alumnos.*

Airolg: *O chamarras.*

Kike: *Chamarras ahora en tiempo de invierno. O sea, es mucha la ayuda que hay aquí, y en México no, en México el gobierno está tan, digamos, mal hecho. No hay apoyos para nadie, ni para los ancianos.*

María Elena (investigadora): *Diferentes sistemas.*

Kike: *Son diferentes sistemas. O sea, todo lo que se paga en colegiaturas mensualmente o para pagar las inscripciones, porque las inscripciones están bien caras, todo eso, el gobierno nada más se queda con ellas. No hay remodelación de aulas en las escuelas, no tienen calefacción, no tienen aire acondicionado, o sea no hay nada, si, en donde los niños puedan estudiar como aquí.*

Airolg: *¡Hijole, está caro!*

Lucy: *Como aquí la high school es la preparatoria allá. Y es muy cara una carrera en una preparatoria, ya no se diga en la universidad.*

Chayo: *Otra cosa es que la universidad siempre se basa por palancas, aparte del dinero. Tiene que tener dinero, aparte del dinero, tiene que tener palanca para entrar a la universidad, y aunque el niño tenga las mejores calificaciones. Si no tiene palanca, no tiene las posibilidades de entrar.*

María Elena (investigadora): *Palanca. ¿Qué es palanca?*

Chayo: *Es conocer a las personas que están más arriba. Que los pueden ayudar a entrar a la facultad. Por ejemplo, si yo conozco al director, es fácil.*

María Elena (investigadora): *¿No es mordida?*

Chayo: *No, pero es parecido.*

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Lucy: We came for the same reason, for opportunities. So that we could give them [children] more opportunities to study, because, well yes, there [México] schools are very expensive and there's not much work. There were six of us in the house and we needed to get ahead. There wasn't much, we lived in a small village and there were no jobs except hard labor in the rural countryside. And, well, there was no work available for women.

Airolg: Like she said, in regards to education, public schools in México are not free, from preschool through the highest level in secondary education.

Lucy: You have to contribute for everything, from a pair of shoes, because if you don't have shoes you can't go to school, to a pencil and a notebook. You have to buy everything. And here [in the U.S.] you just have to send your children to school.

Chayo: Even school uniforms are required [in México].

Lucy: Yes, that is required. And here, well thank God, they give you everything. You just have to send your children to school.

Kike: Your salary has a lot to do with it. For example, here, I am not saying I make a lot of money, but in comparison to México. Here for example, well yes, here you can make it on one parent's income, but in México both parents have to work to make ends meet, and even then, the money they make does not cover all of the expenses. Oftentimes you have to decide between buying food, uniforms, paying the monthly tuition, or buying Christmas gifts. Life is very expensive [in México] and one person's weekly salary equals about \$50.00 [U.S.]. Gas is very expensive there, one large tank of gas can cost around 300 pesos [\$30.00 U.S.] and a factory worker only earns 500 pesos, or \$50.00 [U.S.] a week. People have to buy gas, and for example in these months [winter] people use more gas [to heat their homes] and therefore they spend more. They have to tighten their belts a little more to afford the gas needed to heat their homes.

Lucy: You can really see the difference [between México and the U.S.].

Airolg: And in México, the prices just keep going up. For example, the price of gas goes up, and up, and up and it stays at the high price. It is not like here where the price of gasoline goes up, and up, but then it comes back down.

Lucy: And in México the price of merchandise, food, gas, and everything goes up, but the salaries don't increase. Salaries remain the same as prices climb and less and less people are able to get by.

Mary Ellen: (researcher): So what I understand is that on one hand, life can be hard [in the U.S.], but on the other hand, you gain more than you lose.

Kike: There are ways to resolve problems here. If a person needs food, they can go to a food bank or an agency that provides support for people in need. If you need clothes, it's the same [clothing banks]. Schools, there are many schools, like the one my children go to, if the secretary or teachers see children coming to school without uniforms, they ask them why [they're not wearing their uniform] and if they say they can't afford a uniform, they themselves [school staff] will get uniforms for students.

Airolg: Or jackets.

Kike: Jackets in the winter time. There is a lot of support here and in México, well no, in México the government is, let's say, not good. There is no support for anyone, not even for the old people.

Mary Ellen: (researcher): Different systems.

Kike: They are different systems. After all the money you spend on monthly tuition and paying registration fees, because registrations are very expensive, after all that, the government keeps the money. They don't remodel classrooms in schools, there is no heat, and they don't have air conditioning. In summary, there is nothing, no place for children to be able to study like here [U.S.].

Airolg: Wow! It is expensive [in México]!

Lucy: In México, high school is called *preparatoria*. And it's is very expensive to get a certificate in high school for a career track. And I am not even talking about getting a college diploma.

Chayo: Another thing is that getting admitted to a university always depends on *palancas* (connections to people higher up), aside from the money. You have to have money, but you also have to have a *palanca* (connection) to get into the university, even if the student has the best of grades. If you do not have a *palanca* (connection), you have no possibility of getting into college.

Mary Ellen (researcher): *Palanca*. What does that mean?

Chayo: It means you know people in high positions. People who can help you get into the college. For example, if you know the dean, getting in is easy.

Mary Ellen: (researcher): Isn't that a bribe?

Chayo: No, but it is similar.

As immigrants, participants were deeply grateful for the many different opportunities available in the U.S., such as a free public education system and jobs. As migrant workers, they were also deeply concerned about their limited ability to earn enough money to support their children's success in school and life. They all moved frequently, not by choice, but rather to secure temporary employment in agricultural jobs that barely paid a minimum wage. While one's immigration status was not a concern to enroll children in public school in the U.S., it was an issue that mattered greatly in the workplace, and work is central for migrant families. José, who worked 72 hours a week milking cows on a dairy farm, explained how important jobs were for immigrant families,

and how critical getting an education was for children of immigrant families, as he stated in his third individual interview (May 22, 2009):

*Pues, para mí, la verdad, lo principal es, el motivo de que está uno aquí trabajand, luchando por, pues, mi trabajo, gracias a mi trabajo estamos por aquí. Si, significa o sea, tiene uno un trabajo y les puede uno dar el apoyo tanto económico, verdad. Si, son muchas horas, trabaja uno mucho, muy fuerte, por eso les dice uno que estudien bastante, para que no tengan que trabajar igual que uno tanto, trabajos tan pesados.*

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Well, for me the truth is, the important thing is, the reason why I am here working, struggling for, well, my job, thanks to my work we are able to be here. Yes, it's important, when you have a job you can support [your family], economically speaking right? Yes, I work a lot of hours, I work hard under difficult conditions and that's why I tell them [children] to study hard, so that they won't have to work like I do, in jobs that are very difficult.

Although all participants hoped their children would graduate from high school, none took it for granted. They articulated how barriers, such as language, transportation, health problems, and poverty, created hurdles for immigrant families. In describing what immigrant parents do to support their children to graduate from high school, in his first individual interview (January 13, 2009) Lupe stated, “*Es una lucha, se batalla, no es fácil*” (“It’s a struggle, you have to work hard, it is not easy”), to which his wife Lucy added the following:

*Para que llegue ese día, son todos los días, todos los días de estar con, sobre de ellos, haciendo esto y lo otro, y “tienes que ir a la escuela, y no faltes y no pierdas las clases.” Y al final de los 12 años, que es la graduación, es el fruto de todo lo que hicieron todos estos años, de levantarse temprano, de que “hoy no tengo ganas,” y “que ahora no voy” y así. Y ahora ese es el fruto del éxito que logran cuando ya se gradúan. Y es un bien para ellos y po’s para uno también.*

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To get to that day [high school graduation], it’s all of the days, all of the days of being there with them and following up with them, doing this and that, and, [saying] “you have to go to school, don’t be absent, and don’t miss your classes.”

And at the end of 12 years, graduation is the fruit of all their efforts over those years, getting up early, when they say “I don’t feel like going [to school] today,” and “I’m not going to go,” and so on. So that is the fruit of success they achieve when they finally graduate. It’s good for them and, well, it’s good for [parents] too.

When I asked Lucy during her third individual interview how she felt at her daughter Emi’s high school graduation ceremony, she replied (May 31, 2009):

*Se me graduó y le digo, creo que si estoy haciendo buen trabajo con ellos. Y luego, pues le digo, ya se terminó la ceremonia y fui y la abracé y luego le dije, “A ver mi’ja, ya ves qué te costaba para darme esa alegría.” Y dijo ella, “Si mom.” Ahora, “Si mi’ja, de aquí en adelante su futuro depende de usted.” Le digo, “Su mamá, su papá le dimos hasta donde pudimos hasta hoy que era nuestra meta.”*

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She graduated for me and it makes me feel like I am doing a good job raising them [children]. And later, well, after the ceremony ended I went and hugged her and then I told her, “Look my daughter, now you can see how hard you worked to bring me this much happiness.” And she said, “Yes mom.” Then I said, “Yes my daughter, from today forward your future depends on you.” I said, “Your mom and dad gave you all we could to help you get to this day [high school graduation], which was our goal.

For Lucy, seeing her children graduate from high school reflected more than hope, it was a goal, as she documented in her journal: “*Lo logramos, nuestro esfuerzo dio fruto y nuestros consejos tuvieron un eco en los oídos de quien escuchó. Los papás tenemos una meta en la vida, lograr que los hijos lleguen al final de la escuela*” (“We accomplished it, our efforts came to fruition and our words of advice echoed in the ears of the person who listened. As parents we have a goal in life, that our children make it to the end of high school”).

Unlike obtaining a high school diploma, the idea of her children obtaining a college degree was not necessarily a realistic goal for Lucy (May 31, 2009), as noted in her additional comments (May, 31, 2009):

*Si pues, si hubiera oportunidad, si pudiera seguir estudiando, verdad, pero en veces por la situación este, como tienen que tener residencia, tienen que tener un seguro social. Los costos son muy altos, muy superiores y pues, dice una, una señora, “les podremos dar el primer semestre pero nada más, porque pues no tenemos los recursos.” Y por eso muchas veces ya cuando se gradúen de la high school, pues, ya es suficiente.*

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Yes, well if there ever was an opportunity, if they were ever able to continue studying, perhaps, but sometimes there are situations, like having resident status, or a social security number. The costs [of college] are very expensive, extremely high, and well, one person told me, another mother said, “we [parents] might be able to provide funding for the first semester, but nothing more than that because, well, we don’t have the financial resources.” And for that reason, oftentimes when [immigrant students] graduate from high school, well, that’s enough.

The only participant who voiced an expectation her children would to go college was Chayo, who shared the following comments at the last focus group interview (June 16, 2009):

*El sueño de nosotros es que ellos tengan una carrera. Porque entonces sí, nos vamos a sentir que no vamos a caber en el mundo. Porque ya, ahorita graduarse de la high school, sí es muy importante porque muchos muchachitos no se llegan a graduar. Pero es más importante que tengan su carrera, porque su carrera es lo que los va a ayudar en el futuro. El graduarse de la high school va a venir siendo casi la misma. De una universidad, de una licenciatura, es algo grandísimo. Entonces este, el sueño de nosotros es que nuestros hijos tengan una carrera. Ya que nosotros no, no pedimos poquito, nosotros queremos, nos vamos a lo grande. Queremos una carrera para cada uno de ellos. Y eso va a ser un reto para nosotros, para que ellos se gradúen de aquí de una universidad. ¡Cuesta mucho dinero, un año cuesta mucho dinero! Entonces va a ser un reto para nosotros. Y el día que ellos lo lleguen a conseguir, pues entonces, si como le digo, no vamos a caber en el mundo. Por la felicidad, de la dicha de que nuestros sueños se hagan cumplido.*

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Our dream [as parents] is that they [children] have a college degree. Because, then we will feel so grand that we won’t even be able to fit in the world. Because the way things are now, graduating from high school is very important; many young people don’t even make it that far. But it’s even more important that they have a college degree, because a college degree will help them in the future. Graduating from high school will amount to nothing more than the same thing. But a university, having a bachelor’s degree, well that is something truly great. So our dream is for our children to have a college degree. We no longer aspire to small

things; we're going for all that's possible. We want a college degree for each one of them [children]. And that is going to be our goal, a goal that they graduate here from a university. It costs a lot of money, just one year costs a lot of money! So that will be a goal for us. And the day they attain that, well, like I said, [our feelings will be so grand] we won't even be able to fit in the world. Because of the happiness that will come when our dreams have been realized.

Lupe frowned and responded to Chayo's comments saying, "*Para algunas personas, bueno, hay algo que interrumpe esos sueños, y que le llaman amnistía*" ("For some people, well, there is something that gets in the way of those dreams, and it's called amnesty"), (June 16, 2009). Lupe continued, "*No alcanzo a comprender yo que en un país que es muy importante, que lo consideran de mucho valor, no le permitan a los que quieren estudiar, por el simple hecho de no tener un papel*" ("I just can't understand why, in a country where it [education] is so important, something that is considered to be of such great value, why people who want to continue to study are not allowed to, simply because they don't have a piece of paper [immigration documents]. Nodding, Chayo replied to Lupe's comments saying (June 16, 2009):

*Bueno, yo nomás una observación acerca de eso. Es que, ahorita sí, está muy difícil para los indocumentados. Está muy difícil pero no es imposible. Para poder obtener una carrera yo he sabido que hay que aplicar hasta 70 becas, tal vez 50 becas, y se obtiene la carrera, ¿verdad? Nada más es cuestión de que uno tiene uno que talonearle. Entonces ahorita, no es imposible. Sí está bien que no se les dan las mismas oportunidades, pero si lo pueden lograr. Todo se puede en esta vida queriéndolo hacer.*

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Okay, just an observation about that. So, yes, right now it is very difficult for undocumented people. It is very difficult, but not impossible. In order to obtain a college degree, I have heard you have to apply for 70 scholarships, maybe 50 scholarships, to make it happen, right? It's a matter of working extra hard at it. So right now, it is not impossible. So be it not everyone has the same opportunities, but they [immigrant students] can achieve it [a college degree]. You can accomplish anything in this life if you really want to make it happen.



In spite of the struggles and barriers immigrant families face, all participants expected their children would graduate from high school, and their expectations were backed up by federal laws, such as *Plyler v. Doe*, (1982) which guarantees *all* students the right to a free public education through high school. However, unlike high school, access to post secondary education is a privilege, not a right. Consequently, a college degree was not necessarily an expectation for most participants. As Chayo expressed, immigrant parents need to *talonearle* (work extra hard) to help their children achieve such a higher level goal.

Parents often used the words *migrante* (migrant) and *emigrante* (emigrant) interchangeably in reference to their families. While I never broached the topic of immigration status, it was a prominent theme that surfaced early in our conversations. One participant, whose immigration visa had expired, shared a dream of someday becoming a U.S. citizen. Other participants were patiently awaiting a decision from the U.S. government regarding their applications for a green card, a legal document that would make them lawful permanent residents.

For *ilegales* (illegal aliens), employment options for workers *sin papeles* (without legal papers) were few and scarce. Accepting positions that pay little more than the required minimum wage, migrant workers are often made to work long, hard hours, often in deplorable conditions, and they barely make enough money to cover the costs of their family's basic living expenses. Knowing how hard it could be to find another job, and how easily they could be replaced, migrant workers do what is necessary to keep their jobs to support their families. Lacking health insurance, they show up for work, even when they are sick, because they know if they miss a day, they could be fired. They

suffer in silence, holding on to hope their children will have better opportunities in the future when they complete their education. For the families in this study, a high school diploma represented more than a document of academic achievement; it was a key that might open the door out of poverty. Placing a high value on education, participants believed education was the best hope their children had for a brighter future, perhaps the only hope. Their academic ethos, the second theme of this inquiry, is detailed in the following section.

### *Academic Ethos*

*La educación es primordial* (education is fundamental). These words were expressed repeatedly by both Chayo and Airolg in their individual interviews and journals. Struck by the use of the term *primordial* (fundamental), I asked Chayo and Airolg to help me better understand the meaning this term held for them. After hearing their explanations, I began to understand that education was more than a value, it was *the core value* that motivated participants to become, and stay involved, in their children's schooling. From the early stages of data collection, this theme continually surfaced. A great deal of what parents did and hoped for seemed to revolve around their children obtaining an education that would afford them better options and opportunities in life.

Reflecting on the strong work ethic of migrant parents (Parra Cardona et al., 2006), I compared the concept of work ethic with the strong value participants placed on education. I pondered using the term academic ethic for this theme; however, the word ethic did not fully capture the essence of what participants so richly described. In search of a better word to reflect the notion of education as *primordial* (fundamental), the word

ethos surfaced. Contrasting the terms ethics and ethos, Amato (2004) stated the following:

Although both “ethics” and “ethos” refer to the standards and values of a community, the difference between them involves a recognition that taking a different stance or attitude toward values changes them. Ethics involves the values of a culture insofar as they are subject to reflection, when the *ethos* of a community is thematized reflectively and thus as standards and values it can be regarded as action-guiding: By ethos we refer to values or standards as providing a description of *normality*. By ethics we refer to the practice of holding our values in a different way - either regarding them as right and worth continuing or as wrong and requiring change. (p. 145-146, emphasis in original)

Amato’s description of ethics suggests that values guide behavior and lead people to comply with a certain code of conduct based on perceptions of what is right or wrong, good or bad. In contrast, ethos is used by Amato in reference to general principles and attitudes related to normality. Philosophically speaking, ethos can be viewed as an internalized drive and a willingness to act (Mafunisa, 2000).

Ethos is the Greek root word from which the word ethics was derived. To differentiate these terms, ethics can be viewed as a concept pertaining to compliance, whereas ethos is grounded in commitment (Mafunisa, 2000). Aligned with this distinction, I felt the term ethos best captured the commitment that motivated and sustained the parental involvement efforts of participants in this study. As their most basic value, education was not something they viewed as right or wrong, it was simply *primordial* (fundamental) and required action on their part. This view was supported by Chayo’s statement made at the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008):

*Todo el día estoy ocupada, pero yo prefiero dejar todo lo que tengo y estar 100% disponible para la escuela. Porque para mí es lo más básico, ya que me dio mi esposo la oportunidad de estar en la casa. Entonces yo me dedico completamente a los niños, para lo que ellos necesitan en la escuela yo estoy 100% disponible*

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I am busy all day long, but I prefer to drop everything I have to do so I can be 100% available for my children's schooling. Because for me it is the most basic thing, and my husband [by working] gives me the opportunity to be at home. So I dedicate myself completely to our children, for whatever they need related to their schooling, I am 100% committed.

In addition to comments made by Chayo and other participants to describe what parental involvement actions looked like in their everyday lives, the photographs taken by participants also reflected their strong academic ethos. For example, in her journal Airolg included photographs of her children at the school bus stop. When I asked her, "So where are you in this photograph?" she responded literally, laughing as she explained that she could not be in the photograph because she was the photographer. Then, with a much more serious look on her face, she explained how, although her image was not visible, she actually *was* in the photograph. Using photo elicitation in her second individual interview (March 19, 2009), Airolg justified how her photographs reflected her actions to support her children's success in school, as evidenced in her comment: "*Pues, lo levanto en la mañana para que se aliste para la escuela. Lo llevo a la parada del bus y me estoy allí hasta que el bus se va*" ("Well, I wake my children up in the morning so they can get ready for school. I go with them to the bus stop, and I wait with them until the bus leaves"). Coincidentally, Airolg's husband Kike also shared a photograph he had taken of their children at the bus stop. Explaining how he helped get the children ready for school on his days off from work, Kike shared the following in his second individual interview (March 19, 2009):

*Nunca me ha gustado que sean impuntuales ni a ellos. Hay que siempre inculcarles un poco de puntualidad. El involucramiento que me corresponde a mí aquí es digamos, desde que se están en la casa alistándose, levantarlos temprano,*

*que tengan tiempo para ya sea almorzar porque pues, ya ve que tienen que ir un poco almorzados a la escuela para que piensen bien y no estén pensando en la comida. Si, y salir temprano de aquí, o sea, 10-15 minutos antes para estar en la parada del camión hasta que ya los levanta el camión y estar seguros de que ellos se subieron al camión y se están trasladando a la escuela. Tanto como también con el niño que está en pre-kínder. Pues gana la educación que se le está dando tanto en la escuela como en la casa. Porque el hecho de que, ya con sólo ir a la escuela, él está ganando una sabiduría o una inteligencia que se le está añadiendo un poco. Si, ellos están muy orgullosos de su escuela porque les enseñan mucho, o sea, cuáles son los beneficios de la escuela, por qué es el que tienen que estudiar, o sea, tienen que valorar la escuela y la educación que les está dando uno, tanto en la casa como en la escuela.*

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I don't like to be late nor do I like for my children to be late. You have to always instill punctuality. My involvement [in the photo], is, let's say, starts from the time they are getting ready at home, getting them up early so they have time to eat breakfast because, well, we know children need to eat breakfast before they go to school so that they can think well and not be hungry, or be thinking about food. Then, by leaving the house 10-15 minutes early, staying with them at the bus stop until the bus picks them up, to be sure they got on the bus and are heading off to school. The same holds true for my preschool son. Well, he is gaining an education from what he is learning in preschool as well as in our home. Because the very act of, just by going to school, he is gaining wisdom or intelligence that, little by little, adds up. They [children] are very proud of their school because they are taught many things, such as the benefits of having an education, why they need to study, why they need to value their school, and the education they are receiving, as much as in the home as in school.

Participants vocalized the importance of transmitting their expectations, their academic ethos, to children from a very young age, as Chayo summarized in her first individual interview (January 11, 2009):

*Bueno, para mí se me ha hecho fácil el hecho de que desde un principio les hagamos inculcada responsabilidad, este, interés por la escuela, que sea primordial la escuela. Entonces a mí se me ha hecho algo fácil. No es mucho trabajo para mí porque ya ellos tienen la responsabilidad de hacer sus tareas, de asistir a la escuela. Ya eso ellos ya lo traen desde chiquitos. Ya nosotros se los inculcamos a ellos, entonces ellos, ya para ellos es algo común, normal. Entonces ya no tengo yo que estarles insistiendo en "hagan sus tareas," estar sobre ellos con que la tarea, que asistan a la escuela, que "No quiero ir a la escuela." No, ellos tienen que ir a la escuela. No, porque ellos ya, ellos saben que es su*

*responsabilidad que tienen que asistir y que tienen que tener un buen grado. Desde chicos siempre les hemos inculcado eso. Si ellos se enferman, y es raro que yo, que yo los deje faltar a la escuela. A menos de que la escuela digan, “No puede estar aquí porque la enfermedad que tiene la puede contagiar a los demás.” Entonces sí, pero mientras ellos puedan asistir a la escuela, van a la escuela, y ellos saben que no deben de faltar a la escuela. Y también este, que tienen que tener buenos grados, y yo, no sé, a la mejor resultado ser un poco exigente para mí, pero como yo sé que ellos pueden dar mucho, entonces cuando ellos me enseñan las calificaciones, “Bueno, está muy bien, nomás que pues, puedes hacerlo mejor, puedes tener mejor grado,” y ellos se esfuerzan a hacerlo mejor.*

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Well, for me it's been easy, because from the very beginning we [parents] have inculcated responsibility, or interest in schooling [in our children] so that school becomes fundamental. So for me it's been made easy. It's not a lot of work for me because they know they are responsible for doing their homework and going to school. They have known this since they were very young. We already instilled it in them, so they, it's already common practice, it's normal for them. So I don't have to always be there insisting, “Do your homework,” nagging them about homework, making them go to school when they say, “I don't want to go to school.” No, they have to go to school. No, because they already know it's their responsibility, they have to go and they have to get good grades. Since they were very young we have always inculcated that. If they become ill, and it is rare that I let them miss school, unless someone at the schools says, “No you can't be in school because you have a contagious illness that can be passed to others.” In that case, then yes [they can stay home], but as long as they are able to go to school, they go to school, and they know they can't be absent. And likewise, they have to get good grades, and for me, I don't know, maybe it has worked best for me to be a little strict, but I know my children are capable of achieving a lot. So when they show me their grades, [I tell them] “Oh, that's very good, it's just that you can do even better, you can get better grades,” and they try harder to improve even more.

Describing her children's discipline, attitudes, and responsibilities related to school and homework as “normal,” Chayo captured the notion of academic ethos. Her children's everyday practices and actions were guided by norms, or ethos, rooted in her family's core values related to the importance of education.

Airolg reinforced Chayo's message about the need for children to learn about the importance of school from the time they are very young, as noted in a comment she made

in her first individual interview (January 17, 2009): “*Los niños tienen que aprender, y desde preschool, pues están aprendiendo a escribir, a leer, a compartir con sus compañeros, y pues el significado de la escuela. Preescolar es la base para la educación*” (“Children need to learn, and from preschool, well they learn to write, to read, to share with their peers, and well, the meaning of school. Preschool is the base of education”).

Expanding on academic ethos, Kike described the ways parents think about education and the dreams they have for their children’s future, as noted in the following comment made in his third individual interview (May 28, 2009):

*La educación es un valor para nosotros porque si ellos estudian, y siguen con ese estudio hasta donde pueden, o ellos quieren, si, esperemos en Dios, y puedan seguir en la universidad o los estudios que ellos quieran. Ya sería un valor más a la hora de digamos, por el hecho de que ellos alcanzan sus metas y a nosotros nos llena de satisfacción que les ayudamos a salir adelante. Y darles este interés en la educación que ellos quisieron. Eso viene también en sí a como pensamos muchas veces, o sea, hay que tener un pensamiento exacto de qué es lo que queremos para nuestros hijos.*

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We value education because if our children study, and if they continue with their studies as far as they are able, or as far as they want to go, then yes, God willing, they might be able to continue to study in a university, or study in whatever field they chose. Then it becomes even more valuable when, let’s say, by reaching their goals, we [parents] will be fully satisfied we helped our children move forward. And to help them find an interest and study something they chose. This also has to do with how we [as parents] think, how we have to be clear in our thinking about what it is exactly that we want for our children.

Kike often mentioned how important it was for parents to help children discover their interests and dreams, and then support children’s learning in those specific areas.

In addition to placing a strong value on what happens at school, participants also believed a great deal of what students needed to learn about life took place outside of the classroom. Kike described a time when it was hard for him to give permission for his

daughter to participate in an overnight, school-sponsored field trip, but, in doing so, his daughter learned a great deal from the experience, as he shared in his first individual interview (January 17, 2009):

*Lo que me gustó mucho es que haya podido ir a un este campamento en el campo para que ella pudiera ver este acerca de lo que es el campo, sea hacer estudios acerca del campo. Y a ella eso le ayudó a desenvolverse un poco más porque tuvieron convivencia tanto con la naturaleza como con los compañeros. Eh, le ayudó a ella a ser un poco más organizada y desenvolverse por sí sola. Fue un evento escolar de la escuela, un “field trip,” y fueron todos los niños de 5° grado a las montañas. Duraron 3 días allá. Hay que apoyarle con el gasto, porque estaban cobrando \$50.00 dólares para que pudieran ir. La ventaja, o sea, lo que a mí me gustó, fue que ella tenía muchas ganas de ir a conocer, de estar conviviendo con los niños de la escuela. Y fue lo que me gustó que ella ya esté tratando de desenvolverse un poco más. Le gustó y llegó bien contenta, muy bien. Hay muchas cosas que les faltan por ver, tanto personales como de la escuela. Y yo pienso que dándoles ayuda para que ellos salgan a ya sea a un field trip así o de cualquier otro “trip” de la escuela, si les podemos ayudar siempre en ese aspecto. Es mejor para nosotros y para ellos también porque así se desenvuelven más.*

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What I really liked was that my daughter was able to go to this camp out in the country so that she could see and learn and study about the countryside. And the field trip experience helped her to develop and grow a little more because the students had a chance to learn by sharing in the experience, both with nature and with each other. So it helped her to be a little more organized and to develop on her own. It was a school-sponsored field trip and all of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade students went to a camp in the mountains. They were gone for 3 days. Parents had to help pay the costs, because they charged \$50.00 for each student to participate. The advantage, or rather what I liked, was that my daughter had a strong interest in going to learn about, to be together with the other students from her school. And what I liked was that she was trying to develop and grow a little more. She liked the experience and came back very pleased, very happy. There are many things they [(im) migrant children] miss out on, both in their personal life and in school. And I think that by giving children support [paying the fees] so that they are able to go on a field trip, or whatever other type of trip the school sponsors, then yes, we can always help in that aspect. It's good for us and for them too because that's how they develop even more.

While \$50.00 was a relatively large sum of money to be taken from an already tight family budget, Kike felt his daughter's participation in a school-sponsored field trip to the



mountains was an important investment in her learning. Like other participants, he acted on his academic ethos and made the necessary sacrifices to provide enrichment opportunities for his children to learn, grow, and develop, both in and outside of the classroom.

Supporting a belief that a great deal of learning takes place outside of the school, Chayo stated the following in her second individual interview (March 24, 2009) in discussing a photograph of a family outing included in her journal:

*No todo se basa en la escuela, no todo se hace sobre la escuela. Entonces yo decidí incluir un día que, unas fotografías de un día que fuimos al zoológico y fuimos, tuvimos la oportunidad de ir toda la familia completa. Y añadí unas fotografías aquí también para demostrar un poco el calor familiar, la unión familiar entonces este, incluí esas fotografías. No todo es en la escuela, también se lleva mucho en la parte familiar.*

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Not everything [learning] is based in the school, not all [learning] happens in school. So I decided to include photographs taken one day when we [family] went to the zoo and we had the opportunity to all go together, as a whole family. And I included some photographs here also to show, in a small way, the love in our family, our family unity, so well, I included those photographs. Everything doesn't happen at school, a lot [of learning] takes place within the family.

To illustrate how he guided his children's learning in the home, Kike shared a photograph of him taken at a medical appointment with his doctor, and he stated the following in his second individual interview (March 19, 2009):

*Bueno, para mí, aquí quiere decir que estoy tratando de cuidar mi salud para poder ayudar a mis hijos, todavía en la educación y en el desarrollo de ellos. No nada más en la educación, sino también dentro de la casa y de que ellos tienen que prevenir muchas cosas que no les hace bien.*

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Well for me this photograph shows I am trying to take care of my own health so that I am able to help my children in their education as well as their development. Not only in their education [at school], but also in our home, and by [teaching] them to avoid many things that are not good for them.

One of the primary ways participants transmitted their values, or academic ethos, to their children was through their own examples as life-long learners. In the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008), Airolg described how happy her children were when she received her general equivalency diploma (GED), and she shared:

*Yo pienso que los niños, aunque estén pequeños, valoran lo que los padres hacen, porque en el caso de nosotros nos pasó. Hace 2 años, o casi 3, saqué el GED. Cuando me ponía a estudiar, las niñas se ponían a estudiar conmigo, y ya cuando me dieron el diploma, se pusieron muy contentas, y estaban más chiquitas.*

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I think children, even when they are very young, value what their parents do, because in our case that is what happened. Two or 3 years ago I earned a GED. Whenever I used to study, the girls would sit and study with me, and when I received my diploma they were very happy, and at that time they much younger.

Chayo also believed adult learning had many benefits, as noted in an excerpt from her third individual interview (May 22, 2009):

*El asistir a las clases me estoy sintiendo más segura. Con el paso del tiempo me voy a sentir más satisfecha y voy a ver que no he desperdiciado el tiempo que debería de haberlo estado ocupando con mis hijos. Lo estoy ocupando en mí, y si yo aprendo. No he desperdiciado el tiempo.*

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Taking classes [English] makes me feel more secure [communicating in English]. As time goes by I will feel even more satisfied and I will see that I didn't waste my time, time I should have perhaps been spending with my children. I'm spending that time on myself, and yes, I am learning. I haven't wasted time.

In addition to taking classes for a GED or to improve English language skills, participants described a variety of programs they attended to gain new knowledge and skills. Within the prior year, each of the 3 participant couples had enrolled in local programs aimed at promoting family literacy, strengthening parenting skills, and improving family communication. The 6 participants also took advantage of a variety of workshops and courses offered by schools, and educational offerings provided by

community, health, non-profit, and faith-based organizations. In her third individual interview (May 22, 2009), Chayo described the importance of parents modeling lifelong learning for children, as noted in her statement:

*Si ven que nosotros le ponemos empeño también a nuestras clases, en superarnos, ellos van a tratar de hacer lo mismo, porque están viendo un ejemplo en nosotros. Dicen que pues lo hijos son el ejemplo de uno, entonces, pues hemos tratado de tomarlo muy en cuenta y de superarnos nosotros también para que ellos tengan un buen ejemplo de nosotros. Se me hace muy importante que aunque yo tenga la edad que tenga, de todos modos deseo superarme. Y a mí, como yo le digo, a mí todos los temas me interesan mucho, para mí todos son muy importantes. Gracias a Dios la escuelita de verano me ha tocado ver diferente, y si me ha gustado mucho ir para seguir aprendiendo, y de ahí pues, como le digo, el día a día vamos aprendiendo algo nuevo, siempre. Pero si hay una persona que nos lo enseñe, aprendemos mejor y aprendemos más cosas todavía.*

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If children see us [parents] also putting effort and determination into our own studies to improve ourselves, they will try to do the same, because they see us as an example. It's been said children are a reflection of their parents, so we have tried to be very conscious of that and improve ourselves so that we will be a good example for our children. For me, it's very important, regardless of my age, that I always have a desire for self-improvement. And for me, like I said, I'm interested in a lot of topics, they are all very important to me. Thank God for summer school, the programs taught me how to look at things differently. I really liked going to the summer program and continuing to learn, and from there, well, as I have said, in day-to-day life we continuously learn new things. But when someone actually teaches us [new things], we learn better and we learn even more [than we would have on our own].

Participants were grateful for the different adult learning opportunities available for self-improvement. By placing themselves in the student role, they demonstrated their academic ethos through their actions as committed, lifelong learners.

Another way parents taught children to value education was by celebrating moments of academic success with their families. In his third individual interview (June 3, 2009), Lupe explained the importance of recognizing his daughter Emi's accomplishments as she graduated from high school, and he shared the following

comment, “*Yo les digo que se gradúen, y pues, yo les prometo una fiestecita para que se luzcan con sus amigos, que vean el esfuerzo que hicieron*” (“I tell my children they have to graduate and I promise them a small party so that they can shine with their friends, so that others can see the hard work they did”). Lupe’s wife Lucy added that family celebrations were part of her Mexican culture, and she wrote the following in her journal: “*La familia, sean hermanos, primos, se juntan para compartir momentos agradables. Nosotros, los Mexicanos, somos muy alegres, y bailando es una forma de mostrar nuestra alegría. Nos gusta bailar, sonreír, es nuestra cultura y ésta es nuestra sangre*” (“The family, be it siblings or cousins, we all get together to share pleasant times. As Mexican people we are very joyful, and dancing is a way to show our joy. We like to dance and smile, it’s our culture and [our culture] is our blood [heritage]”). Airolg also expressed the importance of celebrating academic success in sharing a photograph of her daughter’s graduation from elementary school. The photograph was important to Airolg because it marked the successful completion of one chapter in her daughter’s education, a chapter that had been filled with many difficult, emotional challenges. In different ways, participants shared how high expectations, positive recognition, and celebrations of success all served as incentives to motivate children to study and do their best in school.

In summary, participants demonstrated their strong academic ethos through every day actions they took to support children’s academic success. By placing themselves in the role of adult learners, they reinforced the importance of continuous self-improvement and lifelong learning, regardless of one’s age. Recognizing the value of enrichment opportunities, such as field trips and family outings, participants made financial sacrifices, overcame fears and worries, and provided support for activities to help

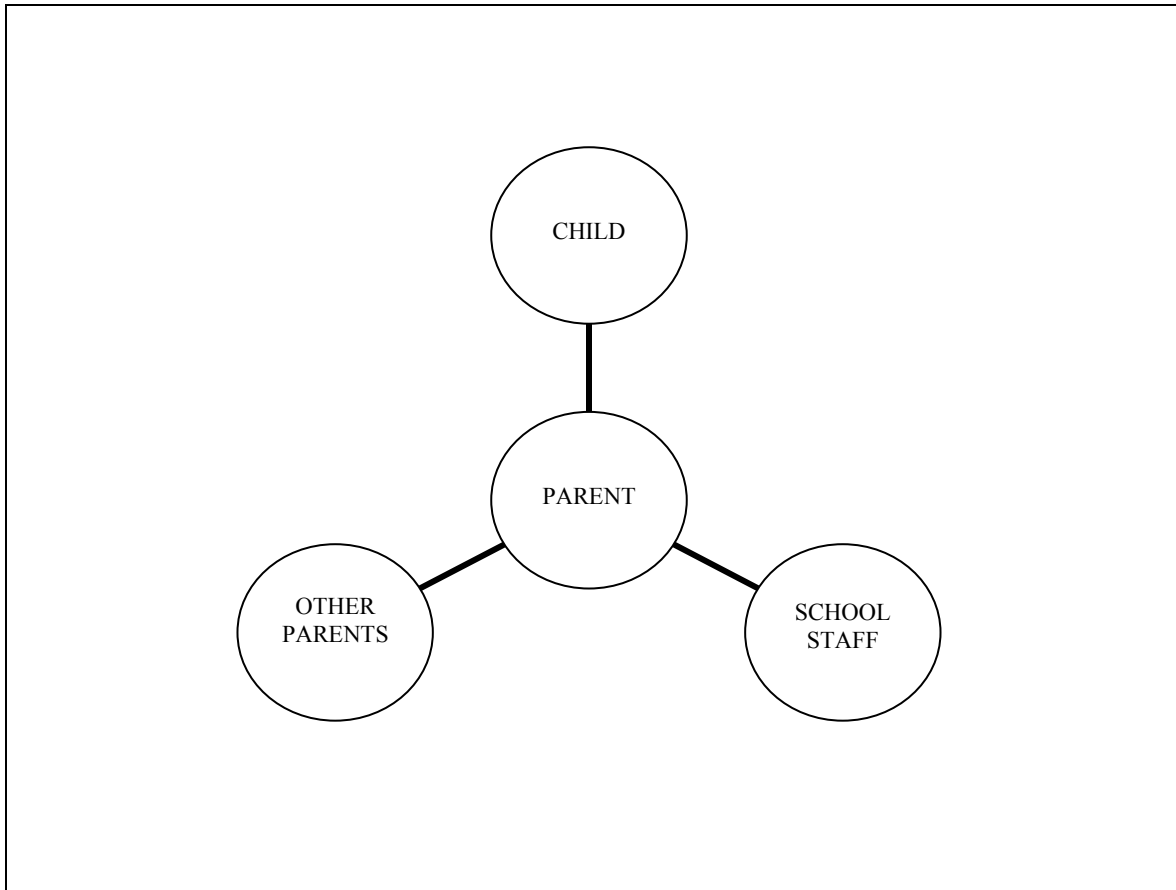
children develop new skills and independence. By modeling their expectations, participants also helped children establish academic habits, such as punctuality, completing homework, having good attendance at school, and getting good grades. They felt it was important for children to understand their parents' expectations and priorities from the time they are very young, so that an academic ethos developed as a normal, *primordial* (foundational) value. They also recognized the importance of incentives and celebrations of academic success to motivate students throughout all stages of their education. In essence, participants embodied their values and ethos through actions and relationships with their children, as well as with others. The importance of critical relationships, the third theme of this inquiry, is detailed in the following section.

### *Critical Relationships*

Findings from this inquiry support those of prior parental involvement studies that indicate connections between parents and educational systems are first, and foremost, built through critical relationships (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein et al., 2009; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Olivos, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés, 1996). One of the principle ways participants in this study understood and made sense of their involvement in children's education was through the critical relationships they developed with others, first and foremost, their family. Relative to parental involvement, the most important relationships identified in this inquiry centered on *la familia* (the family), but key dyadic relationships between parents and other specific individuals were also critical.

Dyadic relationships are based on the interpersonal interactions between two individuals, or dyads. This section opens with a broad discussion about relationships in *la*

*familia* (the family), and then shifts to highlight the relationships between three key dyads: parents and children, parents and school staff, and parents and other parents. These three key dyadic relationships are illustrated in Figure 4 and are discussed in the sections that follow.



*Figure 4.* Key dyadic relationships.

*The family.* In Latino culture, the family is the primary social unit (Bordas, 2007) and it “holds a valued place as a resource for coping with the pressures life brings” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004, p. 3). Unlike mainstream Anglo culture where the emphasis is on the nuclear family, *la familia Latina* (the Latino family) is “elastic” (Bordas, p. 52) and can grow to include *padrinos y madrinas* (godfathers/best men and godmothers/maids of honor) and *compadres y comadres* (men and women sponsors) who support families by participating in ceremonies such as baptisms, first communions, confirmations, *quinceñeras* (a coming-of age-ceremony to celebrate a girl’s 15<sup>th</sup> birthday), and weddings. *Tíos y tías* (aunts and uncles) are people connected to the family through bloodlines and marriage, but they can also be friends and trusted individuals who parents chose to bring into the family. By becoming a *padrino* (godfather/best man), *madrina* (godmother/maid of honor), *compadre* (male sponsor), *comadre* (female sponsor), or honorary *tío* (uncle) or *tía* (aunt), individuals are recognized as members of the family and, as such, they merit respect.

In his second interview (March 23, 2009), Lupe explained how, in addition to his immediate relatives, he also considered all of his wife’s relatives and all of his *compadres* (godparents and sponsors) to be part of his family, as he stated:

*Si, los considero a los compadres, los considero yo como familia, porque cuando uno busca a alguna persona para que le apadrine a un hijo en, pues en lo que sea, verdad un bautismo, ahora de graduación, quiere decir que uno busca una persona que uno le tiene confianza. Que si un día le pido yo un favor, este, “ayúdame con este hijo, mira este que este, tengo problemas con él,” o algo, dale un consejo. Entonces cuando uno los busca como compadres, pues quiere decir que es una persona que uno le tiene confianza. Y entonces se pone como familia.*

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Yes, I consider my *compadres* (godparents and sponsors), I consider them as family because when I look for someone to be a godparent or sponsor for one of

my children in, well whatever ceremony, like a baptism, or now for the graduation [daughter's high school graduation party], it means I look for a person I trust. So if one day I ask them for a favor, like "help me with my son, because, well I'm having problems with him," or for some other issue, they would give me advice or support. So when you look for people to be your *compadres* (godparents or sponsors) it means the person is someone you trust. And so they become like family.

Expanding on the view of the family as an open system where new members could be added by choice, Lucy wrote the following in her journal: "*Los maestros tienen un lugar en la familia porque forman parte de ella con el hecho de enseñarles en las escuelas y atenderlos. Son una ayuda muy grande para los padres. Doy gracias a los maestros.*" ("Teachers have a place in the family because they shape part of it [the family] by the act of teaching children in schools and taking care of them. Teachers are a very big help for parents. I give thanks to teachers").

In her second individual interview (March 23, 2009), Lucy reinforced the importance of family unity, as she described her relationship with her sisters, mother, and sister-in-law, who all lived nearby, saying:

*Sabemos que unidos, si a ti se te ofrece algo, cuentas con esa persona. O la otra persona necesita algo, sabe que al hablarte, al decirte "Mira necesito tu ayuda," sabes que está dispuesta, dispuesta a oírte, no solo en lo económico sino en lo moral, platicando. Pues, "Fijate que tengo este problema," y ya habla uno y platica o en, pues en las buenas y en las malas. Y nosotros así somos, todas, entre todas nos ayudamos y nos juntamos así. En veces dice mi viejo, "Nomás para contar chismes, están ahí nomás chismorreando una de la otra." Como, po's si tenemos mucha comunicación entre ellas. Ellas me ayudan y yo les ayudo y en compartir, unión, sí siempre estamos unidas.*

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We know that by being united, if someone offers you something, you matter to that person. Or if someone needs something, you know that by talking with you, by telling you, "Look, I need your help," they know you are available to help, available to listen, not just about economic problems, but also about ethical or moral problems, you are available to talk. Like, "Look I have this problem," and then you talk about it, the good and the bad. And that's the way we are, all of us,



between all of us we help each other and we get together like that. Sometimes my husband says we [sisters] “get together just to gossip. There you all are just gossiping about each other.” Well, yes we have a lot of communication between us [sisters]. They help me and I help them, and through sharing, in unity, yes, we are always united.

Chayo also explained how her parents, sisters, brother-in-law, nieces, and nephews traveled from México to the U.S. each summer to spend a few weeks visiting in her home to renew family ties. For Chayo’s family, staying connected was essential, as she described in her second individual interview (March 24, 2009):

*Bueno para mí la base fundamental es la familia, de ahí se derivan muchas cosas. ¿Por qué? Porque el niño se va a sentir querido, se va a sentir dentro de un ambiente familiar, entonces él va a sentir que toda su familia lo apoya en cualquier momento, que todos van a estar ahí, tanto en la buenas como en las malas. Entonces para mí, se me hace que es fundamental el convivir en familia. El estar siempre en familia. Lamentablemente, muchos de nosotros no podemos estar todo el tiempo juntos o mucho tiempo juntos. Entonces el poquito tiempo que tengamos pues, disfrutarlo al máximo con ellos. Y no tanto el juntarnos en ponernos a leer todos o cada quien por su lado, o hacer tareas. No, el disfrutar el tiempo, convivir, salir. A veces nos hace falta el dinero pero, poder salir a un día al parque o a jugar de basquetbol, cualquier cosa para ellos es una motivación, porque estamos aprovechando los tiempos juntos.*

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Well for me the fundamental base is the family, everything flows from the family. Why? Because the child feels loved, the child feels loved within a family environment. The child feels his whole family supports him at all times, everyone will be there for him, in good times and bad. So for me, being together as a family is fundamental. Always being part of the family. Sadly, many of us can’t be together a lot of the time, or for long periods of time. So the little time that we have, well, we have to enjoy it as much as possible. And not just in getting together to read together side by side, or to do homework. No, we also have to have fun, be together, and go out places. Sometimes we don’t have money, but we can go on outings to the park, or play basketball, whatever things motivate them [children], because we are taking advantage of the time we have together.

The importance of *convivencia* (the act of spending time together) was consistently stressed by all participants, especially when discussing family unity. In her second individual interview, Lucy shared a photograph of her children sitting together at home in

the living room. When I asked her to explain the meaning behind the photograph she stated:

*Estábamos viendo unas “movies” aquí en el día de San Valentín y le digo a Emi, “traite la cámara,” porque estamos este, en una noche de familia, estamos viendo “movies.” Pues no salimos a ningún lado ese día ni nada. Estábamos y todos sentados y dijo mi hijo, “vamos a ver ‘movies’,” y nos sentamos y nos pusimos a mirar una “movie”.” No me acuerdo cual era, pero aquí estábamos todos, todo juntos.*

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We were all watching movies here on Valentines Day and I told my daughter Emi to get the camera because we were, um, having a family night, we were watching movies. So we didn't go out that night or do anything else. We were all just together [in the living room] and my son said “let's watch movies,” so we all sat down together to watch a movie. I don't remember which one it was, but we were together, all of us together.

Lucy did not remember the name of the movie her family watched on Valentine's Day, but what she did remember was that her family was together. It did not matter so much what they were doing, what mattered was that they were spending time together and experiencing life as a united family.

Participants viewed time as a precious gift and lamented how little time they had to *convivir* (spend time together) as a whole family. Spending time together, united as a family, was a core value, as Chayo explained in her second individual interview (March 24, 2009), “*Yo pienso que tiene mucha importancia, la convivencia en familia, y para mí convivencia es, es estar todos juntos, participar del momento en que estamos y compartir, compartir este, ese tiempo de cada quien* (“I think spending time together as a family is very important, and for me *convivencia* (sharing time together) means everyone being together, participating in the moment, and sharing, sharing each person's time”). In his third individual interview (May 28, 2009) Kike said that his family did not value

materialism; instead, they valued “*lo que es la vida familiar, la unión familiar*” (“family life, family unity”). Elaborating further he added, “*Los hijos tienen que saber cómo valorar a la familia. Les inculcamos eso desde chicos*” (“Children need to know how to value their family. We have inculcated that [value] since they were very young”).

Participants recognized family elders, particularly grandparents, as sage guides in their family, as Lucy noted in her journal:

*Los raíces de los jóvenes también tienen un lugar importante en la educación. Las personas mayores, como los abuelos, son el ejemplo más fuerte a seguir. Porque ellos, a través de los años, nos enseñan que las cosas de la vida no son fáciles, pero con esfuerzo y dedicación, todo se logra. Sus canas y sus arrugas son muestra clara del esfuerzo que hacen para sacar adelante la familia. Adelante, y que continúen su camino con dignidad.*

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The roots [ancestral] of young people also have an important place in education. Elders, such as grandparents, are the strongest example to follow. Because they, over the years, teach us there are things in life that aren't easy, but through hard work and dedication, we can accomplish anything. Their grey hairs and wrinkles are clear evidence of their struggles to move the family forward. May they go forth and continue on their path [life] with dignity.

Family loyalty spanned the generations, and, in addition to elders, siblings also played a critical role in strengthening family unity. Airolg described how her two older daughters showed loyalty to their younger brother by protecting him in school, especially on the playground. In her second individual interview (March 17, 2009) Airolg shared, “*En el recreo si a él le pasa algo, corre con alguna de las dos niñas y siempre están en comunicación*” (“During break time [on the playground] if something happens to him [younger brother], he runs to one of his two sisters and they are always in communication”). As siblings, Lucy said (March 23, 2009) her children “*se disfrutan mucho cuando están todos juntos*” (“they have a lot of fun when they are together”), and

she described how older siblings were expected to serve as role models for younger siblings:

*Los hermanos mayores ponen el ejemplo a los hermanos pequeños y de lo que es asistir a la escuela. Hacen deportes y los más chicos comprenden y siguen los pasos de quienes los van enseñando. Es por eso que tienen la obligación como mayores de tratar de que su ejemplo sea positivo y dejar huella segura y estable para los que vienen atrás de ellos.*

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Older brothers and sisters are an example [role model] for their younger siblings who learn what going to school means. When they play sports, the younger ones learn and follow in the steps of those who teach them. That's why older siblings are obligated to try to be positive examples and leave a secure and established mark for those who follow in their footsteps.

Family relationships, while broadly defined, were always deeply rooted in trust and respect. Data from this inquiry support findings from prior studies that identified trust and respect as critical to the development of meaningful relationships in Latino immigrant families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdés, 1996). Trust and respect were core values also found in the dyadic relationships participants established with three key individuals, namely their children, school staff, and other parents. Each of these dyadic relationships is explained in the following section.

*Parent-child relationship.* Relative to meaningful parental involvement, the first and most significant dyadic relationship identified by participants in this study was the parent-child relationship. Regardless of school level (elementary, middle, or high school), all participants viewed parental involvement as starting and ending with their child. Of particular interest was the fact all families in this study were binational families with mixed-status, having children who were U.S. born citizens and children who were undocumented immigrants from México. As Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001)

noted, “Special issues arise in families that have a mix of documented and undocumented children – a rather common occurrence. In such families, unique dynamics tend to develop” (p. 35).

Lamenting the fact their children had different levels of privilege in U.S. society relative to immigration status; participants were especially concerned their children did not have equal access to basic services, such as health care. They went to great lengths to make sure their children were treated equally, at least in their homes. Airolg and Kike told all of their children they were “Mexican,” even though three of their four children were born in the U.S. As (im) migrant parents, they did not want their oldest child, a 12-year old girl, to feel singled out simply because she was the only sibling born in México. When Chayo’s entire family became ill with an upper respiratory infection, multiple people shared the two youngest children’s antibiotics; they were the only ones in the family with health insurance. I explained to Chayo that it was not medically sound to divide two children’s antibiotics between multiple people, and she sighed as she explained there were no other options. Having limited resources, participants made the best decisions they could under the circumstances. They based their actions on what was available and affordable, which often depended on one’s level of privilege.

Sensitive to the reality associated with immigration status, participants made great efforts to instill a sense of equality in their children. As Cronoe (2006) noted, “First generation children (those born in Mexico to Mexican-born parents) and second-generation children (those born in the United States to Mexican-born parents) .... are being raised in the United States by parents who were born in Mexico” (pp. 7 - 8). Cronoe highlighted that “the inequity facing children from Mexican immigrant families

exists and is years in the making” (p. 9). Supported by the literature, immigration status had a noticeable impact on the critical relationships established between immigrant parents and their immigrant and non-immigrant children (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

In regard to the research question, Chayo explained how she understood parental involvement as being grounded in the relationships she had with her children, as noted in her following statement made at the first focus group interview (December 20, 2009):

*Para mí el término involucramiento de padres vendría siendo como una relación más estrecha con nuestros hijos, y vendría siendo también como un camino para platicar, para conversar con los maestros acerca de nuestros hijos. Cómo se están desarrollando en la escuela, qué problemas tienen, este, qué es lo que el niño tiene en mente hacia el futuro. Sus intereses tanto del niño y también los intereses de los maestros. También involucramiento se me haría a mí como una forma de que los papás estuvieran más cerca del niño. Al momento en que los papás están más cerca del niño, el niño se va a abrir y él va a dar su punto de vista, lo que a él le está pasando, cómo se siente, qué le interesa en el futuro, qué es lo que él piensa hacer en un futuro, qué piensa estudiar, este, cómo lo están tratando los maestros, qué maestro no le cae bien. Entonces, yo pienso que involucramiento es un interés hacia el niño para que el niño se abra con nosotros y también va a ser un camino a conversar con los maestros.*

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For me the term parental involvement means having a tighter relationship with our children, and it could also be like a pathway for talking, for conversing with teachers. How our children are developing in school, what problems they have, and what they have in mind for the future. It's about the interests of both the child and the teachers. Likewise, involvement is a way for parents to get even closer to the child. When parents get really close to the child, he will open up and share his point of view, what's going on with him, how he is feeling, what his interests are for the future, what he is thinking about doing in the future, what he wants to study, um, how his teachers are treating him, and which teachers he doesn't like. So I think involvement means having an interest in the child so that the child opens up with us [parents] and it also becomes a pathway for having conversations with teachers.

Using metaphor, Lucy described the relationship between parents and children in her journal where she wrote the following:

*Los padres nunca terminan de educar a los hijos. Los padres somos como los pájaros que crían a sus pajaritos. Les preparan el nido que los cobijará durante una etapa, donde les dan de comer, para que crezcan sanos y fuertes. Pero llega el día que los pajaritos se llenan de alas y quieren emprender el vuelo. Un día, sin pensarlo, abren sus alas y se van, abandonan el nido. Con los hijos es igual.*

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Parents never stop educating [guiding] their children. Parents are like birds raising their baby birds. They prepare a nest to protect them during a stage of their life, a place where they are fed so they grow up healthy and strong. But the day comes when the little birds grow their wings and want to begin their flight. One day, without even thinking about it, they open their wings and they leave the nest behind. It's the same with children.

Adding to Lucy and Chayo's comments, Kike defined parental involvement as

obligatory, as reflected in one of his journal entries:

*Yo como padre de familia estoy en la obligación del sustento económico de mi familia, de su salud física y emocional. Cuando hay conferencias, hago todo lo posible por asistir, ya que mi esposa Airolg y yo consideramos muy importante estar informados de todo lo que tenga que ver con la educación de nuestros hijos. Yo como padre, no sólo estoy involucrado en la educación de mis hijos, también me toca llevarlos al doctor, a vacunas, al dentista y a todas las partes que ellos necesiten ir. Al igual también me gusta llevarlos a comer, al parque, a las albercas, al cine, a que anden en bicicletas, a todo lo que diversión se refiera y sobre todo cuando se pueda.*

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As a parent I am obligated to sustain my family economically and in matters of physical and emotional health. When there are conferences, I do everything possible to attend. My wife, Airolg, and I consider it very important to be informed about everything that has to do with our children's education. As a parent, I am not only involved in my children's education, I also take them to the doctor, to get immunizations, to the dentist, and anywhere else they need to go. At the same time, I also enjoy taking them out to eat, going to the park, the swimming pool, the movies, on bicycle rides, all kinds of things that are fun, depending on when it's possible.

Participants believed it was very important to enjoy life, and by having fun together, the parent-child relationship was strengthened, as Kike shared in his third individual interview (May 28, 2009):

*Por el hecho de que si ellos están contentos y, aunque no piensen mucho a esta edad acerca de lo que le pasa a uno con la economía, o con la salud de uno, pues ellos están contentos, y es lo que le da a uno ánimos para seguir viviendo y seguir trabajando para ellos.*

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When children are happy and, even if they don't think much at this at this age [young] about what is happening to us [parents] with the economy [lost hours at work] or with health problems, well, they are happy, and that is what gives me courage to keep living and working on their behalf.

Participants understood the parent-child relationship was primarily nurtured in the home, but they also believed the relationship should extend into the school building.

Parental presence at school mattered, as Chayo discussed in her third individual interview when she shared a photograph of her middle school son taken at a school band concert (May 22, 2009):

*Se me hizo importante ponerla ahí [en su diario] para demostrarle a él lo que acompañamos a estos eventos. Para que él se sienta que tiene el apoyo de la familia y que todo lo que él hace nos interesa a nosotros también. Si él se siente apoyado, se siente querido, se siente que, que un poco de lo que él está haciendo, nos está devolviendo algo de lo que nosotros le estamos dando. Entonces también esto es un, es como un acuerdo entre él y nosotros. De que nosotros lo apoyamos, nosotros vamos y que él tiene que hacer las cosas bien y que nosotros lo disfrutemos también.*

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It was very important for me to include this photograph [in her journal] to show that for him [son], we [parents] are there for him at these events. So that he feels he has the support of the family, and that everything he does also interests us. If he feels supported he feels loved, he feels that, a little of what he is doing [playing in the school band] is giving back to us a part of what we are giving to him. So this is also a, it's like an agreement between us. From our support for him [by going to his concert], he must perform well, and we also get to enjoy it.

José, who defined parental involvement through his work, believed it was his responsibility as a father to help his children understand how hard parents worked to support their education. In his third individual interview (May 22, 2009), I asked José



what he hoped his children would see in his photographs when they saw them years in the future, and he replied, “*Pues lo que estamos haciendo por ellos. Va a ver la lucha, que siempre, que nada es fácil en esta vida* (“Well, all that we are doing for them. They will see the struggles, that nothing in this life is ever easy”).

In addition to providing for life’s basics, such as food, clothing, health, and safety, parental involvement practices included developing a one-on-one relationship with each child, getting to know each child as an individual and supporting their development. On one hand, participants wanted to protect and shelter their children from the dangers of life, such as gangs, drugs, alcohol, and bullies, but on the other hand, they felt it was imperative for children to understand how harsh reality can be, particularly for (im)migrants. Through parent-child relationships, participants came to know and understand each of their children as individuals with unique needs, fears, and dreams relative to their education and development. It was important for parents to “*dejar una huella*” (“leave a mark” [literally a footprint]), (Chayo, January 11, 2009) for children to follow. As leaders in their families, participants demonstrated through their actions, and reflections on those actions, the central role parent-child relationships play in student success. Once that critical, dyadic relationship took root, participants were able to expand the scope of their advocacy and involvement and develop relationships with school staff.

*Parent-school staff relationship.* When participants used the word school, they were not talking about a building; rather, they used the word comprehensively to include the entire educational system. As a living concept, school meant a wide network of people who supported the mission of educating children. In addition to teachers, school also included principals, secretaries, school nurses, outreach workers, classroom aides,

and support staff from supplemental programs, such as the MEP. School meant a team of people responsible for teaching children what they needed to learn in order to graduate and succeed in a competitive workforce.

Critical relationships between participants and school staff were highly dependent on whether or not parents felt accepted by the school, more specifically, whether or not they felt welcomed in the school as Latino immigrants. In regard to the words Latino and Hispanic, Lupe explained how he understood the difference between these terms. Lupe felt Hispanic referred to people who spoke primarily Spanish, and Latino meant people who came from Latin America, regardless of the language(s) they spoke. To make his point, in his second individual interview (March 23, 2009) Lupe shared the following comments about a photograph taken of him with an elementary school principal during a school-sponsored parent meeting:

*Este, ésta me gustó porque, pues, el señor ahí nos tomó en cuenta, el principal de la escuela. Se fija que la gente hispana participa en los eventos que hace la escuela. Le gusta que la gente latina se presente ahí. Es importante para mí, porque a pesar de que nosotros no sabemos, bueno pues, mi esposa y yo no sabemos el inglés, y el señor tampoco no sabe el español. Si, entonces, de que se, de que nos tome en cuenta a las personas que no sabemos su idioma, este, nos hace sentir que sí, que sí nos aceptan en la sociedad de los Americanos. Y él, como director de esa escuela pues, sí acepta que la gente latina esté en su escuela. Yo pienso que él también se siente apoyado porque uno también, al ir ahí pues es que uno le está brindando su apoyo. Bueno, el apoyo de uno pues, él siente que sí lo queremos también y pues nosotros también sentimos que somos bienvenidos ahí a la escuela, como hispanos.*

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I like this photograph because, well, the gentleman there [in the photo] acknowledged us [parents], he was the school principal. He notices that Hispanic parents participate in the school's events. He likes it when Latino parents show up at the school. That's important for me, because to start with, we don't know English, okay, well my wife and I don't know English, and likewise, the principal doesn't know Spanish. So by acknowledging us as people who don't know his language, well, the principal makes us feel that he, that we are accepted in American society. And as the principal of that school, he is welcoming of Latinos

in his school. And I think he also feels supported, because [when parents] show up at the school, they are extending support for him. And from that support, well, the principal feels we also care about him, and we too feel we are welcomed in the school, as Hispanics.

How school staff perceived (im) migrant parents mattered greatly to participants, as reflected in Airolg's statement made in her third individual interview (May 28, 2009):

*Pues yo pienso que los maestros de la escuela de los niños ahorita tienen una buena opinión de nosotros como papás, porque dondequiera que nos ven. Nos han visto en conferencias, nos han visto nada más yendo ahí a la, la escuela porque queremos asistir. Nos han visto apoyando a los niños, por ejemplo ahora en la graduación de mi'ja, en la graduación de mi hijo en preschool. En el día de campo que tuvieron todo el día hubo diversión, ahí estuvimos todo el día. Y yo pienso que somos de los pocos padres que nos la pasamos todo, todo ese día con los niños.*

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Well I think that the teachers in our children's current school have a good opinion of us as parents, because they see us everywhere. They have seen us in conferences, they have seen us not just going to the school, but going there because we want to be there. They have seen us supporting our children, for example at my daughter's graduation [elementary school], at my son's graduation from preschool. On field day when the children had a whole day filled with fun, we were there for that whole day. And I think we were among the few parents who spent the whole day, the whole day with the children.

Chayo shared a similar sentiment in her third individual interview (May 22, 2009), when she said:

*Los maestros han visto cómo nos preocupamos por los niños. Saben que yo estoy al pendiente de eso entonces, es bueno para ellos que sepan que yo estoy al pendiente porque ellos van a trabajar mejor con nuestros hijos a que digan, "No pues, a la señora no le interesa," y así se va, todo así queda. Y no, el hecho de demostrarles que nosotros estamos al pendiente de ellos, también les da más seguridad para trabajar con los niños. Siempre me ven, entonces ellos saben que yo siempre estoy al pendiente, estoy allí. Y pues todos los maestros me ven que ahí estoy y se anota luego cuando uno se interesa por ellos.*

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Teachers have seen how concerned we are for our children. They know that I am always monitoring things, it's good for them to know that I am always around because they will work better with our children than if they could say, "That mother is not interested," and that's the way it is, everything stays the same. By showing school staff we are always monitoring things also makes teachers feel more secure in working with our children. They always see me [at the school] so they know that I am always aware of what's going on, there I am. And well, all of the teachers see that I am there and later on you notice things happen, when a parent takes an interest in them [teachers].

Parental presence mattered. Participants believed showing up and participating in school events demonstrated their involvement and strengthened their relationships with school staff, especially with teachers. By being present in the school at different events, participants felt they demonstrated interest and commitment to their children's academic success. For Lucy, it was important for teachers to know they could count on her whenever they needed her help, such as serving as a volunteer, or providing snacks for a special event. In her second individual interview (March 23, 2009), Lucy shared that by being present, parents also developed an awareness of what was happening in the school, as she said:

*El estar ahí significa que está uno pendiente, que quiere uno saber qué hay en la escuela, qué está pasando y qué van a hacer en los próximos días. Y pues informarse y saber que los maestros, o sea los maestros sepan que cuentan con uno, de que digan, bueno po's, si me necesitan o necesito algo de ellos, puedo contar con ellos.*

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By being there, it shows you are on top of things, that you want to know what the school has to offer, what is happening in the school, and what is going to happen in the next days. And well, being informed and knowing that the teachers, rather than the teachers know they can count on you, so that they can say, well, if they need me or if I need something from them, I can count on them.

In the literature the concept of parent-teacher relationships and home-school connections is often described as a partnership; however, participants in this study did not necessarily share that view. Some felt the word partnership suggested too much of a legal relationship, comparing it to a business partnership. Returning to her core values, Airolg preferred to define her relationship with school staff in terms of a family. In the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008), Airolg shared:

*Por ejemplo, en la escuela de nuestros niños nos dicen, “No somos la escuela, somos una familia. Aquí es una familia porque aquí sus niños están más tiempo que hasta en su propias casas. Así que aquí nosotros no los vemos como alumnos, sino los vemos como una familia.” Y eso es lo que también queremos, que la escuela sea una familia.*

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For example, in our children’s school they tell us, “We are not the school, we are a family. Here we are a family because your children spend even more time here than they spend in their homes. That’s why here we don’t view children as students; we view them as family.” And that is what we [parents] also want, for the school to be a like a family.

Much like in their own families, participants stressed the importance of teachers knowing and understanding each child as an individual. In the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008), Chayo expressed the following:

*Es muy importante que los maestros tengan un poco interés también hacia el alumno, pero personal, o sea, a nivel por separado a cada alumno. Porque cada alumno tiene sus problemas, cada muchachito se desenvuelve en un ambiente diferente. Entonces yo pienso que los maestros sería muy importante que los tomaran a los niños por individual, no por general. Y hay muchos maestros, lamentablemente no lo hacen, lo generalizan. Hay niños que necesitan más apoyo que otros niños.*

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It’s very important that teachers take some interest in the child, both as a student and personally, to see each student on their own level. Because each student has their problems, each young person develops in a different environment. So I think it is very important for teachers to treat each child as an individual, not as a group. There are many teachers, unfortunately, who do not do that; they generalize. Some children just need more support than others.

Participants used the word *maestro* (teacher) broadly, sometimes in addressing people who were not actual classroom teachers. For example, Lucy knew I was a program administrator, not a teacher, but in introducing me to her extended family at her daughter Emi's graduation party, she referred to me as *la maestra* (the teacher), a term of respect. Participants, as well as their children, demonstrated respect by greeting classroom aides, outreach workers, presenters at workshops, and many others in the field of education as *maestros* (teachers) because they recognized a wide array of school staff as being teachers of children. All *maestros* (teachers), regardless of their actual job title, merited respect for the important work they performed, as Lucy shared in her third interview (May 31, 2009): "*Los maestros tienen mucha importancia en la educación. En las buenas y en las malas. Los maestros saben que nosotros dependemos de ellos. Al nivel de escuela verdad, ellos tienen la palabra.*" ("Teachers have a lot of importance in the education [of children]. In both the good and the bad. Teachers know that we [parents] depend on them. At the school level, they [the teachers] have the final word.")

*Maestro* (teacher) was a term participants used to show respect and honor the work of those who taught, or instructed others. Contrary to the popular notion of parents as the first teachers of their children, participants did not internalize this view; instead, they understood their role as educators of children, more like guides who showed children the way to grow up and become good people. Relative to the education of children, participants recognized a distinct difference between these two important functions: teaching and educating.

Kike, in describing his relationships with school staff, expressed a deep appreciation and respect for teachers in the following comments he made at the first focus group interview (December 20, 2009):

*Gracias a los maestros, las puertas están abiertas porque siempre que tenemos una duda con ellos en relación a nuestros hijos, ellos nos contestan las preguntas que nosotros les hagamos. Y en cualquier momento que nosotros queramos ir a la escuela a saber cómo va la educación de nuestros hijos o digamos, cualquier problema que tengamos, no nada más acerca de la escuela, sino también personal, muchas veces ellos nos ayudan. Tratan de involucrarse tanto ellos en la vida de nosotros como nosotros nos debemos involucrar en la vida de nuestros hijos en la escuela. De hecho, nos ayudan muchas veces a solucionar los problemas que tenemos en el hogar, tanto con los hijos como personales. Y es una manera de que pueda uno agradecerle a los maestros que nos abran las puertas para involucrarnos los dos juntos. Y así, trabajamos para la educación de nuestros hijos.*

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Thanks to teachers, the door is always open, because if ever we need help understanding something in relation to our children, they answer our questions. And if we ever want to go to the school to see how our children are doing, or let's say whatever problems we might have, not only related to school, but also personal, they [teachers] help us. They try to involve themselves in our life just like we should involve ourselves in our children's school life. It goes without saying that teachers help us to resolve problems we have at home, with our children as well as personal problems. It is a way parents can show appreciation for teachers who open the doors so that we get involved [teachers and parents] together. And in that way, we work for the education of our children.

Recognizing experience as the best teacher, participants shared how they learned about parental involvement from their own parents' involvement (or lack of) as young children in México. All participants said their parents had little, or no formal, education because of the lack of schools in rural México, especially 30 or more years ago. Most participants believed their parents knew the value of sending children to school for as long as necessary, or as long as feasible. When asked about the relationship their parents had with their schools, participants could not describe, or even frame a discussion in

terms of a relationship. Instead, they explained the roles and expectations of teachers and parents in México as separate and distinct. Kike and Airolg shared that their parents were not at all involved in their formal schooling; no relationship existed between their parents and their teachers. However, they both felt they learned important lessons from experiencing that missing relationship first hand, and said they used that understanding to guide their involvement and the relationships they chose to develop with their children's school staff.

In the first focus group interview (December 20, 2008), Airolg described how she and Kike learned about the importance of parental involvement from what their parents did *not* do, as noted in her following comments:

*Pues, es que yo pienso que nosotros hemos aprendido de la experiencia de los papás de nosotros. Y sabe que, por ejemplo yo, mis papás no nos apoyaban, entonces, por eso, nosotros queremos apoyar a nuestros hijos. No me gustaría estar como mis papás que, "Si estudias bien, y si no, po 's también." No, a mí sí me gustaría que ellos sigan estudiando.*

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Well, I think we have learned from the experience of our parents. And you know, for example in my case, my parents did *not* support us [academically] so that's why we want to support our children. I don't want to be like my parents and say "If you study fine, and if not, well that's fine too." No, I want my children to continue with their studies.

When I asked José what he wanted teachers to know about his involvement in his children's education he expressed a hope that teachers would understand the reasons why he brought his family to the U.S. As a man of few words, José replied, "*Quiero que sepan que somos unidos, que luchamos por estar aquí, por salir adelante*" ("I want them [teachers] to know we [family members] are united, that we are working hard to be here [in the U.S.] so that we can progress forward"). José and other participants believed it



was important for (im) migrant parents to demonstrate their commitment to the education and development of children through actions and involvement with schools. Knowing school staff took note of parental involvement; participants felt it was necessary to demonstrate their presence and commitment across all school levels (elementary, middle, and high school). In addition to the critical relationships they established with their children and school staff, participants identified a third key dyadic relationship, their relationship with other parents. This third relationship reached both within and beyond the school community.

*Parent-parent relationships.* Participants valued opportunities to interact, share, and to learn from and with other parents, particularly parents who understood their unique experiences as (im) migrant families. As Mexican immigrants, participants' practices reflected a traditional Latino value that centered on "helping one another and being of service" (Bordas, 2007, p. 53). They enjoyed communicating with other parents and wanted to belong to a community where parents connected and could help each other. Participants said they found it most helpful when they could dialogue with other Latinos, particularly Latino (im) migrant parents, in their native language. Through interactions and relationships with others, participants learned about parental involvement strategies and new ways of thinking. Reflecting on her feelings as a first time participant in a focus group interview (December 20, 2008), Airolg wrote the following in her journal:

*En la reunión de hoy me sentí un poco rara, rara porque jamás en mi vida me imaginé llegar a formar parte de un grupo así, y menos en un país que no es en el cual yo nací. También me sentí muy orgullosa porque pude compartir con los otros integrantes de este grupo mis experiencias como madre de familia. También en ésta reunión aprendí de las experiencias de mis otros compañeros, las experiencias de ellos con sus hijos, los cuales ellos ya asisten a escuelas de*

*niveles más altos. Esas experiencias puedan servirme a mí con mis hijos, cuando ellos asistan a estas escuelas.*

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In today's meeting I felt a little strange, strange because never in my life could I have imagined being part of a group like this, much less in a country where I wasn't born. I also felt very proud because I was able to share with the other members of the group my experiences as a mother. In the meeting I also learned from the experiences of my peers, experiences they had with their children who were in higher grade levels [middle and high school]. Those experiences can help me with my children when they reach those school levels.

Feeling connected to other parents and having a sense of community was important to all participants. As immigrants, they valued the wisdom and lessons that could be gained from the experiences of other (im) migrant parents.

In addition to learning from others, participants also felt a responsibility to help people in the community, as Chayo expressed in her first individual interview (January 11, 2009) when she discussed her role on the state MEP Parent Advisory Council (PAC):

*También podemos ayudar en la comunidad, podemos ayudar a otros padres que no saben, que no tienen la oportunidad de asistir. Y yo pienso que un tanto el PAC es eso, enterarnos y pasárselo a los demás padres. Porque si ellos no tienen la oportunidad y yo sí la tengo, entonces yo puedo ayudar dándoles a los demás padres la información que yo recibo. Para mí es mucho muy importante, aparte de que primero están mis hijos, también me gusta ayudar a las familias, me gusta ayudar a los demás padres. De hecho, las clases de inglés, la información que a mí me han dado en el PAC del estado, yo les he pasado también copias a ellos. Entonces trato de que todo lo que a mí me parece importante, que pues, y los padres estén enterados, ya también ellos pueden ayudar a sus hijos. Entonces es una cadenita que se va haciendo, partiendo de que a mí me dieron la oportunidad de asistir a esas conferencias y aprovecharlas.*

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As parents we can also help the community and we can help other parents who aren't informed, parents who don't have the same opportunity to attend [parent meetings]. And I think that is what the PAC is really about, for us to become informed and share the information with other parents. Because if other parents

don't have the opportunity that I have [to attend PAC meetings], well I can at least help them by sharing the information I receive. For me it's really very important, aside from the fact that my children come first, I also like to help other families. I like to help all the other [migrant] parents. So, the information I received at the state PAC meetings, I made copies and shared it with the other parents in our ESL class. So everything I get that seems important to me, [I share] so other parents are informed, and they in turn can help their own children. So it's like a little chain being formed, starting with me being given the opportunity to attend and take advantage of what I learn at the [PAC] conferences.

As Chayo shared, parent-parent relationships have the potential to create a network, a “small chain” of parents who share and utilize information and resources to benefit parental involvement so that all students succeed. Participants recognized the importance of reaching out and supporting other parents, particularly (im) migrant parents who are marginalized and isolated.

Participants acknowledged their responsibility for helping others and collectively shared a belief that (im) migrant parents have the potential to positively influence other (im) migrant parents. They believed (im) migrant parents who lived in the community for sometime had a responsibility to share information and resources with newly arrived (im) migrant parents, and felt happy when they were able to help their peers in tangible ways, such as assisting MEP staff to distribute clothing, school supplies, food, and other resources to families in need. They felt valued when schools and programs asked them to help, or serve in roles that supported other (im) migrant families, especially in regard to children's education. Chayo clarified that she did not feel comfortable being introduced as a *maestra* (teacher) to other parents. Based on her humility and the respect she had for the status of *maestros* (teachers), Chayo did not feel she merited this esteemed title. She was, however, quite comfortable in the role of a peer educator and preferred to serve in

positions that allowed her to work side-by-side other parents, not as an expert, but as an equal.

Kike also acknowledged how important it was for parents to help other parents and he believed helping others was a family value that needed to be passed on to children. In his third individual interview (May 28, 2009), Kike shared the following perspective:

*Si ven a una persona que tiene algún problema, tratar de ayudarles. O sea, no meterse en sí a fondo en el problema, pero tratar de ayudarles a solucionar. Son valores familiares y ellos pueden transmitírselo a su vez a sus hijos, que es lo que queremos, ese valor nunca se pierda. El valor de ayudar a la demás gente y valorarse a sí mismo es un valor, porque si usted convive con una persona aunque no la conozca, sí, ese valor se va a ganar un amigo más. Que el día de mañana puede que usted lo necesite a él, o él lo necesite a usted. Y que intercambian, se intercambian los valores porque puede ser muchas de las veces sea un problema muy fuerte, o es que él está haciendo algo malo y nosotros podemos meterlo a un carril que sea bueno.*

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If my children see a person that has a problem they try to help them. Or rather, not by getting thoroughly inside the problem of others, but by trying to help others find a solution. These are family values that our children can someday pass on to their children, and that is what we want, that our values are never lost. The value of helping other people, and also valuing yourself, has value, because if you spend time and experience things together with another person, even if you don't know that person, then yes, the value added is that you will gain another friend. At some future point in time you may need that person, or that person may need you. And through that exchange, you exchange values, because a lot of times it can be a serious problem, or the person might be doing something wrong, and you might help put them on a better path.

Chayo echoed Kike's sentiments and reinforced the importance of parents teaching children the value of helping others, as she made the following statement in her third individual interview (May 22, 2009) where she shared her photographs:

*En mi familia siempre hemos tenido en cuenta que ayudar a los demás debe ser algo primordial para nosotros, para sentirnos bien con nosotros mismos. Entonces yo siempre les he dicho que el ayudar a los demás nos va a fortalecer*

*mucho y siempre les he inculcado que hay que ayudar, y que siempre tenemos que ayudar a los demás.*

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In my family we have always considered helping others as being something essential in regard to feeling good about your self. So I always tell my children that by helping others, we also strengthen ourselves, and I have always taught my children that we must help; we always have to help other people.

In a variety of ways, participants expressed satisfaction in their abilities to help other parents. Whether it was because they felt a responsibility for sharing information, or because it made them feel better about themselves as people, all participants wanted to connect with other parents in ways that were mutually beneficial. By talking, listening, and through *convivencia* (sharing time together), participants believed their relationships with other parents were strengthened. In his first individual interview (January 13, 2009), Lupe explained how much he and his wife Lucy enjoyed talking with other parents, and he stated, “*A nosotros nos gusta hablar. Nomás que nos busquen. Nos gusta platicar con la gente y tener un diálogo y este, conocernos* (“We like to converse. It’s simply a matter of people seeking us out. We enjoy dialoging with others, and well, having people get to know us”).

In summary, participants viewed their relationships with others as a critical component of parental involvement. *Primordial* (fundamental) relationships were those established within the most basic social unit, *la familia* (the family). Viewed as an open system, the family included many people connected through blood and marriage, as well as honorary aunts, and uncles, godparents, and sponsors who were invited to become lifetime family members. In addition to the relationships established within the family, three key dyadic relationships were also identified. Rooted in the home, the first and most important dyadic relationship developed between parents and children. Participants

believed they needed to clearly understand their child's physical, social, emotional, and academic needs before they could even begin to advocate on their behalf.

Grounded in academia, the second dyadic relationship developed between the parent and school staff. Parents established relationships with a wide array of school staff, such as teachers, administrators, counselors, paraprofessionals, nurses, outreach workers, and secretaries. By calling all school staff *maestros* (teachers), participants demonstrated respect for a team of people who supported their children's learning.

Centered in the community, the third dyadic relationship was one that developed between parents and other parents. Participants expressed a sense of joy when they were able to help other parents; particularly other (im) migrant parents, access resources to help children succeed in school. They viewed helping others as a responsibility, a family value that needed to be passed on to their children. By helping others, participants believed they too benefited by becoming better people. Through their critical relationships with family, children, school staff, and other parents, participants experienced strength and a sense of empowerment, the fourth and final theme of this inquiry, presented in the following section.

### *Empowerment*

Parental empowerment is a term both commonly used and rarely defined in public education. Based on the critical framework used in this inquiry, empowerment mirrors what Freire (1972a) identified as conscientisation: an awakening that occurs when people become critically conscious of their realities through dialogue, critical reflection, and action (Crotty, 1998). Freire (1972b) believed conscientisation could never occur in

isolation; instead, “it takes place in human beings among other human beings ... united by their action and their reflection upon that action and upon the world” (p. 75).

Rather than becoming empowered by someone or something external to themselves, participants viewed empowerment as something they brought upon themselves. They became empowered through dialogue with each other and with me, the researcher, and through critical reflection expressed through journaling and photography. They described how the very act of participating in this research study was empowering, particularly when they were asked to reflect upon their experiences, situations, and actions. Participants shared that this was a new experience for them. In her third individual interview (May 22, 2009), Chayo explained how she empowered herself through critical reflection, which helped her become more aware and conscious of her own reality:

*Lo que pasa es que uno con el pasar de los días, va uno haciendo, y va uno siempre en bien de ellos, en bien de los hijos. Y todo por los hijos, y también por uno, también personal. Pero no se pone uno a reflexionar exactamente qué tanto los estamos ayudando, qué tanto necesitan ellos de nosotros. Y con estos estudios, pues, nos hemos dado a la tarea y nos hemos dado cuenta de muchas cosas que antes no lo hacíamos y que ahora lo estamos haciendo. O que simplemente estamos descubriendo cosas en ellos que no nos habíamos fijado. Y entonces con este estudio nos ponemos a reflexionar acerca de todo lo que ellos están haciendo y de todo lo que nosotros estamos haciendo por ellos, por reflexionar.*

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What happens is that as time goes by, you keep doing things, always thinking about what’s best for them [children], the well-being of children. Everything is for them, and also for the parent, in a personal sense. But we never stop to reflect on exactly how much we are helping [children], how much they need from us. In this study, well, we did our homework and we became aware of many things that we didn’t do, and now we are doing them. Simply said, we are discovering things in them [children] that we had not noticed before. And so, from this study we stopped and reflected on everything our children are doing, and everything we are doing to benefit them, by using reflective thinking.

Airolg expressed an experience similar to what Chayo described, but for her, self-empowerment came through the act of reflective journaling. In the last focus group interview (June 16, 2009), Airolg shared she felt most comfortable, most free, expressing her thoughts and reflections in writing. Saying there were periods of time when she wrote nothing at all, she sometimes surprised herself on days when she suddenly felt compelled to write 10 pages in a single night. Prior to participating in this study, Airolg had never kept a journal; however, based on what she learned about her skill and ability to capture her reflections in writing, she said she planned to create four photo journals within the next year, a keepsake for each of her children.

In addition to dialogue and journaling, participants also experienced empowerment through photography and photo elicitation. Although Chayo and José did not take as many photographs as other participants, they felt the photographs they did take were *profundas* (profound) and *muy importantes* (very important). In their individual interviews, Chayo and José each shared details about the meaning behind each of their photographs. Other participants also shared how photography afforded new and creative ways to document parental involvement actions and the positive difference parental involvement makes in children's education. Kike planned to share his journal, which included some of his photographs and his reflections on those photographs, years in the future with his children's children. Lucy believed her photographs would empower her children in the future. She hoped when her children looked at their images captured in her photographs they would be able to see how much their parents did to support their success. Lucy believed her photographs had the power to convince her children they had value and worth, and hoped when they saw her photographs in the future they would



think, “*Soy alguien, soy alguien, y este les interesará* (“I’m somebody, I’m somebody, and that would be of interest to them”).

As Lucy explained, the photographs taken in this study have the potential to empower not only the parents who took them, but also the children whose history was captured in prints that were likely to fade over time. Because her photographs documented significant moments in her family’s life, Lucy believed her children would feel satisfied recalling memories of their childhood, and they would understand the sacrifices she, Lupe, and many extended family members made to move them *adelante* (ahead).

Viewing myself and participants as “equally knowing subjects” (Freire, 1972b, p. 31) and as research partners, I learned as much (perhaps more) about critical inquiry in this study as I did about the research problem under investigation. Through dialogue and critical reflection, participants and I searched for meaning in words (spoken and written), behaviors (theirs and mine), and photographs (framed and loose), and we became more consciously aware of issues related to power, voice, and social justice. In an event marking the culmination of this study, participants expressed gratitude and deep appreciation for being invited to take part in this study, mainly because of what they learned and gained through self-empowerment. In the last focus group interview (June 16, 2009), Chayo summarized her experience in the following comments:

*Yo primeramente le quiero agradecer el hecho que nos haya tomado en cuenta a cada una de nuestras familias para compartir esto. Porque dice usted que para usted es un reto, el poder dar una buena expresión o una buena historia de todos nosotros. Pero para nosotros también sería un punto de agradecimiento hacia usted, por haberse fijado en nuestras familias, que podamos compartir todos nuestros sentimientos y todo este, nuestra forma de pensar acerca de nuestros hijos. Y a la vez, nos ayudó a descubrir cosas que nosotros no sabíamos, que nosotros no habíamos experimentado. Y que ahora nos hemos estado fijando más*

*en detallitos que antes no nos habíamos fijado. Entonces, por eso, pues, le agradecemos.*

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I first want to express appreciation for the fact that you [the researcher] have taken each of our families into consideration by sharing in this study. You [the researcher] say it will be a challenge for you to write a good account, or a good story [dissertation], about all of us. But for us too, it (the dissertation) is a way for us to show appreciation for you, for having taken notice of our families, so that we could share our sentiments and all of this, our ways of thinking about our children. And at the same time, it helped us to discover things that we didn't know, things we hadn't experienced before. And now we have noticed those things in greater detail than ever before. And for that, well, we thank you.

Through reflective thinking, Chayo gained insight and understanding in this study, and quite possibility, a new career path. In the final focus group interview (June 16, 2009), Chayo made the following comments to express how she became aware of her calling to become a social worker:

*Ya sé que voy a estudiar para trabajadora social porque me gusta trabajar con las familias y todo eso. Se me hace que para eso me voy, por ese rumbo me voy a dedicar. Entonces eso fue una de las cosas que saqué, de todas estas reflexiones, que mi deber es, como dice, mi vocación es ayudar a las familias. Si, entre tantas reflexiones, entre tanto ver y todo, que ya nomás me gusta ayudar a mi familia, también me gusta ayudar a las demás personas. Entonces esa sería una buena vocación. Y ya lo saqué, ya lo deduje por mí sola.*

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I now know I am going to study to become a social worker because I like to work with families, and all that. It seems to me that's where I'm headed; I am going to devote myself in that direction. So that was one of the things I took from this study, from all of these reflections, that my calling is, like they say, my vocation, is to help other families. Yes, between all the reflections, from seeing so much and all, I no longer want to only help my own family, I also want to help other people, so that would be a good vocation [social work] for me. That's what I figured out, and I came to this realization on my own.

A deeper awareness and increased consciousness resulted when participants, such as Chayo, used reflective thinking to help make sense of their situations and their actions.

Through a process of critical thinking, participants gained new insights and perspectives related to meaningful parental involvement. In dialogue with others, they received validation for the many positive things they did and the many sacrifices they made to support their children's academic success.

As participants increased their self-empowerment through journaling, photography, dialogue, and critical reflection, they discovered new things about themselves and their children they had not previously considered. Humbly recognizing they had still much to learn, participants felt they had developed a new found capacity to see things differently, to consider multiple perspectives, and to believe in untapped possibilities. By sharing their reflections with others, they realized they had valuable social and cultural capital. Some, for the first time, felt comfortable publicly acknowledging their strengths and limitations, and by doing so, they felt a release, a new sense of freedom. The more they were able to recognize and acknowledge their children's successes, the more they were able to draw strength from awareness of how their actions and involvement played a critical role in each child's success story.

Empowerment, as a theme in this inquiry, was easy to construct but difficult to define. Leaning on the critical framework that guided this inquiry, empowerment relates to a type of freedom that lives within the human experience, as Crotty (1998) described:

As conscious beings, humans are endowed with creative imagination. This means that they find themselves confronted not by brute factuality, sheer material circumstance, but by what can only be described as a *human* situation (emphasis in original). This is a situation that holds creative possibilities, for humans are able to see it not only in terms of what it is but also in terms of what it can be. They can do something about their situation and, precisely as human beings, they are called to do something about it. This, and only this, is the kind of freedom human beings enjoy. It is a situated freedom, an embodied freedom - not the freedom to realize absolute, abstract ideals as such, but the freedom to address

themselves to their situation, seize upon its growing points, and out of the worse to create the better. (pp. 149-150)

As research partners, participants and I used what Crotty described as “creative imagination” (p. 149) to make sense of our realities, not only in terms of what is, but also in terms of what could be. Throughout this study, without fully understanding how and when it happened, we empowered ourselves and each other by way of continuous dialogue, critical reflection, and action.

### Summary

Findings from this inquiry were presented in this chapter as four major themes: Migrant Parents as Mexican Immigrants, Academic Ethos, Critical Relationships, and Empowerment. These four findings were intentionally presented in this specific order to illustrate the interplay between themes. The four themes were co-constructed by me, the researcher, and the 6 participants by aggregating the many sub-themes that emerged throughout the process of data collection and analysis. To increase trustworthiness for the reader, each of the four major themes were detailed in this chapter and were supported by extensive, verbatim quotes voiced by participants in their native language, Spanish, and translated by me into English.

The findings presented in this chapter generally support those of prior parental involvement research studies; however, there were a few surprises that make a unique contribution to advance the knowledge base and inform future educational practice. In chapter seven, the conclusions of this inquiry are presented, along with recommendations which are portrayed through a future story. This dissertation concludes with a portrait that will transport the reader 5 years into the future to the 2015 National Migrant Education Parent Conference held in San Antonio, Texas.

## CHAPTER VII

### WHAT WAS, IS, AND COULD BE

When I approached this inquiry 18 months ago, I was excited about the chance to apply new knowledge and skills gained over the course of 5 years in my doctoral program to shed light on a research problem I cared deeply about: the persistent gap in achievement between mainstream students and those marginalized by the educational system, more specifically, students enrolled in the Migrant Education Program (MEP). My initial view of “the dissertation” was that it was an outcome, a final product required by the university to complete my degree program. In conducting this study, however, I came to understand the dissertation less in terms of a product and more as a process. No longer a noun, dissertation took on new meaning as an action verb. The insights, understanding, and knowledge I gained as a novice researcher in conducting this inquiry are depicted in this final chapter as the conclusions and recommendations.

Beyond meeting degree requirements, my aspiration for writing this dissertation was to advance a new point of view and to make a creative contribution to the field by helping educational leaders (re) consider how we think about parental involvement. Grounded in a critical framework, I hoped to conduct a study that would help galvanize action for change. With that purpose in mind, this chapter was written as a call to action for educational leaders, policy makers, and other stakeholders committed to social justice and equity in public education.

Framed in portraiture methodology, this dissertation ends with a portrait, a future story created to engage the reader in thinking about parental involvement not only in terms of what was (presented in chapter two as the literature review), or what is (presented in chapter six as findings), but in futuristic terms, presented in this last chapter as what could be. The story told in the future portrait is a story of stories, painted not as a single picture, but rather as a collage co-created by seven equally knowing (Freire, 1972b) artists. Contextualized by the unique realities of the 6 migrant parent participants, and me, the researcher, the final portrait was created as a reflection upon, not of, our shared experiences. Through vicarious placement in a future setting, the reader is encouraged to make sense of the story, and ultimately, this inquiry, by constructing meaning about parental involvement in his or her own way.

### Concluding Remarks

This study aimed to answer one primary research question: How do migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement? To gain a deeper understanding of the problem, three sub-questions were also raised about meaningful parental involvement practices, expressions of goodness, and barriers. Looking back on this inquiry, I recognize how fortunate and honored I was to have had the opportunity to conduct this study. Through relationships built on trust and respect, and strengthened by prolonged engagement in the field, 6 migrant parents privileged me with access to their worlds. More than simply letting me in, they created space so that I could more fully experience their unique realities. What I saw, heard, smelled, tasted, and felt by sharing in their experiences was enlightening and transformative. I learned more about parental involvement in conducting this study than by working in the MEP for over 22 years.

What I thought I “knew” about parental involvement in migrant families from attending trainings and workshops, reading studies, reports, and evaluations, and administering programs for migrant families pales in comparison to the knowledge, no, the wisdom, I gained in this inquiry. Being there, making sense of parental involvement side-by-side with migrant parents, and sharing in their unique realities, expanded my thinking, and, in my attempt to make sense of a familiar topic in new ways, I was humbled by the realization there is still so much more to be learned. This inquiry primarily supports findings from prior research; however, there were a few contradictions between this study and the literature reviewed. Alignment and differences between the findings from this and prior studies are presented in the following section.

As in previous parental involvement studies, this inquiry recognized Latino immigrant parents as having different needs than mainstream, non-immigrant parents related to culture, language, educational attainment, immigration status, and familiarization with the U.S. education system (Bordas, 2007; Crosnoe, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; López, 2001; López et al, 1995; López et al., 2001; Olivos, 2006; Perea, 2004; Valdés, 1996; Vocke, 2007). Findings from this inquiry related to the value (im) migrant parents place on education and their strong work ethic are supported by the literature (López, Parra-Cardona et al., 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Valdés). Similar to prior research, the need for new ways of thinking about the critical relationships between Latino (im) migrant parents and school staff was identified. This finding justifies a need for additional studies on parental involvement and supports this topic as a focus for current education research (Crosnoe, Delgado-Gaitan, Olivos, Perea, Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco). Also documented in the literature, findings from this

inquiry revealed the importance of parents feeling empowered in their involvement practices to support children's academic success (Epstein et al., 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Stelmack, 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

In many regards, this study gives credence to much of what is already known about parental involvement. What is new and different about this study, however, is that it adds to the body of knowledge by illuminating a view of parental involvement as constructed by migrant parents, a view seldom found in the literature. By reflecting on their unique realities, 6 migrant parents, all of whom were also Mexican immigrants, used their voices to share how they made sense of their worlds. Having a deeper awareness of how (im) migrant parents understand and practice parental involvement can help educational leaders design, implement, and evaluate programs that schools and parents value and consider as being meaningful and effective.

The four themes constructed in this study, Migrant Parents as Mexican Immigrants, Academic Ethos, Critical Relationships, and Empowerment, were presented in this particular order because each theme gave structure to the next. Although not by design, participants were bound not only by their status as migrant parents, but also by their status as Mexican immigrants. The fact participants were both migrant parents and Mexican immigrants was significant because the way they constructed meaning and made sense of parental involvement was rooted in their shared perspectives as people who emigrated from Mexico to the U.S. Much of what participants did, felt, and believed stemmed from a choice they each made years ago to leave México and come to the U.S. Their understanding of parental involvement was filtered through an immigrant's lens, more specifically, a Mexican immigrant's lens. Having grown up and attended school in



México, having lived in rural Mexican villages where poverty, oppression, and uncertainty created hardships that became unbearable, and having adjusted to a new reality in the U.S. are just a few examples of experiences that helped shape the ways participants understood and practiced meaningful parental involvement. Born Mexican, participants emigrated to the U.S. where they became Mexican immigrants, and ultimately migrant parents. How they made sense of parental involvement was in part determined by life's circumstances and changing roles as they moved through processes that transformed them from who they were to who they chose to become.

The MEP does not track the national origin of the parents of children enrolled in the program were born; consequently, it is not possible to make generalizations about where migrant parents come from. Research does, however, indicate the vast majority of migrant farm workers in the U.S. are Mexican immigrants (Parra-Cardona et al., 2006). Having worked with migrant parents for over 22 years in 3 states with large concentrations of migrant families, and having participated in dozens of state and national conferences designed to strengthen parental involvement in migrant families, I have observed the vast majority of migrant parents have family ties that connect them to México, and, as (im) migrant families, they confront different issues and challenges than their non-immigrant, migrant parent peers. Similarly, undocumented migrant parents confront different issues and challenges than migrant parents who are legally documented immigrants.

One's immigration status is a delicate matter, a topic most educators would avoid if given the choice. Some find it taboo to even suggest school staff should engage (im) migrant parents in dialogue about their experiences as immigrants. I would argue such

dialogue is not only helpful, it is essential for building relationships between schools and (im) migrant families. I do not suggest educators ask migrant parents whether or not they are legal immigrants, quite the contrary. Immigration law is not the business of educators; however, working together with parents to support the academic success of *all* children is our business. Leadership is needed to help educators, particularly those who work with migrant students, understand the different needs and challenges that (im) migrant parents face.

Immigration status adds yet another dimension to parental involvement research. Not all of the participants in this study were U.S. residents or citizens. In addition to being a migrant parent and a Mexican immigrant, one participant, who was undocumented, described what it was like living “under the radar,” waiting years for an application for resident status (green card) to be approved. Immigration status matters greatly for migrant parents and children to be able to access resources that many people take for granted, such as public health care, a driver’s license, jobs, and in some cases, permission to volunteer in schools. When working to involve migrant parents in the educational system, it is important for educators to understand that (im) migrant parents may have unique needs, issues, and concerns relative to immigration status.

By searching for goodness (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and acknowledging the positive things (im) migrant parents already know and do to support children’s academic success, educators validate parents’ expertise and help families feel included and welcomed in the school community. In contrast with prior studies that suggest Mexican immigrant parents are less involved in schools than mainstream parents (Crosnoe, 2006; López et al., 1995), this study found migrant parents were actively

involved in their children's learning, both at home and in schools. Placing a high value on their relationships with school staff, participants were well-informed about school events and made it a point to attend school meetings and conferences whenever they were able. They wanted school staff to know they could be counted on, and said they were concerned that many other Latino, immigrant, and migrant parents fail to show up at school events. Participants understood the expectations of schools related to parental involvement and saw it as their obligation to be part of the school team. All 6 participants took advantage of opportunities to participate in adult education programs and to utilize resources provided by the MEP. They also recognized that other immigrant parents (who did not have children enrolled in the MEP) lacked access to the types of support services available to them as migrant parents. Participants valued the supplemental support services provided by the MEP, and said the types of resources this program provided were not offered by schools or community agencies.

This study aligned with prior research that documented how migrant parents teach their children about the value of education through hard work, such as by taking children with them to work in the fields (López, 2001). Chayo made this a regular practice. Other participants also consistently reminded their children if they did not complete their education, they too might end up working in the fields as migrant farm laborers. Participants never forgot that the primal reason they brought their families to the U.S. was to have a chance for a better life. Grounded in a strong academic ethos, education was a high priority, a finding also documented in literature (Crosnoe, 2006; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001)

Similar to findings from prior research, relationships were a critical component of parental involvement for the families included in this study (Bordas, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Olivos, 2006; Perea, 2004; Valdés, 1996; Vocke, 2007). Through dialogue and critical reflection, migrant parents and school staff engaged in an integrated process and worked together for a shared purpose: student success. However, unlike studies that use the term partnership to explain the parent-school staff relationship (Epstein et al., 2009); findings from this study suggest a different term should be considered.

Participants did not view their relationship with school staff as a partnership because they found the term *socio* (partner) to be too formal. For them, partnership was a term used in legal and business fields, a term that did not reflect the interpersonal nature of the relationship between parents and school staff. Participants welcomed and appreciated when school staff said they wanted the parent-school staff relationship to be more like a family. The role of *la familia* (the family) in Latino culture has clear meaning and value; contrarily, the notion of a partnership did not make sense for participants. As migrant parents and Mexican immigrants, participants had a great deal of respect for teachers, and viewed school staff as part of their extended family.

In working with migrant families, schools and programs should (re) consider language used in designing programs to build relationships with parents and to strengthen parental involvement practices. Describing the relationship between parents and school staff in more meaningful terms, such as in the context of a family or a team, could be more helpful. Schools and programs also need to understand that certain terms, such as partnership, can not simply be translated from English to Spanish, because meaning is oftentimes lost in the translation. When the term partnership is used, it would be helpful

for migrant parents if schools and programs described how and why this term is commonly used in an academic context. Communication, relationships, and parent involvement efforts are all strengthened when parents and school staff have a shared understanding of how commonly used terms, such as partnership and advocacy are defined and measured.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this study was the finding related to empowerment. Contrary to people being empowered by others, such as the notion of schools and programs empowering parents, participants in this study experienced self-empowerment through dialogue, critical reflection, and interactions with others. Freire (1972b) referred to this process as true dialogue, a key component of critical thinking. Using reflective thinking, journaling, and photography, the migrant parents in this study became more conscious of their realities by asking critical questions of themselves and of the education system, questions they had not previously considered. The nature of the questions discussed in the focus groups and individual interviews were described by participants as interesting, different, and even intriguing. Never before had they been asked to keep a journal or to provide critical feedback on written observations made of them and their families. New to research, they were not accustomed to thinking reflectively about their actions, and on a deeper level, why they did what they did to support their children's success in school. Participants used a variety of terms to describe this new experience as liberating.

Parents experienced empowerment when they became more conscious of the fact they were doing the right things to help their children succeed in school, especially when they themselves were able to recognize goodness in their intentions and actions. As

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis stated, “The researcher who asks first ‘what is good here?’ is likely to absorb a very different reality than the one who is on a mission to discover the sources of failure” (1997, p. 9). As co-researchers in this study, participants took a deeper look at their own strengths and successes, as well as their vulnerabilities and limitations related to parental involvement. Rather than defining for participants what made parental involvement “good,” or giving them indicators of what constituted best practice, this study was designed for migrant parents to make sense of this construct on their own, by deconstructing their understanding and naming expressions of goodness in their everyday practices. Through the use of photography and photo elicitation, participants were able to capture and holistically express what goodness in parental involvement looked like through their lens. Harper (2002) described photo elicitation as a potentially useful, but largely unrecognized research method. In this study, photo elicitation provided a useful means to gather thick, rich data that might have otherwise been missed had I conducted the interviews without incorporating this technique. This inquiry supports the use of photo elicitation as a valuable research method that warrants further exploration.

In summary, the findings from this study are more suggestive than conclusive. Participants were all migrant parents and Mexican immigrants who lived and worked in rural agricultural communities in one region of the country. Studies such as this should be replicated in other communities with migrant parents from different backgrounds, and in geographically diverse areas of the county. Having a broader understanding of how different groups of migrant parents understand and construct meaning in parental involvement can inform thinking for educational leaders responsible for reauthorizing

federal laws, allocating funding, creating policies, and conducting evaluations of program effectiveness.

Research is most useful when it moves beyond publication to action, and when it becomes linked to practice. Unfortunately, current educational practices have not caught up with the rapid demographic changes taking place in classrooms across our nation. To close the achievement gap, new and different types of studies are needed to call attention to creative initiatives that promote expressions of goodness in everyday parental involvement practices, particularly for parents historically under-served by the educational system, such as Latino immigrant and migrant parents. Educational inquiry, conducted by socially minded researchers, can be a useful means to advocate for social and cultural changes so that *all* students, including those who are recent immigrants, have an equitable chance to succeed in public education and in life. Describing the connection between educational research, policy, and leadership, Willis (2009) stated:

The process begins with education researchers and policy makers envisaging all children as worthy of the best that education research has to offer and making explicit their epistemological and ideological stances as well as their goals for education. As a community of scholars we must insist that a rigorous, dynamic, diverse, and translatable body of research be required to meaningfully inform education policy, accompanied by a commitment to excellence, democracy, and social justice. We need more than a stated willingness... we need action. (p. 534)

Unlike a dissertation, critical inquiry and social justice are ongoing projects (Crotty, 1998), not a series of discrete actions taken to meet research objectives that simply come to an end. Perhaps that is the greatest lesson I take from this study: awareness of my

responsibility as an educational leader to continuously question current ideology and respond to the call to action in the cause of social justice. Long after this dissertation has been completed, the work must continue.

In conclusion, recommendations are presented in a future story created through the use of portraiture. Framed by a picture of what meaningful and effective parental involvement could, and should, look like in the MEP, the recommendations generated from this inquiry are voiced by migrant parents at the second annual National Migrant Education Parent Conference held in San Antonio, Texas in the spring of 2015. As part of a national level evaluation of the effectiveness of parental involvement in the MEP, the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Migrant Education (OME), conducted two simultaneous focus group interviews with migrant parents at the Conference, in both English and Spanish. Each focus group interview was designed to include 8 migrant parents who served as officers on different state Parent Advisory Councils (PACs). Based on my doctoral research study conducted 5 years earlier, and subsequent publications related to parental involvement in migrant and immigrant families, I was asked by OME to facilitate the Spanish focus group interview at the Conference. The reader is invited to join me in the following portrait set in the historic downtown area of beautiful San Antonio, Texas.

### Recommendations

*¡Bienvenidos a San Antonio!* Welcome to San Antonio! Standing below the conference banner hanging above a large, ornate, tiled water fountain in the center of the hotel lobby, I admired the architectural beauty as music drifted from the patio where a mariachi band serenaded parents who gathered from across the county to attend the



second annual National Migrant Education Parent Conference. I glanced towards the patio and noticed a large crowd clustered around the registration booth where conference attendees picked up their name badges and conference materials. Having just registered, I stopped for a moment to enjoy the music. I recognized the words from the song *México Lindo y Querido* filling the air. A trumpet blared as migrant parents joined the lead singer in the well-known song about patriotism and loyalty for the rural lands of México: “*México lindo y querido, si muero lejos de ti, que digan que estoy dormido, y me traigan a ti*” (“Pretty and beloved México, if I die far from your soil, say that I am asleep, and bring me back to thee”). I realized San Antonio was not far from México, perhaps only 150 miles north of Laredo, Texas and Nuevo Laredo, México, border towns linked by a bridge that both connected and divided two nations.

I wandered across the hotel lobby to see what the conference information board listed as suggestions for evening activities. Colorful posters promoted boat rides along the San Antonio River, art museums, world class restaurants, shops, tours of the Alamo (located directly across from the hotel), and leisurely strolls along the famous river walk, considered by many to be the crown jewel of the city. Deciding to decide later, I picked up a few brochures and returned to my hotel room to make last minute preparations for the Spanish focus group interview I was scheduled to facilitate in less than an hour. Noticing many people with luggage waiting for the elevator, I opted for exercise and climbed three flights of stairs that delivered me to the far end of the hallway where my hotel room was located.

Realizing I didn't have much time, I reviewed my semi-structured interview protocol and reminded myself it was time to stop thinking in English. As I practiced the

guiding interview questions aloud in Spanish, I heard the words flowing from my mouth in Spanish, but at the same time, I was consciously aware my brain was interpreting their meaning in English. I moved through the mental processes required for me to shift from my native language, English, to my second language, Spanish. Feeling my brain shift into that in-between gear, the borderland in my mind where my two languages meet, my thoughts drifted to the border towns of Laredo and Nueveo Laredo, and metaphorically speaking, I prepared to cross over the bridge.

Tucking my interview protocol into a folder, I closed the door, and as I walked towards the elevator I heard people speaking in Spanish. I noticed a mother proudly showing off her infant son to a small group of women all wearing conference name badges. Everyone was smiling and paying great compliments to the mother, taking turns stroking her baby's perfectly round head which was covered in thick, black curls. As indicated on the mother's name badge, Lili Flores was the president of the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) of the Washington state Migrant Education Program (MEP). The elevator door opened, and I quickly introduced myself to Lili as we squeezed in with the others. It did not take long for me to realize Lili was 1 of the 8 migrant parents who would be participating in the Spanish focus group interview I was scheduled to facilitate. Lili mentioned she was on her way to the childcare center where her baby, 9-month-old Carlitos, would be cared for while she attended *una reunión de entrevista de grupo* (a meeting for a group interview). We engaged in Spanish conversation as the elevator descended to the lobby, and in mentioning to Lili we were going to the same place, I offered to carry her diaper bag as we proceeded to the childcare center.

As we walked past the Sam Houston meeting room, I motioned to Lili that was the room where our focus group interview would take place. We reached the end of the hallway, and, when I opened the childcare center door, I spotted Chayo, the PAC president of the Colorado state MEP. With her back facing me, I overheard Chayo telling her 4-year-old son, Librado, that she would pick him up after her meeting and they would go swimming in the outdoor pool. My mind flashed back 5 years earlier when Chayo, pregnant at the time with Librado, was a participant in my dissertation study of meaningful parental involvement in the MEP. Librado, the youngest of her five children, was born on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, only a few months after Chayo attended my doctoral defense. Librado hugged his mother, and as Chayo turned to leave, our eyes met. After greeting her, I introduced Lili to Chayo and, not surprisingly, the two mothers quickly bonded through their sons.

Librado ran towards the corner of the room where art easels were set up for the children as Lili lovingly handed baby Carlitos to Claudia, a childcare volunteer and college freshman at the University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA). Claudia, along with the two other childcare volunteers, was a former migrant student and a freshman at the UTPA. Having received a scholarship awarded by the College Assisted Migrant Program (CAMP), all of Claudia's expenses for tuition, room and board, and books were covered for her first year in college. To be eligible for the CAMP, students must have been enrolled in the MEP at some point in their K-12 education. I knew there was a high degree of collaboration and coordination between the CAMP and the MEP, which helped explain why CAMP students were assisting at a national conference for migrant parents. In addition to accruing community service for the hours they volunteered in the childcare

center, Claudia and her peers would also receive academic credit for serving as panelists during the conference luncheon later that day. Over 300 migrant parents would hear Claudia and her peers share their experiences as the first in their families to attend college. Additionally, three migrant parents of children attending different colleges would also serve on the panel and to share their stories about how parental involvement helped their sons and daughters graduate from high school, obtain scholarships, and go on to college.

Claudia warmly greeted Lili and Chayo in Spanish and presented them each with a pre-printed, colorful sticker listing their child's name and age. Both mothers seemed pleased to know their children were not only anticipated in the childcare center, they were also personally welcomed by name. Claudia explained that of the 16 parents who would participate in the 2 focus group interviews, 5 indicated on their registration forms they would need childcare, and in total, she expected 7 children to show up. Lili said she was impressed with the planning and organization of the childcare, and emphasized it would have been impossible for her to attend the focus group interview had childcare not been offered. Chayo agreed and thanked the three CAMP students for volunteering to care for the children.

Lili smiled as she watched Claudia settle into a rocking chair and kiss baby Carlitos on the top of his head. As we turned to leave the room, I saw the historic Alamo framed by a large picture window on the side wall. The morning sun illuminated the brilliant hues of the trees, foliage, and cacti in the garden of the once-fort preserved as a museum to commemorate the famous 2 week battle of 1845 between the U.S. and México. Admiring the artistic charm of the Alamo from the outside, it was hard to

imagine the violence and bloodshed that took place 170 years ago on the other side of the façade. I pointed to the view of the Alamo captured in the window and Lili replied, “I know, that’s where half of México was lost in the war. This very spot we’re standing on used to be México, before they took it away!” Chayo nodded in agreement, and realizing my decision about what to do later that evening had been resolved, I invited the two mothers and their sons to accompany me on an evening tour of the Alamo, believing our binational perspectives would enrich our learning and understanding of U.S.-Mexican history.

Lili, Chayo, and I waved goodbye to Librado and I heard Carlitos cooing as Claudia told him he was *lindo y precioso* (handsome and precious), and reassuringly added, “*No tengas pena, estás conmigo*” (Don’t worry, I am here for you). While the three of us walked down the hallway to the Sam Houston meeting room, I listened as people conversed in Spanish, English, and Spanglish around a large display board that identified the meeting rooms where 24 workshops would be conducted for migrant parents over the next 2 days. Each workshop was scheduled to repeat in English and Spanish. Organized by themes, parents could chose workshops from six strands: (a) Parenting adolescents, (b) strengthening communication between families and schools, (c) volunteering as a way to learn and improve English, (d) home-based activities to help children succeed in school, (e) using the power of your voice, and (f) collaborating with other parents to create healthy communities. The conference planning committee, which included migrant parents from three different states, used scientifically based research strategies to strategically align the conference strands with Epstein’s (1995) framework for parental involvement. The workshop topics and presenters had also been selected by

the planning committee who took into consideration the evaluations completed by migrant parents at the 2014 National Migrant Education Parent Conference held a year earlier in Portland, Oregon.

Quickly reviewing the display board, Lili and Chayo discussed the workshops they wanted to attend when a woman waved from across the hall. Lili introduced us to Angeles, a migrant parent from Lubbock, Texas, and explained how they met in the registration line a few hours earlier that morning. The three mothers agreed to sit together at the luncheon, and we hurried off towards the Sam Houston meeting room. Lili asked Chayo if she had ever participated in a focus group interview before, and seemed surprised by her response. Chayo explained how she took part in a university-sponsored research study on parental involvement 5 years earlier, a study that included focus group interviews. Knowing how articulate Chayo was, I had little doubt she would have a lot to contribute to the focus group interview that was about to begin.

As we entered the meeting room, I took note of a large oval table covered by a royal blue linen table cloth. Ten high-back, brown, leather chairs with padded armrests were arranged around the table, four on each side, and one at each end. Set in front of each place was a blank cardboard name placard and a red marker for participants to write their name and the state they represented. In the center of the table was a digital recorder set next to a large talavera pottery vase filled with a bouquet of freshly cut sunflowers. In the back of the room I noticed a beverage table with pitchers of coffee, tea, water, and lemonade. When the clock marked 9:45 a.m., an official looking gentleman dressed in a grey suit entered the room and introduced himself as Leo, an OME staff member assigned to provide support for the focus group interview. Leo's role was to greet

participants, see that everyone was comfortable, and to make sure the digital recording equipment worked. Fluent in Spanish, Leo said he would send me a transcript of the interview via email within 1 week. When I asked if he was sure the batteries would last for 60 minutes, Leo laughed and said, “Batteries? Where have you been? This digital unit is rechargeable and will record for at least 12 hours!”

Chayo and Lili helped themselves to coffee, and Leo moved towards the door as two women and a man entered and asked if they were in the right room for *la entrevista en Español* (the Spanish interview). “*¡Si, si! ¡Bienvenidos! ¡Adelante!*” replied Leo, as he ushered the three migrant parents into the room. Within a minute, another man and woman paused in the doorway and peered into the room as Leo rushed to greet them. It was 10:00 a.m. and 7 of the 8 migrant parent participants had arrived on time. I assumed the last parent was lost and would probably arrive a little late, but I was wrong. The 8<sup>th</sup> participant, a migrant parent from Amarillo Texas, never did show up. Later that day, a conference organizer informed me the absent participant called to say he could not come to the conference because, at the last minute, his supervisor informed him he would lose his job if he did not report for work.

Right on schedule, Leo welcomed the 7 participants in Spanish and thanked everyone for agreeing to participate in the focus group interview. He encouraged parents to get a beverage, take a seat at the table, and then turned the agenda over to me. I introduced myself and reminded the parents the interview would be recorded. I explained my role as the facilitator of a group interview conducted by OME as part of a national evaluation study of the effectiveness of parental involvement in the MEP, and reinforced they had been purposefully selected to participate in the evaluation because they were

leaders on their state PACs and parents from whom a great deal could be learned. I explained focus group interviews worked best when everyone contributed, and informed the participants it was my role to make sure that happened. I then provided a handout listing the following three questions that would be addressed in the interview:

1. In regard to parental involvement in the MEP, what do you think is working especially well?
2. What do you think needs to be improved?
3. Besides what we have already discussed, what else do you want educational leaders and policy makers to know about migrant families and parental involvement in the MEP?

As officers on their state PACs, participants were accustomed to speaking before groups of people and being recorded. Signaling the start of the interview, Leo announced he was turning on the digital recorder. I stated my name, the date, time, and place of the interview, and participants introduced themselves and the states they represented: Pennsylvania, Florida, Oregon, Colorado, Arizona, California, and Washington.

In response to the first question about what was working especially well in the MEP relevant to parental involvement, participants had a great deal to share. Consistently, they reinforced how the MEP provided support and services no other programs offered. They strongly valued opportunities offered or coordinated by the MEP for migrant parents to learn English, and said it was good that ESL classes were scheduled in the evening and on weekends for parents who worked, and during school hours for stay-at-parents. In confidence, they shared how difficult it was for some (im) migrants who lacked documentation to register for ESL classes at community colleges and other organizations that required students to have a social security number. Participants highly valued the ESL classes that were offered through the MEP.



Overall, participants were pleased with the wide variety of educational opportunities the MEP provided for adult learning. They felt conferences that were designed specifically for migrant parents, such as the one they were attending, worked best, because parents were able to connect and learn from and with other migrant parents who had similar issues and concerns. By interacting with their peers at conferences and trainings, migrant parents gained important information, learned new ways of thinking, and established social networks. The participant from Florida shared how she used email and her cell phone to maintain communication with another migrant parent who she met at the conference the prior year in Portland. Two other participants shared stories about how parents they met as they migrated in search of agricultural work had become part of their extended families.

Participants felt parent trainings and classes provided by the MEP were very helpful, particularly when they were conducted in Spanish, and when childcare was made available. They said the MEP did a good job with translation and interpretation, but felt parents benefited most when trainings were conducted in their native language. Each participant said they personally knew MEP staff who they could call if they ever needed help or clarification. They felt the MEP did a good job communicating with parents about the program, and said it was easy to develop relationships with MEP staff because “they could be trusted.” When asked to name one thing they found most helpful about the MEP, parents consistently said they felt welcomed and respected in the program, and felt they were acknowledged as being “good parents.” As officers on their state PACs, they appreciated how the MEP helped migrant parents develop leadership “from the bottom up, instead of the top down.” They described ways migrant parents became empowered

by learning how to manipulate the educational system instead of being manipulated by it. They felt the MEP did a good job helping migrant parents find solutions to problems and teaching parents how to advocate for their families.

Participants shared examples of experiences and opportunities the MEP provided for parents to assume leadership roles in their families, schools, and communities.

Rolando, the participant from Pennsylvania, said the MEP helped him realize his voice mattered, and he told a story about a time he used his voice at a school board meeting to influence a vote that led to the creation of a summer program for migrant high school students to gain the credits they needed to graduate on time.

Focusing on middle and high school students, the participant from Oregon said she thought classes offered by the MEP on adolescent growth and development were very helpful. She described how difficult it was for immigrants, as newcomers to U.S., to understand the norms of U.S. teen culture. Elaborating further, she explained how the Oregon MEP offered a year-long series of workshops to help parents improve communicate with youth about topics that were difficult to talk about, topics such as alcohol and drug use, bullying, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and gangs. She said that in addition to these topics, the Oregon MEP also provided workshops that promoted mental health in families and to helped migrant children develop a strong sense of self esteem, and that these types of workshops were consistently well attended by migrant parents. The participant from California said she thought the reason migrant parents valued these types of workshops so much was because their parents never taught them how to talk about these topics, and there limited options available for migrant parents to attend parenting classes, especially for families who move around a lot.

When asked what needed to be improved in the MEP relative to parental involvement, the participant from Arizona highlighted the importance of early childhood education and said more programs were needed for young children, both during the regular school year and in the summer. Participants understood the vital link between parental involvement and school readiness, and believed student achievement would improve if migrant children started school in par with their non-migrant peers. Parents said there were always long waiting lists for children to enroll in public preschool programs, and added it was impossible for migrant families who moved into a school district during the middle of a semester to gain entry. They expressed a critical need for transportation for young children to access preschool, and said full day kindergarten would also greatly benefit migrant children.

Participants felt the MEP should give more consideration to the health needs of migrant families and believed this was an area ripe for improvement. They suggested the MEP partner with local health care agencies to expand access to services such as immunizations, dental, vision, and hearing screenings, and help migrant parents find follow-up care when problems are identified. They suggested the MEP use school-based events, such as health fairs and family nights, to connect migrant families with community resources. Because health care is often not available, accessible, or affordable for (im) migrant families, participants suggested the MEP mandate a health component, much like the parental involvement component, to address the wide array of unresolved health problems migrant students face. Parents believed migrant children missed a lot of school when they become ill because many families are unable to obtain the medical care they need due to barriers, such as a lack of money to purchase medications and a lack of

transportation to show up for medical appointments. Participants felt most migrant families lacked health insurance and were probably not established patients in any clinic, health department, or private practice. Lili recommended the MEP take a closer look at her state, explaining how the Washington state MEP had a comprehensive health program that other states might be able to replicate. She believed the reason her state's health program worked so well was because it was included in the MEP budget and there was an assigned state health coordinator responsible for supervising health services for migrant students statewide.

Another topic parents identified in need of improvement in the MEP was training to help migrant parents identify scholarships for children to continue their education after high school. Everyone agreed college tuition costs far exceeded the income of migrant farm worker parents, and without scholarships or financial aid, high school was often the end of the road for most migrant students. One participant shared a success story about her son who received a CAMP scholarship to Washington State University, but another sighed and lamented the CAMP required students to have a social security number. Parents were concerned that so many migrant students, after completing 12 years of schooling in the U.S., were unable to access financial aid for college *porque no tienen papeles* (because they lacked immigration documents).

In continuing the discussion about improving the MEP, the participant from Florida said migrant parents needed to learn the importance of having high expectations for children and how to *empujar* (push) students to succeed in academics as well as in sports. He mentioned that many migrant students had great talents in the arts; talents that never became fully developed, and suggested the MEP support enrichment activities for

migrant students to discover their full potential, academically, athletically, and artistically. The participant from Pennsylvania said private scholarships were available, even for those without papers, but students had to be at the top of their class “in something” to receive an award from a private college or university. Chayo agreed and added the MEP should do more to help migrant parents understand how important it is to become involved, and stay involved, in children’s education, starting from the day they are born. She said the greatest gift the MEP can give parents is hope, stressing it was critical to never give up on any child. After all, she said, “this is the land of opportunity where anything is possible.”

Noticing the time, I transitioned the discussion to the final question and asked what else participants wanted to share with educational leaders and policy makers about migrant families and parental involvement in the MEP. One parent expressed his concerns about budget cuts and said it was very important for the MEP to continue, because, as a national program, it was the only resource migrant families could consistently rely on as they moved from state to state in search of work in agriculture. Participants wanted OME to know how much they appreciated the MEP hotline, a nationwide 800 telephone number that routes calls to the MEP in any state. Sharing a story, the parent from California discussed how the hotline helped him refill his daughter’s medication to control her seizures. The prior summer, he and his wife moved their family from Modesto, California when work dried up as a result of a drought, to Hood River, Oregon where growers were hiring workers to pick apples and pears. In route to Oregon, his 12-year-old daughter inadvertently left her medication in a gas station restroom somewhere along the interstate in California. A caring person who

answered the hotline connected him to a community health center located 2 hours north where he was able to pick up his daughter's prescription later that day. Another parent reinforced the value of the hotline and gave examples of how it helped migrant families connect with the MEP, resources, and schools as families migrate across the boundaries of school district and state lines. One parent said, "Be sure to tell them it's important to keep that program."

The interview drew to a close, and not surprisingly, Chayo had the final word. She wanted the people who made decisions in the MEP to understand "not all migrant families were created equal." Summarizing what had been discussed in the focus group; Chayo felt compelled to express how the MEP sometimes failed to recognize that migrant families with immigrant backgrounds had unique needs. She added that she could not understand why schools and programs were so uncomfortable discussing immigrant issues. Another participant agreed, saying migrant families shared certain characteristics, such as poverty, high mobility, and a history of work in agriculture, but other factors, like culture, language, educational attainment, social and cultural capital, national origin, experience with educational systems, and immigration status, created more differences than similarities among and between migrant parents across the nation.

Chayo said she hoped the MEP would continue to invite migrant parents into the dialogue, especially when decisions were made that had life-long consequences for their children. Standing up, she removed a digital camera from her conference bag and asked her peers if they would allow Leo to take a group photograph. When questioned about what she planned to do with the photograph, Chayo said she wanted to include it in a publication she and another migrant parent from Colorado were developing. She

elaborated saying the publication was commissioned by her state PAC and would include poems, drawings, essays, photographs, and reflections of migrant parents and students.

Leo smiled, handed Chayo the talavera vase filled with sunflowers, and motioned me into the picture. Posing against the backdrop of a crimson colored wall, Leo aimed the camera and said, “Okay, bueno, on the count of three, everyone say, *¡Adelante!*”

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APPENDIX A

Invitation to an Informational Meeting  
and Focus Group Interview



Invitation to an Informational Meeting and Focus Group Interview

December 1, 2008

Dear Parent:

Centennial BOCES (CBOCES) has given permission for a university research project on parental involvement. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand their role and responsibilities in supporting their children's academic success. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

The researcher in this study is Mary Ellen Good, who is the BOCES Program Director and a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) in Greeley. Gloria Galindo, the BOCES Parent Advocate and Juvenal Cervantes, the BOCES Program Coordinator recommended you as a potential participant for this study because of your important views and experience in the Migrant Education Program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a group interview meeting with up to five other migrant parents to explore this research topic. Your contributions will be confidential and your name will not be used in the research report. This meeting will last no more than 90 minutes and you will be offered a light snack and a gift certificate for gasoline valued at \$25.00 the end on the meeting in appreciation of your time and effort. Childcare and transportation will be provided if you need it.

I hope you will accept this invitation to participate in an informational meeting and focus group interview that will take place on December 20, 2008 in the conference room at the Centennial BOCES office in Greeley. Please reply to this invitation on the form included and return your response no later than December 10, 2008 in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope provided.

Thank you for considering participating in this research study. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact Mary Ellen Good at (970) 381-9878.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Good  
Researcher and Director of the CBOCES Migrant Education Program

Response to Invitation to an Informational Meeting  
and Focus Group Interview

Please respond to this invitation no later than December 10, 2008

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, I would like to participate in the Meeting on December 20, 2008

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Your signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Your phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Will you need childcare? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Do you need transportation? Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU!



Invitación a una Reunión Informativa y Entrevista de Grupo de Enfoque

1 de Diciembre del 2008

Estimado Padre:

Centennial BOCES (CBOCES) ha autorizado un estudio sobre el involucramiento de los padres con sus hijos en la escuela. El propósito de este estudio es obtener un mayor entendimiento de cómo los padres migrantes entienden su rol como padres y sus responsabilidades para apoyar a sus hijos a lograr el éxito en la escuela. Tu participación en este estudio es estrictamente voluntaria.

La investigadora de este estudio es Mary Ellen Good, quien es Directora del Programa de Educación Migrante de BOCES y además es estudiante de doctorado en la University of Northern Colorado (UNC) en Greeley. Gloria Galindo, del Programa de Apoyo para Padres de BOCES, y Juvenal Cervantes, Coordinador de Programa de BOCES, lo recomendaron a usted como un participante potencial en este estudio por sus importantes puntos de vista y experiencia en el Programa de Educación Migrante.

Me gustaría por lo tanto, invitarle a participar en una reunión informativa y una entrevista de grupo con otros cinco padres migrantes más para discutir sobre el tema del estudio. Su contribución será confidencial y su nombre no aparecerá en el reporte del estudio. Esta reunión no será de más de 90 minutos y se ofrecerá un refrigerio además de obsequiarle una tarjeta de \$25.00 para gasolina al final de la reunión en agradecimiento por su tiempo y esfuerzo. Se proporcionará cuidado de niños y transporte si lo necesita.

Espero que acepte esta invitación a participar en la reunión informativa y la entrevista de grupo de enfoque a realizarse el 20 de Diciembre del 2008 en la Sala de Juntas de las oficinas de Centennial BOCES en Greeley. Por favor responda a esta invitación contestando en la forma adjunta y envíela en el sobre también adjunto a más tardar para el 10 de Diciembre del 2008.

Gracias de antemano por considerar participar en este estudio. Si tiene preguntas o dudas al respecto, por favor llámeme al No. de teléfono (970) 381-9878 y le podré ayudar en Español.

Atentamente,

Mary Ellen Good  
Investigadora y Directora del Programa de Educación Migrante de CBOCES



Respuesta a una Reunión Informativa  
y Entrevista de Grupo de Enfoque

Por favor responda a esta invitación antes de 10 de Diciembre, 2008

\_\_\_\_\_ Si, me gustaría participar en la Reunión el 20 de Diciembre de 2008

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

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

No. de teléfono: \_\_\_\_\_

¿Necesitará cuidado de niños? Si \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

¿Necesitará transporte? Si \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

¡Gracias!

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent for Participation in Research



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Informed Consent for Participation in Research  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Research Study Title:                    Meaningful Parental Involvement in the Migrant Education Program: A View through the Lens of Six Migrant Parents

Researcher:                                Mary Ellen Good (970) 381-9878                    [meg@cboces.org](mailto:meg@cboces.org)

Researcher Advisor:                    Dr. Linda R. Vogel (970) 351-2861                    [Linda.vogel@unco.edu](mailto:Linda.vogel@unco.edu)

I am a graduate student at the University of Northern Colorado and am conducting a study of parental involvement in migrant families. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand their role and responsibilities in supporting their children's academic success. You are invited to participate in this study because you have important views and experience with this topic. Your participation in this study is strictly voluntary.

This study will explore, document, and record in words and photographs the perceptions and experiences of parents from 3 families that have children enrolled in the Colorado North Central Regional Migrant Education Program. If you agree, you will be invited to participate in two activities related to this study: two group interview meetings (90 minutes each) at the CBOCES Greeley office and three individual interviews (60 minutes each) in your home.

In the home visit interviews, I will be observing the different ways parents are involved in helping children succeed in school. You will be asked to share your thoughts and experiences related to ways you are involved both in your home and in your child's or children's schools. The home visit interviews will take place over the next 6 months and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. Both parent group interview meetings will take place at a convenient time for you. The questions to be discussed in the group interview meetings and in the home visit interviews are not designed to be embarrassing, confrontational, or upsetting.

At the first home visit interview, you will be given a used digital camera and training on how to use it. Technical support will be provided to you throughout the study as needed. Between now and next June 2009, you will be asked to photograph the visual images of the many different ways you are involved in your child or children's education. After the study is completed, you may keep the digital camera. You will also be offered a journal to organize your photos if you so desire. You will be provided the opportunity to print, at no cost to you, up to 50 photographs (4" x 6") taken by you as part of this study. You may also keep the disc on which your photos will be stored. No electronic or paper copies of your photographs will be saved by me unless you give permission for me to use your photographs in future presentations or publication of this research (see below).

In addition to your photographs, you may be asked to also share with me documents related to parental involvement such as newsletters sent home from school, correspondence between you and your child's teachers, handouts from school meetings or trainings provided to parents, and any other documents or artifacts which you believe will be helpful in understanding parental involvement in migrant families.

Every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. Your name, address, children's names, or any other links to your identity, or your family's identify, will not be used in this study. Your interview responses will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. You will be asked to give a pseudonym for use in any publications or presentations related to this study. Topics to be discussed in the interviews relate to your understanding of what meaningful parental involvement means to you and what it looks like in your family. Your responses will be summarized and combined with others in the study to gain a deeper understanding of this topic. Your name will not appear in any professional report of this research, or be attached to photographs you take that might be used in presentation or publication, if you give your permission (see below).

This study and its' procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in normal daily conversation. Your participation may provide insight for you about your own involvement with your child or children's education as well as inform you about new ideas on how to strengthen your involvement. Benefits of this study may include new knowledge and a better understanding of what makes parental involvement meaningful. Such knowledge and understanding can assist schools to design and deliver services that migrant parents and teachers both find to be meaningful in supporting students' academic success. Additional benefits include being able to keep the used digital camera, training on how to use the camera, a gift card for gasoline (valued at \$25.00) for participating in a 90 minute group interview meeting. You will receive a \$25.00 gasoline card for participating in each of the two group interview meetings. You will also be offered snacks, childcare, and transportation to each group interview meeting.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having carefully read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Sincerely,

Mary Ellen Good  
(970) 381-9878 or [meg@cbooces.org](mailto:meg@cbooces.org)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you give permission for Mary Ellen Good to use your photographs taken with a digital camera in professional presentations and publications, please initial here:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Acuerdo de Consentimiento de Participación en el Estudio  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Título del Estudio: Involucramiento Significativo de Padres en el Program de Educacion para Migrantes: Un Punto de Vista a través del Lente de Seis Padres Migrantes

Investigadora: Mary Ellen Good (970) 381-9878 [meg@cbooces.org](mailto:meg@cbooces.org)

Asesor del Estudio: Dr. Linda R. Vogel (970) 351-2861 [Linda.vogel@unco.edu](mailto:Linda.vogel@unco.edu)

Soy una estudiante de doctorado de la University of Northern Colorado (UNC) y estoy llevando a cabo un estudio sobre el involucramiento de padres en las familias migrantes. El propósito de este estudio es obtener un mayor entendimiento de cómo los padres migrantes entienden su rol y responsabilidades como padres para ayudar a sus hijos a lograr el éxito académico. Usted está invitado a participar en este estudio porque tiene importantes puntos de vista y experiencia en este tema. Su participación en este estudio es estrictamente voluntaria.

Este estudio explorará, documentará y registrará en escrito y con fotografías las percepciones y experiencias de padres de 3 familias que tienen a sus hijos dentro del Programa de Educación Migrante de la Región Norte Centro de Colorado. Si está de acuerdo, se le invitará a participar en actividades relacionadas con este estudio: dos reuniones de entrevista de grupo para padres (90 minutos cada reunión) en la oficina de BOCES en Greeley, y tres entrevistas individuales (60 minutos cada entrevista) en su propio hogar.

En las entrevistas en su hogar, yo observaré las diferentes formas en que los padres se involucran con sus hijos para ayudarlos en su desarrollo en la escuela. Se les pedirá que comparta sus pensamientos y experiencias relacionadas a la forma en que ustedes se involucran tanto en casa como en la escuela de sus hijos. Estas entrevistas se llevarán a cabo en los siguientes 6 meses y se efectuarán a una hora conveniente para los participantes. Las preguntas de discusión tanto para las reuniones de entrevista de grupo para padres como para las entrevistas de hogar están diseñadas de manera que usted no se sienta avergonzado, en enfrentamiento con otras personas o que se dañe en su integridad.

En la primera entrevista domiciliaria, se le proporcionará una cámara fotográfica digital y se le mostrará cómo usarla. También tendrá el apoyo técnico que necesite durante el estudio. A partir de hoy y hasta Junio del 2009, se le pedirá tomar fotografías de las muchas maneras diferentes que usted está involucrado en la educación de sus hijos. Usted recibirá un diario para guardar sus fotos, si quiere. Cuando se complete el estudio, usted podrá quedarse con la cámara y también tendrá la oportunidad de imprimir, sin costo para usted, hasta 50 fotografías de 4" x 6" de las que haya tomado como parte del estudio. Así mismo, podrá conservar el disco donde se grabarán sus fotos. Ninguna copia electrónica o en papel de dichas fotografías se quedarán en mi poder sin su previa autorización para utilizarlas en futuras presentaciones o publicaciones de esta investigación (vea abajo).

Además de sus fotografías, se le pedirá también compartir documentos relacionados con su involucramiento como padre, ya sea con boletines informativos enviados de la escuela, correspondencia entre usted y los maestros de sus hijos, notas para las reuniones escolares o entrenamientos para los padres, y cualquier otro documento o artículo que usted crea que ayude a entender el involucramiento de padres en las familias migrantes.

Cada participación será protegida a su máxima confidencialidad: su nombre, dirección, los nombres de sus hijos, o cualquier dato sobre su identidad o la de su familia, no se usarán en este estudio. Sus respuestas en las entrevistas serán grabadas y escritas en papel. La información grabada y escrita se guardarán en un archivo bajo llave. Se le pedirá dar un seudónimo para usarlo en las publicaciones o presentaciones de este estudio. Los temas a discutir en las entrevistas serán de cómo entiende y qué significa para usted el involucramiento de padres significativo y de qué manera lo toma su familia. Sus respuestas serán resumidas y combinadas con otras para dar un mejor entendimiento del tema. Su nombre no aparecerá en ningún reporte profesional de este estudio, o en las fotografías que usted haya tomado y que pudieran ser usadas en presentaciones o publicaciones, si me da su consentimiento (vea abajo).

Este estudio y su procedimiento ha sido autorizado por el Comité de Revisión Institucional (IRB) de la University of Northern Colorado (UNC). Su participación no representa un daño previsible ni nada más allá de lo que pueda ocurrir en una conversación diaria normal. Su participación puede dar ideas de su propio involucramiento en la educación de sus hijos así como también informarle sobre nuevos conocimientos y mejor entendimiento de qué hacer para un involucramiento de padres significativo. Tal conocimiento y entendimiento puede ayudar a las escuelas a diseñar y dar servicios que los padres migrantes y maestros encuentren de sumo beneficio para el apoyo en el éxito académico de los estudiantes. Beneficios adicionales incluyen el poder conservar la cámara digital, entrenamiento en cómo usarla, una tarjeta de regalo para compra de gasolina (valor de \$25.00) por participar en una reunión de entrevista de grupo por 90 minutos. Usted recibirá una tarjeta de gasolina (valor de \$25.00) por su participación en cada una de las dos reuniones de grupo. También se ofrecerán refrigerios, el cuidado de niños, y transporte en cada reunión de grupo.

Su participación es voluntaria. Usted puede decidir no participar en este estudio aún después de empezar su participación y retirarse en cualquier momento. Se respetará su decisión y no le repercutirá en los beneficios a que tiene derecho. Después de leído lo arriba escrito y teniendo la oportunidad de hacer preguntas, por favor firme abajo si le gustaría participar en esta investigación. Usted obtendrá una copia de esta forma para futuras referencias. Si tiene cualquier pregunta sobre la investigación, por favor contacte al Programa de Patrocinadores y al Centro de Investigación Académico, Kepner Hall de la University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; (970) 351-1907.

Atentamente,

Mary Ellen Good  
(970) 381-9878  
[meg@cbooces.org](mailto:meg@cbooces.org)

---

Firma del participante

Fecha

---

Firma del Investigadora

Fecha

Si usted da su consentimiento a Mary Ellen Good de utilizar sus fotografías tomadas con la cámara digital en presentaciones y publicaciones profesionales, por favor ponga sus iniciales abajo:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Iniciales

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

## APPENDIX C

### Questions for the Two Focus Group Interviews

## Questions for the Two Focus Group Interviews

### *Questions for Focus Group Interview # 1:*

- When you hear the term “parental involvement,” what does it mean for you?
- Schools use the word “meaningful” a lot when talking about educational programs. What does “meaningful” parental involvement mean for you?
- Think about something positive you did that helped your child succeed in school. Tell us about what you did and how it helped your child in school.
- What are some things you do at home to help your children succeed in school?
- What are some things schools do, or should do, to strengthen the relationships between parents and teachers?
- What are some of the unique challenges for migrant parents in helping their children succeed in school?
- If you could change one thing to improve your child’s educational experience, what would you change?
- What do you want teachers to know about your involvement in your child’s success in school?
- What other information or comments do you want to share today related to this research topic?

### *Questions for Focus Group Interview # 2:*

- Having heard about the themes that are emerging from this study, please share your thoughts and interpretations about how these themes reflect, or don’t reflect, your experiences in this study.
- What insights or suggestions would you like to add to improve the findings?
- How do you think the findings from this study should be shared?
- How can the findings from this study be used to improve the academic success of migrant students?



## Preguntas para las Dos Entrevistas de Grupo

### *Preguntas para la Entrevista de Grupo # 1:*

- Cuándo usted escucha el término “involucramiento de padres,” ¿qué significa para usted?
- Las escuelas utilizan con frecuencia la palabra “significativo” cuando hablan de programas significantes. ¿Qué quiere decir para usted “involucramiento de padres significativo”?
- Piense en algo positivo que usted hizo y que ayudó al éxito de su hijo en la escuela. Díganos qué hizo y cómo lo ayudó con sus estudios.
- ¿Cuáles son algunas de las cosas que usted hace en casa para que ayude a su hijo a sobresalir en la escuela?
- ¿Qué cosas hacen las escuelas, o deberían hacer, para reforzar la relación entre padres y maestros?
- ¿Cuál único reto cree usted que los padres migrantes enfrentan al ayudar a sus hijos para sobresalir en la escuela?
- Si usted pudiera cambiar algo para mejorar la educación de sus hijos, ¿qué cambiaría?
- ¿Qué desea que los maestros sepan sobre su involucramiento en el éxito de su hijo en la escuela?
- ¿Qué otra información o comentarios desea compartir relacionado con este tema de estudio?

### *Preguntas para la Entrevista de Grupo # 2:*

- Habiendo escuchado sobre los temas que han surgido de este estudio, por favor comparta sus puntos de vista e interpretaciones sobre cómo estos temas lo reflejan, o no reflejan, para usted sus experiencias en este estudio.
- ¿Qué ideas o sugerencias le gustaría agregar para mejorar los resultados?
- ¿Cómo cree usted que se pudieran compartir los resultados de este estudio?
- ¿Cómo se pueden utilizar los resultados de este estudio para mejorar el éxito académico de los estudiantes migrantes?

APPENDIX D

Questions for the Three Individual Interviews

## Questions for the Three Individual Interviews

### *Interview #1: January 2009*

- Think about a recent time when you helped one of your children with their school work. Tell me about your child and how you helped.
- What's easy and what's hard for you in regards to helping your child succeed in school?
- Tell me about when you were a young student in school. What did your parents do to support your learning in school?
- If you have questions or concerns about how your child is doing in school, who do you turn to for help?

### *Interview #2: March 2009*

- Please choose from the photographs you have taken over the past 3 months and tell me what each one means to you in regards to helping your child succeed in school.

### *Interview # 3: June 2009*

- During our last interview, you shared your initial photographs and talked about what each one meant for you. Please chose from you new photographs and once again, help me understand what they mean for you.
- What do you hope your child will see in your photographs 10 years from now?
- What would you like for your child's teachers to know about you and how you support your child's learning?
- What are some ways the Migrant Education Program can strengthen and support the involvement of migrant parents in their children's schools?
- Do you have any comments you would like to share or any questions about this study since this is the final interview?

## Preguntas para las Tres Entrevistas Individuales

### *Entrevista # 1: Enero 2009*

- Piense en un evento reciente que ayudó a uno de sus hijos en su desarrollo escolar. Describa a su hijo y cómo usted le ayudó.
- ¿Qué le resulta fácil o difícil para ayudar a que su hijo(a) obtenga el éxito en la escuela?
- Describa cuando usted era estudiante, ¿qué hicieron sus padres para ayudarlo a aprender en la escuela?
- Si tiene preguntas y/o dudas sobre cómo su hijo(a) va en la escuela, ¿a quién solicitaría ayuda?

### *Entrevista # 2: Marzo 2009*

- Por favor escoja de las fotografías que haya tomado en los últimos 3 meses y diga qué significan para usted y cómo ayudan al desarrollo de su hijo en la escuela.

### *Entrevista # 3: Junio 2009*

- En nuestra última entrevista, usted compartió sus primeras fotografías y habló sobre cada una de ellas. Por favor elija entre esas fotografías y explique qué significan para usted.
- ¿Qué espera que su hijo(a) vea o piense de estas fotografías dentro de 10 años?
- ¿Qué le gustaría que los maestros de sus hijos sepan sobre usted y de cómo ayuda al aprendizaje de su hijo(a)?
- ¿Cómo puede el Programa de Educación Migrante fortalecer y ayudar al involucramiento de los padres migrantes para que sus hijos logren el éxito en la escuela?
- ¿Tiene algunos comentarios que le gustaría compartir o si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio ya que ésta es la última entrevista?

APPENDIX E

Written Assent of Minor to Participate in Research

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Written Assent of Minor to Participate in Research  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Hi!

My name is Mary Ellen Good and I'm a student at the University of Northern Colorado. I do research on how parents help their children do well in school. That means I study the many different things parents do in their homes and in their children's schools to help students like you succeed in school. Your parents have agreed to be part of my research study and they will be taking pictures of the things they do to help you, and your siblings if you have any, do well in school. If you want, pictures that include you can be part of my research study.

Having pictures that include you in my research probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it is okay for me to use the pictures that include you, but you don't have to agree to let me use these pictures. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can stop the pictures from being used at any time you want to.

If you want to be part of my research and have pictures that include you used in my research, please write your name below and write today's date next to it. Thanks!

Mary Ellen Good  
Researcher  
University of Northern Colorado  
(970) 381-9878

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Student

Date

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Researcher

Date

UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Consentimiento Escrito de Participación en el Estudio para Menores de Edad  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

¡Hola!

Mi nombre es Mary Ellen Good y soy estudiante de la University of Northern Colorado. Estoy realizando un estudio sobre cómo los padres ayudan a que sus hijos tengan éxito en la escuela. Esto quiere decir que estudio las muchas diferentes cosas que los padres hacen en casa y en la escuela de sus hijos para ayudarlos a tener éxito. Tus padres han aceptado ser parte de mi estudio y permitirán tomarte fotografías de las actividades que ellos llevan a cabo para ayudarte a ti y a tus hermanos a que tengan éxito en la escuela. Si tú aceptas, estas fotografías pueden ser parte de mi estudio.

Teniendo fotografías tuyas en mi estudio, probablemente no te ayudará o no te molestará. Tus padres me autorizaron a usar estas fotografías, pero tú tienes que estar de acuerdo. Es tu decisión. Por lo tanto, si decides aceptar y después cambias de opinión eso será suficiente para no usar tus fotografías en el estudio.

Si quieres participar en mi estudio y tener fotografías en dónde tú estás incluido, favor de escribir tu nombre y la fecha en la parte de abajo. ¡Gracias!

Mary Ellen Good  
Investigadora  
University of Northern Colorado  
(970) 381-9878

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Estudiante

Fecha

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Investigadora

Fecha

APPENDIX F

Verbal Assent of Minor to Participate in Research







APPENDIX G

Consent to be photographed in a Research Study



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Consent to be photographed in a Research Study  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Research Study Title:           Meaningful Parental Involvement in the Migrant Education Program: A View through the Lens of Six Migrant Parents

Researcher:                       Mary Ellen Good (970) 381-9878  
[meg@cbooces.org](mailto:meg@cbooces.org)

Researcher Advisor:           Dr. Linda R. Vogel (970) 351-2861  
[Linda.vogel@unco.edu](mailto:Linda.vogel@unco.edu)

Participant Photographer:   \_\_\_\_\_

I am participating in a research study conducted by Mary Ellen Good, a doctoral student at the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of how migrant parents understand their role and responsibilities in supporting their children's academic success. As a participant in this study, I will be taking digital photographs to document the many different ways I am involved in my children's education. I would like to take and share photographs that include your visual image.

Your consent to be photographed by me is strictly voluntary and every attempt will be made to maximize confidentiality. Your name, address, or any other links to your identity will not be used. If you agree to allow photographs that include your visual image to be used in this research study, please sign and date this consent form below.

Some of my photographs may be selected and displayed in the final publication of this study, as well as future reports, presentations, and publications. If you give permission for Mary Ellen Good, the researcher, to utilize digital photographs that include your visual image in future publications or presentations, please initial and date this form at the bottom of second page.

Pg. 1 of 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials

This study and its' procedures have been approved by the UNC Institutional Review Board. Your participation poses no foreseeable risk and nothing beyond what might occur in having your image in print. A benefit of this study is receiving a free copy of photographs that include your visual image, per your request.

Your consent to be photographed and have your visual image included in this study is voluntary. You may decide not be photographed, and if you are photographed, you may still decide to withdraw your consent to allow photographs of you to be included in this study at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having carefully read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to have photographs that include your visual image included in this study. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns, please contact Sponsored Programs and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Photographer's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Your Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

If you give permission for Mary Ellen Good to use digital photographs that include your visual image in the final publication of this research study, and in future professional presentations and publications, please initial here:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Initials

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Consentimiento para ser fotografiado en un Estudio de Investigación  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Título del Estudio: Involucramiento Significativo de Padres en el Program de Educacion para Migrantes: Un Punto de Vista a través del Lente de Seis Padres Migrantes

Investigadora: Mary Ellen Good (970) 381-9878  
[meg@cbooces.org](mailto:meg@cbooces.org)

Asesor del Estudio: Dr. Linda R. Vogel (970) 351-2861  
[Linda.vogel@unco.edu](mailto:Linda.vogel@unco.edu)

Fotógrafo(a) participante: \_\_\_\_\_

Estoy participando en un estudio de investigación dirigido por Mary Ellen Good, estudiante de Doctorado de la University of Northern Colorado (UNC). El propósito de este estudio es obtener un entendimiento más profundo de cómo los padres migrantes entienden su papel como padres y sus responsabilidades para ayudar al éxito académico de sus hijos. Como participante en este estudio, estaré tomando fotografías digitales para documentar las diferentes maneras en las que me involucro en la educación de mis hijos. Me gustaría poder tomar y compartir fotografías que incluyan su imagen visual.

Su consentimiento para ser fotografiado por mí en este estudio es estrictamente voluntario y cada intento se hará con la máxima confidencialidad. Su nombre, dirección, o cualquier otra información sobre su identidad no será usada. Si usted da el permiso de tomar las fotografías que incluyan su imagen visual para usarse en este estudio de investigación, por favor ponga su firma y fecha abajo de esta forma de consentimiento.

Algunas de mis fotografías se pueden seleccionar y mostrarlas en la última publicación de este estudio, y en reportes, presentaciones y publicaciones futuras. Si usted da su consentimiento para que Mary Ellen Good, la investigadora, utilice las fotografías digitales que incluyan su imagen visual in publicaciones o presentaciones futuras, por favor ponga sus iniciales y fecha en esta forma al final de la segunda hoja.

Pág. 1 de 2

\_\_\_\_\_  
Iniciales

Este estudio y sus procedimientos han sido aprobados por el Comité de Revisión Institucional de la University of Northern Colorado. Su participación no representa un daño previsible ni nada más allá de lo que pueda ocurrir al imprimir su imagen. Un beneficio de este estudio es que obtendrá una copia gratis de las fotografías que incluyen su imagen visual, según usted lo solicite.

Su consentimiento para ser fotografiado y tener su imagen visual incluida en este estudio es voluntario. En cualquier momento usted puede decidir no ser fotografiado, y si lo fuera, usted puede todavía decidir retirar su consentimiento de que sus fotografías sean incluidas en este estudio. Se respetará su decisión y no le repercutirá en los beneficios a que tiene derecho. Habiendo leído cuidadosamente lo arriba expuesto y teniendo la oportunidad de hacer cualquier pregunta, por favor firme abajo si a usted le gustaría tener fotografías con su imagen visual incluidas en este estudio. Usted recibirá una copia de esta forma para futuras referencias. Si tiene alguna pregunta, por favor contacte al Programa de Patrocinadores y al Centro de Investigación Académica, Kepner Hall de la University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1907.

Atentamente,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del(a) Fotógrafo(a) participante

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Investigadora

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

\_\_\_\_\_  
Su firma

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

Si usted da su consentimiento a Mary Ellen Good para usar fotografías digitales con su imagen visual al final de la publicación de este estudio de investigación, y en futuras presentaciones y publicaciones profesionales, por favor ponga sus iniciales aquí:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Iniciales

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha

APPENDIX H

Written Assent of Minor to be photographed  
in a Research Study



UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Written Assent of Minor to be photographed in a Research Study  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

Hi!

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am taking part in a research study on how parents help their children do well in school. I am taking pictures of the many different things parents do to help students like you succeed in school. Your parent has agreed to let me take pictures that include you. If you want, I will take pictures that include you, and they can be part of this research study.

Having pictures that include you in this research study probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it is okay for me to take and use the pictures that include you, but you don't have to agree to let me use these pictures. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can stop the pictures from being used at any time you want.

If you want to have pictures that include you used in my research, please write your name below and write today's date next to it. Thanks!

---

Photographer Participant Date

---

Student Date

---

Researcher Date

Mary Ellen Good  
Researcher  
University of Northern Colorado  
(970) 381-9878



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Consentimiento Escrito para Menores de Edad  
de ser fotografiado en un Estudio  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

¡Hola!

Mi nombre es \_\_\_\_\_ y estoy participando en un estudio sobre cómo los padres ayudan a que sus hijos tengan éxito en la escuela. Estoy tomando fotos de las muchas diferentes cosas que los padres hacen para ayudarles a estudiantes, como tú, a tener éxito en la escuela. Tu padre o madre ya me dio permiso de tomar fotos en que tu estas incluido. Si tú aceptas, estas fotografías pueden ser parte del estudio.

Teniendo fotografías de ti en el estudio, probablemente no te ayudaría o no te molestaría. Tu padre o madre ya me autorizaron a usar estas fotografías, pero tú tienes que estar de acuerdo. Es tu decisión. Por lo tanto, si decides aceptar y después cambias de opinión eso será suficiente para no usar las fotografías en el estudio.

Si quieres tener fotografías en dónde tú estás incluido en mi estudio, favor de escribir tu nombre y la fecha en la parte de abajo. ¡Gracias!

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Fotógrafo(a) Participante	Fecha
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Estudiante	Fecha
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Investigadora	Fecha
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Mary Ellen Good  
Investigadora  
University of Northern Colorado  
(970) 381-9878

APPENDIX I

Verbal Assent of Minor to be photographed  
in a Research Study



UNIVERSITY of  
NORTHERN COLORADO



College of Education and Behavioral Sciences  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

Consentimiento Verbal para Menores de Edad  
de ser fotografiado en un Estudio  
University of Northern Colorado (UNC)

¡Hola!

Mi nombre es \_\_\_\_\_ y estoy participando en un estudio sobre cómo los padres ayudan a que sus hijos tengan éxito en la escuela. Estoy tomando fotos de las muchas diferentes cosas que los padres hacen para ayudarles a estudiantes, como tú, a tener éxito en la escuela. Tu padre o madre ya me dio permiso de tomar fotos en que tu estas incluido. Si tú aceptas, estas fotografías pueden ser parte del estudio.

Teniendo fotografías de ti en el estudio, probablemente no te ayudaría o no te molestaría. Tu padre o madre ya me autorizaron a usar estas fotografías, pero tú tienes que estar de acuerdo. Es tu decisión. Por lo tanto, si decides aceptar y después cambias de opinión eso será suficiente para no usar las fotografías en el estudio.

Si quieres tener fotografías en dónde tú estás incluido en mi estudio, favor de escribir tu nombre o haga su marca en la parte de abajo. ¡Gracias!

_____	o	_____	_____
Tu nombre		Tu marca	Fecha
_____			_____
Fotógrafo(a) Participante			Fecha
_____			_____
Padre			Fecha
_____			_____
Investigadora			Fecha

Mary Ellen Good  
Investigadora  
University of Northern Colorado  
(970) 381-9878