

¡NO ME JUZGUEZ! LATINO PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF  
PARTICIPATION IN THEIR CHILD’S EDUCATION: A TRANSCENDENTAL  
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Trinidad Y. Sierra

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. Participants were chosen through convenience and snowball sampling with the criterion that each participant was a Latino parent of a child who attended a middle school in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania. "Lehigh Valley" is the pseudonym used for the school district and the area in which the study was conducted. Theories that guided this study and the research questions were parental involvement theory and cultural capital theory. The central question for this study was focused on Latino parents' perceptions of the way their life experiences impact their participation in their middle school child's education. In addition, the three research subquestions were designed to investigate Latino parents' perceptions of the ways relationships between parenting at home and school-based involvement, their experiences with school personnel, and community program involvement impact their participation in their middle school child's education. Data—in the form of interviews, a focus group interview, observations, and documentation of field notes—were collected and analyzed in order to depict the essence of the phenomenon. Finally, data analysis included direct interpretation of participant interviews and experiences, narratives, and memoing. This research adds to the current literature by providing the voice of the Latino parent. This study's findings confirmed that Latino parents believe their life experiences impact their participation in their child's education. Participants also corroborated the findings of current literature regarding parental involvement and cultural capital in education.

*Keywords:* cultural capital, Latino parent, middle school education, nontraditional parental involvement, school-based parental involvement, traditional parental involvement

## **Copyright Page**

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this to parents who are emotionally present, but physically absent, and to all the parents who want to participate more in their child's education but cannot. I also dedicate this study to my grandmother, my cousin, my husband, and my children. To my grandmother, for her love of education and always believing in me. To my cousin, for taking this journey with me and never allowing me to give up. To my husband, for supporting me and understanding the ups and downs of this journey and reminding me that wanting something gives you ambition in life. To my children, for being patient and supportive while I wrote for days and missed a game or two.

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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .....	3
Copyright Page .....	4
Dedication .....	5
Acknowledgements .....	6
List of Tables .....	12
List of Figures .....	13
List of Abbreviations .....	14
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION .....	15
Overview .....	15
Background .....	16
Historical Context .....	17
Social Context .....	18
Theoretical Context .....	19
Situation to Self .....	19
Problem Statement .....	23
Purpose Statement .....	23
Significance of the Study .....	24
Research Questions .....	26
Central Research Question .....	26
Research Subquestions (SQs) .....	27
Definitions .....	29
Summary .....	31

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	32
Overview.....	32
Theoretical Framework.....	32
Parental Involvement Theory .....	33
Cultural Capital Theory .....	46
Related Literature.....	48
Parents’ Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement.....	49
Educator Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement .....	52
Parental Involvement Programs.....	54
Communication Between School and Home.....	56
Barriers to Parental Involvement.....	57
Cultural Connections .....	59
Summary.....	61
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS.....	63
Overview.....	63
Design.....	63
Research Questions .....	64
Central Research Question .....	64
Research Subquestions.....	65
Setting.....	65
Participants.....	66
The Researcher’s Role.....	69
Data Collection.....	71



Individual Interviews .....	71
Focus Group Interview.....	75
Observations .....	78
Audiovisual and Documented Materials.....	78
Data Analysis .....	79
Trustworthiness .....	83
Credibility.....	83
Dependability and Confirmability .....	83
Transferability .....	84
Ethical Considerations.....	85
Summary.....	85
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS.....	87
Overview.....	87
Participants.....	87
Anna.....	89
Celia .....	90
Christina .....	91
Claribel.....	91
Emelia .....	92
Jose.....	93
Juana .....	93
Julia.....	94
Lilliana .....	94

Lucia .....	95
Maria .....	95
Paulina.....	96
Results .....	96
Major Theme 1: Defining Parental Involvement.....	97
Major Theme 2: Communication.....	101
Major Theme 3: Reasons for Participation .....	112
Major Theme 4: Perceptions About Those Involved.....	119
Research Question Responses.....	132
Central Research Question .....	133
Research Subquestion 1 .....	135
Research Subquestion 2 .....	137
Research Subquestion 3 .....	141
Summary.....	142
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION .....	143
Overview.....	143
Summary of Research Findings .....	143
Discussion .....	146
Empirical Literature .....	146
Theoretical Literature.....	152
Implications.....	156
Theoretical Implications.....	157
Empirical Implications.....	160

Practical Implications.....	162
Delimitations and Limitations.....	165
Recommendations for Future Research.....	166
Summary.....	168
REFERENCES .....	171
APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORMS.....	187
APPENDIX B: PROCEDURES.....	193
APPENDIX C: LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL.....	194
APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER.....	195
APPENDIX E: INFORMATIONAL FLYER.....	196
APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	198
APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....	200
APPENDIX H: SITE PERMISSION.....	202

### **List of Tables**

Table 1. Participant Demographics.....	89
Table 2. Theme 1: Defining Parental Involvement.....	97
Table 3. Theme 2: Communication .....	102
Table 4. Theme 3: Reasons for Participation .....	113
Table 5. Theme 4: Perceptions About Those Involved.....	120

### **List of Figures**

Figure 1. Family Dinner Invitation .....	127
Figure 2. First Family Dinner.....	128
Figure 3. Community Fun Day.....	129
Figure 4. Strengthening Families Program.....	129
Figure 5. Portable Translators for English-to-Spanish Translation .....	130
Figure 6. Parent Network Membership Event and Meeting.....	132

### **List of Abbreviations**

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)

Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)

Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

The U. S. Department of Education has noted a need to increase parental involvement for all students but observed that there are some challenges present with attempting to increase the involvement of Latino parents specifically (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). One of the challenges revolves around the increase in the Latino population. Dewey (2011) discussed the rapid growth of the Latino population in Pennsylvania, observing that the increase in Latino student enrollment corresponded with an increase in the Latino population. The Latino population in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania is currently the largest minority demographic group and continues to grow. In some Lehigh Valley schools, the Latino population accounted for over 65% of the student body. Therefore, this study was conducted to examine hindrances to Latino parental involvement in their children's education while also reviewing successful methods of encouraging this involvement. *No me juzgues* translates to "don't judge me." This statement serves as a reminder not to judge Latino parents by focusing on the barriers to participating in their child's education; instead, educators must investigate the practices or experiences that promote Latino parental involvement.

Chapter One of this study serves to introduce this transcendental phenomenological research. The subsections included in this chapter are a background review of the historical, social, and theoretical perspectives, as well as the researcher's situation to self, which included my motivation, philosophical assumptions, and paradigm of the study. In this chapter, the problem and purpose statements are presented, along with the significance of the study. The research questions and term definitions are also presented. In addition to the subsections, a summary of the chapter is provided.

## **Background**

While examining the challenges and the successful methods of increasing parental involvement, it is important to understand the different types of traditional (or school-based) parental involvement. According to Epstein and Sanders (2002), six types of traditional parent involvement are found in education, including parenting, communication, volunteerism, learning at home, making educational decisions, and community partnerships.

Studies indicate a positive interrelationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement (W. Chen & Gregory, 2011; Editors of Salem Press, 2014; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Higgins & Katsipatakis, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hornby, 2011; Tang, Dearing, & Weiss, 2011). The U. S. Department of Education (2004) also recognized the importance and need for parental involvement to promote the academic success of children, allocating grant funding to school districts to support parental involvement and outreach. Researchers Mundt, Gregory, Melzi, and McWayne (2015) found a modest increase in Latino parental involvement while investigating the ethnic match between teachers and caregivers. Conversely, although there are programs and incentives that target the increase of parental involvement in schools, other studies have shown there is no increase in Latino parental involvement (Avvisati, Besbas, & Guyon, 2011; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). The present study attempts to examine this disparity.

Much of the current research includes examination of the barriers that impede Latino parent engagement as well as the Latino culture in general, to find reasons for the lack of Latino parental involvement in their child's academic learning (Alfaro, O'Reilly-Diaz & Lopez, 2014; Avvisati et al., 2011; Gonzalez, Borders, Hines, Villalba, & Henderson, 2013; Valdés, 1996; Vega, Moore, & Miranda, 2015). Focusing on the barriers or the negative reasons for the lack



of Latino parental involvement in their child's education allows this particular population to be judged by administrators and educators. Understanding the experiences of Latino parents who participate in traditional parental involvement may lead to effective methods that increase Latino parental engagement. A gap in the literature was found regarding the impact of life experiences of Latino parents on their traditional (school-based) participation in their child's middle school education. This study served to fill that gap by investigating Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education.

### **Historical Context**

Early American settlers in the 1620s were very involved in the education of their children (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Jeynes, 2011). Colonists believed that parents were responsible for the education of their children and learning took place mainly at home. The first public education law, the Old Deluder Satan Act, was passed in 1647 (Gutek, 1995; Pevoto, 2004). The Old Deluder Satan Act required communities to create public schools to educate children with scripture. The church, home, and school worked together to promote literacy and understanding of the Bible (Gutek, 1995; Jeynes, 2011; Pevoto, 2004). During the 1680s, Pennsylvania required parents to teach their children how to read (Jeynes, 2011). During the late 1700s and the early 1800s, federal laws regarding education and schools were created to educate teachers (Gutek, 1995). Parents were skeptical of public education because they believed their involvement in their child's education would subsequently diminish (Gutek, 1995; Harlan, 2011; Jeynes, 2011). During the late 1800s and the early 1900s, parents were fined if children did not attend school (Gutek, 1995). During the Industrial Revolution, children were working more and parental involvement in education decreased (Gutek, 1995; Jeynes, 2011). There was such a notable decline in parental involvement in the 1960s that parental involvement was included in

new laws; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESSA) included the provisions regarding parental involvement (Zascavage, 2010). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandated parental involvement and held schools responsible for the involvement of parents (Baquedano-López, Alexander, & Hernandez, 2013; Byrnes, 2011; M.-T. Wang, Hill, & Hofkens, 2014). Although the NCLB was replaced with the ESSA during the 2017–2018 school year, the push for parental involvement continued to be included (Burnette, 2016; ESSA, 2015).

### **Social Context**

Family structure or dynamics in the United States during the early 1900s traditionally consisted of a man and a woman who were married (Jeynes, 2012; Leherer & Son, 2017; Sweet & Bumpass, 1990). In the 1930s, there were few studies that addressed the differences between single-parent homes, two-parent homes, and homes that encompassed stepfamilies (Jeynes, 2012; Leherer & Son, 2017). The divorce rate during the 1930s was low and those who remarried did so due to the death of a spouse (Jeynes, 2012). As a result of the Second World War, there was an absence of fathers and researchers began to study single mothers (Jeynes, 2012; Leherer & Son, 2017). However, it was not until the 1970s when the divorce rate rose, that more research was conducted regarding single-parent homes. Studies indicated the rate of divorce among African American families was higher than the rate of divorce of Caucasian American families (Jeynes, 2012; Leherer & Son, 2017). The number of Mexican American two-parent families more than doubled in the 1970s (Sweet & Bumpass, 1990).

Today, family households have changed to incorporate a variety of nontraditional households. These households consist of gay or lesbian parents, stepparents, grandparents or other family members as caregivers, biracial families, foster families, adopted families, blended families, and joint custody families (Aldridge & Goldman, 2007). The Latino family often

includes extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents living in the same household (Durand, 2011; Valdés, 1996).

### **Theoretical Context**

The theories that guided this study were the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and the cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Parental involvement theory served to address traditional or school-based and nontraditional or home-based parental involvement in education and to guide the focus of the participants' experiences on the various models of involvement. The types of traditional involvement include parenting, communication, volunteerism, learning at home, making educational decisions, and community partnerships (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Nontraditional parental involvement is not visible to school administrators or educators (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). This type of parental engagement involves parental support, which is home-based and could include providing meals, school materials, a place to complete homework, and *consejos*, which is essentially sharing advice or life experiences that include moral integrity (Alfaro et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996).

The second theory that guided this research was the cultural capital theory, which addresses how cultural experiences impact the experiences of humankind. Cultural capital theory includes the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate from one social class level to another, possessing the pedagogic communication needed to foster success in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

### **Situation to Self**

I have been an educator for 20 years. During this study, I taught three middle school subjects: English, Spanish, and language arts. I learned the value and importance of education

from my Spanish-only speaking grandmother. She raised my sister and me while my mother received her general education development diploma in order to become employed after her divorce. I learned Spanish from my grandmother and English from *Sesame Street*. I grew up in two of the four housing projects located in the city: one side of town with my grandmother and the other side of town with my mother. Growing up, I did not know I was categorized as a disadvantaged, at-risk, minority person because of the love, care, and support that my family provided.

In school, I was in the low socioeconomic, minority demographic with limited English skills. I was provided with programs such as English as a Second Language and remedial reading to support my learning. My mother could not come to parent-teacher conferences because she was in school. As early as kindergarten, I was the interpreter and translator between my teachers and my grandmother. My grandmother rarely came to school and teachers did not expect my mother to come at all. The support and encouragement displayed at home with regard to education led me to believe that my “parents” (grandmother and mother) were involved with my education.

My personal experiences as a Latina student, educator, and parent were my motivation for this research study. As a student, my family was involved in my education. As an educator, I found that the definition of parental involvement varied between educators, parents, and students. As a parent, my parental involvement was more traditional than my family’s involvement was when I was growing up. Additionally, as a Latina woman, I realized that the cultural beliefs and experiences of my family may have impacted how they perceived their involvement with my education. My grandmother trusted in her religious upbringing to guide her with how to educate and care for us. Proverbs 22:6 discusses how children should be cared

for and guided to promote success in adulthood. Some educators would have believed that my parents did not care about my education because they were not visibly present at school functions. However, my family valued education and entrusted the teachers with the charge of educating me without interference. My grandmother respected teachers and administrators and held them in high regard. The reality was that my family did not participate traditionally in education. As a young mother, I did not participate traditionally in my children's education. These beliefs changed after I began my journey as an educator in 1991. I became more traditionally involved in my children's education. As an educator, I identify with Latino families and their nontraditional parent involvement with regard to education.

Due to my personal experiences, I understand the traditional models of parental involvement as well as the nontraditional models that may not be recognized by educators. I agree that parental involvement supports student success. Many programs spotlight the obstacles that prevent Latino parents from being traditionally involved in their child's education. There is a lack of research focusing on the nontraditional involvement of Latino parents or on the reasons Latino parents participate in the traditional methods. I believe it is imperative that educators understand the cultural beliefs of Latino parents and establish a positive relationship that encourages parental engagement in their child's education. I believe in promoting trusting relationships between Latino parents and educators in order to build the bond needed to support student success. Focusing on experiences of Latino parents that help their decision to become involved rather than the barriers that prevent their involvement is one way to support the relationship-building between home and school.

My study was characterized by philosophical assumptions that were epistemological and axiological. The epistemological assumption allowed for the reality of parental involvement to

be cocreated with multiple ways of knowing or understanding the experiences of parental involvement by the subjects of the study (Creswell, 2013). Knowing the participant experiences allowed for deeper understanding of the phenomenon. The axiological assumption of the present study respected the values of the participants, which was needed to understand and discuss the problem (Creswell, 2013). The values of the participants were understood and respected as valid throughout the study. As a Latina middle school educator, I saw the need for parental involvement to promote success of all students and wondered how to increase the traditional involvement of Latino parents. I was motivated to understand the impact of the life experiences of Latino parents on their participation in their child's education with hopes of sharing positive methods with other practitioners and researchers while contributing to the literature.

The research paradigms for this study were pragmatism and social constructivism. When researching the reality of humans, paradigms may overlap. By using a pragmatic interpretive framework, I examined participant values and realities regarding parental involvement using a variety of research tools. By using a social constructivist interpretive framework, I sought to construct meaning with the participants using the participants' experiences. Additionally, I acknowledged and honored individual participant's values with the social constructivism approach (Creswell, 2013).

Through my research, my intent was to describe the life experiences of Latino parents that impacted their participation in their middle school child's education. I then discussed the essence of the phenomenon with school administrators, policymakers, and teachers to improve methods used to promote Latino parental involvement. I aimed to understand the methods that were working to promote Latino parental involvement and how the methods related to the experiences of parents.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of this study was Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. Researchers have noted a positive relationship between parental involvement and student success (W. Chen & Gregory, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015; Hornby, 2011; Tang et al., 2011) and the need to increase participation of Latino parents (Georgis, Gokiart, Ford, & Ali, 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015; U. S. Department of Education, 2004). However, there was little research giving a voice to the Latino parents' lived experiences with traditional approaches to parental involvement and their decision to be engaged, through participation in their child's middle school education.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. The term *participation* is used throughout this study to transparently articulate the intent and focus of the research, most notably in the title, problem, purpose, and research questions. However, the additional terms of *engagement* and *involvement* are used synonymously to enhance broad understanding of the participants' participation, and to provide unambiguous context for theories used to frame the study. In general, the definition of parental involvement, that was used to describe Latino parent participation for this study, was that of the U. S. Department of Education (2004), which defined parental involvement (or participation) as the reciprocal interactions regarding a child's academic and extracurricular activities that establish parental roles in the child's learning while

promoting a partnership with educators and the decision-making involved in education (Parental Involvement, §9101[32]).

To further clarify the type of parental involvement that was researched, the following definition of Epstein and Sanders' (2002) six types of traditional parental involvement was used: (a) parenting, which is the basic obligation of families; (b) communicating, which is the basic obligation of schools; (c) volunteering by the parent as it supports the school and students; (d) learning at home, which includes involvement in curricular-related activities and decisions; (e) decision-making, which includes parents' involvement in school decisions, governance, and advocacy; and (f) collaborating with the community, which entails involvement in schools to identify, use, and improve community programs and services.

The theories used to guide this study, including parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), were also used to create the research questions. Parental involvement theory addresses traditional and nontraditional parental participation and engagement in education and promoted the focus of the participants' experiences on the various models of involvement. Cultural capital theory addresses how cultural experiences influenced the experiences of the research participants.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was an exploration of the life experiences and social relationships (Creswell, 2013) among Latino parents as well as middle school children and school personnel such as teachers, administrators, and policymakers to understand the impact that the life experiences of Latino parents had on their participation in their middle school child's education. The



relationship deserved a thorough examination through a transcendental phenomenological study approach (Moustakas, 1994).

The literature documents the positive relationship between parental involvement and student success (W. Chen & Gregory, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Higgins & Katsipataki, 2015; Hornby, 2011; Tang et al., 2011). The literature also showed a discrepancy between the definition of parental involvement and cultural models of minority families (Altschul, 2011; Andrews, 2013; Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Ceballo, Maurizi, Suarez, & Aretakis, 2014; Chun & Dickson, 2011; Durand, 2011; Mundt et al., 2015; Nino, 2014). Additionally, research includes the barriers that prevent Latino parents from becoming more involved in their child's education as well as recommendations for educators to overcome the barriers presented (Alfaro et al., 2014; Avvisati et al., 2011; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996). Programs are in place to support Latino parental involvement, but the literature has continued to concentrate on the reasons Latino parents do not become involved. ¡No me juzgues! translates to "Don't judge me." Latino parents who are not involved in school-based activities may think that administrators and educators view them as uncaring parents. By overcoming the barriers to participation, teachers, administrators, and policymakers are able to promote greater Latino parental involvement in the education of Latino children (Georgis et al., 2014; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015). Using parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990), the current research filled the gap in the literature with regard to understanding the impact of the life experiences of Latino parents on their participation in their middle school child's education.

The Latino population is becoming the largest minority group in many areas of the United States (Durand & Perez, 2013; Espinosa-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gilbert, Spears Brown, & Mistry, 2017; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Valdez, Shewakramani, Godlberg, & Padilla, 2013). The current study benefits policymakers, teachers, teacher assistants, administrators, parents, students, and those communities with a large number of Latino families. Policymakers will be able to continue practices that promote Latino parental involvement and discard or modify practices that do not support parental involvement. Teachers, teacher assistants, and administrators will be able to understand the positive and negative parental experiences in order to promote parent engagement. Parents and students will better understand the experiences that describe reasons for participating that may influence academic success. Communities with large Latino families will benefit by understanding the experiences of parents in order to promote positive communication between home and school. Understanding the experiences of Latino parents who do participate traditionally in their child's middle level education will support programs and policies created to increase Latino parental engagement in traditional models of involvement.

### **Research Questions**

This transcendental phenomenological study, seeking to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education, was guided by the following research questions:

#### **Central Research Question**

What are Latino parent perceptions of the ways their life experiences impact participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?

Administrators, educators, policymakers, and parents define parental involvement differently (Alfaro et al., 2014; Altschul, 2011; Lewis, Kim, & Ashby Bey, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; U. S. Department of Education, 2004; Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Parental involvement theory includes traditional (school-based) and nontraditional (home-based) parental involvement in education (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). According to Epstein and Sanders (2002) there are six types of traditional involvement: parenting, communication, volunteerism, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration with the community. Allowing Latino parents to share their experiences and their perception of how the involvement impacts their child's education will allow for deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Research Subquestions (SQs)**

**SQ1:** What are Latino parent perceptions of the relationship between parenting at home, school-based involvement, and participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?

The activities involved in the six types of school-based parental involvement may overlap with each other. The theory describes basic family obligations such as feeding, clothing, and housing children as "parenting" (Epstein & Sanders, 2002, p. 418). Included in this parental involvement type is the teaching of values, behaviors, and beliefs of the family from parents to children. School-related activities and decisions that parents are engaged in are characterized under "learning at home" (Epstein & Sanders, 2002, p. 420). Both these types of parental involvement may be categorized as parenting. Understanding how Latino parents describe parenting will promote the understanding of the phenomenon.

**SQ2:** What are Latino parent perceptions of the ways their interactions with school teachers and administrators impact participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?

When parents share their school involvement experiences, teachers, administrators, and policymakers can promote more parental involvement. Epstein and Sanders (2002) described communication as an obligation of the school. There are a variety of methods that schools use to communicate with parents such as notes sent home, email, and phone calls. The U. S. Department of Education (2004) noted the need for parental engagement and has provisions regarding parental involvement and mandates school districts to support parental involvement and outreach. Epstein and Sanders (2002) discussed supporting the school and students as volunteering (p. 420). Activities such as attending school functions and events as well as helping teachers are included in this category. When parents are aware of what is going on in their children's school, they are in the position to become involved in "school decisions, governance and advocacy," which Epstein and Sanders categorized as "decision-making" (p. 421).

With this subquestion parents would also be able to describe their experiences with school personnel. Understanding the experiences of Latino parents under the premise of cultural capital will allow for the participants to elicit deeper meaning. Cultural capital theory can explain the cultural influences that may shape the experiences of the research participants (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). When parents share their experiences, researchers, teachers, administrators, and policy makers may have a better understanding of parental involvement with regards to personnel interactions and school involvement. This understanding can support the continuation or change of policies.

**SQ3:** As a lived experience, how do Latino parents perceive their engagement with community programs impacts participation in their middle school child's education?

Schools often partner with government and city agencies as well as businesses and organizations that are based on faith, cultural origin, and more. Community members share information about community programs and support services available to families. Parents must decide if they are going to allow their children or family to participate in the programs and services. Epstein and Sanders (2002) classified this type of parental involvement as "collaborating with the community" (p. 422). Learning how Latino parents describe their involvement with the community will promote the understanding of the phenomenon.

### **Definitions**

1. *Consejos* - Translated into English the word consejos means advice or tips, but in the Latino culture consejos have a deeper meaning of spontaneous powerful stories that invoke strong views, feelings and actions about life and education used to teach morals and values as well as to motivate children to be academically successful (Alfaro et al., 2014; Altschul, 2011; Vega et al., 2015).
2. *Cultural Capital* – Cultural Capital is the term used to describe the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate from one social class level to another: possessing the pedagogic communication needed to foster success in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).
3. *Home-Based Parental Involvement*- Home-based parental involvement refers to non-traditional parental involvement. (See Non-Traditional Parental Involvement.)

4. *Latino* – In this study, Latino refers to anyone who identifies himself as Latino or herself as Latina with origins from Latin American countries such as Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, and Central America (Census, 2013).
5. *Non-Traditional Parental Involvement* – Throughout this study, non-traditional parental involvement are types of involvement is not visible to school administrators or educators. Non-traditional parental involvement is also known as home-based parental involvement. Support is home-based and may encompass providing meals, school materials, and a place to complete homework, and sharing advice or consejos (Alfaro, O'Reilly-Diaz, & Lopez, 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Suizzo, Pahlke, Yarnell, Chen, & Romero, 2014; Valdés, 1996).
6. *Parental Involvement* – Parental involvement is the reciprocal participation of parents in meaningful communication with the school community. Examples include helping and encouraging their children's educational opportunities. Parents are engaged in a partnership through mutual decision-making and other school-based opportunities (U. S. Department of Education, 2004).
7. *School-Based Parental Involvement*- School-based parental involvement refers to traditional parental involvement. (See Traditional Parental Involvement.)
8. *Traditional Parental Involvement* - Traditional parental involvement refers to the reinforcement of school activities that include direct contact with the school such as homework and concept support, attending sporting events, attending parent meetings and conferences, and promoting academic achievement (Altschul, 2011; Andrews, 2013; Avvisati et al., 2010). Traditional parental involvement is also known as school-based parental involvement. Traditional parental involvement is used do

include six types of parental involvement which include: (a) Parenting: basic obligations of families; (b) Communicating: basic obligations of schools; (c) Volunteering: support for the school and for students; (d) Learning at home: involvement in curricular-related activities and decisions; (e) Decision-making: involvement in school decisions, governance, and advocacy; and (f) Collaborating with the community: involvement to identify, use, and improve community programs and services (Epstein & Sanders, 2002).

### **Summary**

Chapter One included an overview of the research study and relevant literature and explained how the study addressed gaps in the existing literature. The discussion included a background of parental involvement in addition to a brief statement regarding the need for Latino parent involvement. The problem statement, the purpose statement, and the research questions were provided. Motivation for the selection of the topic for the research study was revealed.

Chapter Two encompasses an explanation and exploration of the theoretical frameworks and supporting literature of the research study. Chapter Two also includes empirical evidence and the theoretical basis for the study.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Overview**

Chapter Two includes details of the two theoretical frameworks for the study in addition to a review of relevant literature pertaining to the phenomenon of parental involvement in education. The first theory that grounded this research is the parental involvement theory by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) as well as by Epstein and Sanders (2002). The second theory that grounds this research is the cultural capital theory by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990). The current literature serves as a catalyst for researching the life experiences of Latino parents of middle school students in order to understand how their approaches to parental involvement impact their participation in their student's education. This relevant literature produces sound representations of parental involvement and cultural capital. In addition to the theoretical frameworks and the review of relevant literature, a summary of the chapter is provided.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The first theory that grounded this research was the parental involvement theory by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) as well as by Epstein and Sanders (2002). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) provided reasons for parents to become involved, while Epstein and Sanders discussed the six types of parental involvement. The second theory that grounded this research is cultural capital theory by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), which addresses possessing the skills and knowledge necessary to move from one social class to another. The relevant literature produced sound representations of parental involvement and cultural capital. Further literature denoted the barriers affecting Latino families from becoming engaged in their children's education. Parental involvement in relation to Latino parent perceptions and attitudes were synthesized from the literature. A gap in the literature existed with regard to how the life



experiences of Latino parents impacted their traditional (school-based) parental involvement in their child's education.

### **Parental Involvement Theory**

In the late 1980s, the parental involvement theory originated with Epstein and Sanders's (2002) partnership model for school, families, and communities. Epstein and Sanders further explained this model by categorizing activities into six different types which include (a) basic parenting obligations, (b) basic communication obligations of schools, (c) parents supporting the school and students through volunteering, (d) learning at home and becoming involved in curricular-related activities and decisions; (e) becoming involved in school decisions, governance, and advocacy; and (f) collaborating with the community to identify, use, and improve community programs and services (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) examined the psychological factors of parental involvement and their model is also considered to be the foundation of the parental involvement theory. Through this theory, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) helped to develop the ideas that influence parents to participate in their children's education. This theory was first developed in 1995 and revised in 1997, and it was used to categorize the parental process into five levels (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler, & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The focus of the first three levels involves the psychological aspects, contextual reasoning, and the perception of how the involvement impacts life. The last two levels are concentrated on strategies that parents use and how they coincide with the expectations of the school and student outcomes.

There is disagreement between researchers, educators, and policymakers with regard to defining parental involvement (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Carpenter, Young, Bowers, & Sanders, 2016; H. Chen & Zhu, 2017; Sebastian, Moon, & Cunningham, 2017). For example, Kyzar and

Jimerson (2018) discuss traditional involvement as being one-way and explain the benefits of two way involvement:

Traditional, one-way “involvement” strategies are not sufficient for supporting the needs of adolescents, and risk solidifying the home-school divide that often widens when children transition to the middle level grades...The full promise of two-way, relationship-based family engagement can only be realized when school-wide teams plan for assess, and engage in continuous improvement around family engagement strategies on a regular basis. (p. 22)

A broad definition of parental involvement, such as the one given by the U. S. Department of Education (2004) encompasses forms, or types of parental involvement, that include traditional and nontraditional methods of parental involvement. The U. S. Department of Education defined parental involvement as the reciprocal interactions regarding a child’s academic and extra-curricular activities that establish parental roles in the child’s learning while promoting a partnership with educators and the decision-making involved in education (Parental Involvement, §9101[32]). The definition of parental involvement given by the U. S. Department of Education was used for this study. It is also important to examine traditional or school-based and nontraditional or home-based forms of parental involvement in order to promote a clear understanding of the phenomenon.

**Traditional parental involvement.** Traditional parental involvement involves the reinforcement of school activities that include direct contact with the school such as homework and concept support, attending sporting events, attending parent meetings and conferences, and promoting academic achievement (Altschul, 2011; Andrews, 2013; Avvisati et al., 2010; Garbacz, et al., 2017; Georgis et al., 2014; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Reininger &

Santana López, 2017; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Traditional parental involvement is also known as school-based parental involvement (Duppong Hurley, Lambert, January, & Huscroft D'Angelo, 2017; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Suizzo et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014). This type of involvement may “require investments of time and money from parents, and those who may not be able to provide these resources are deemed uninvolved” (Bower & Griffin, 2011 p. 78).

Traditional parental involvement encompasses six types of parental involvement defined by Epstein and Sanders (2002): (a) parenting: basic obligations of families; (b) communicating: basic obligations of schools; (c) volunteering: support for the school and for students; (d) learning at home: involvement in curricular-related activities and decisions; (e) decision-making: involvement in school decisions, governance, and advocacy; and (f) collaborating with the community: involvement to identify, use, and improve community programs and services. Each of the forms are explained separately below.

**Nontraditional parental involvement.** Nontraditional forms of parental involvement include forms of parental involvement that are not visible to school administrators or educators (Daniel, 2015). Nontraditional parental involvement is also known as home-based parental involvement (Duppong Hurley et al., 2017; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Suizzo et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; Wehrspann, Dotterer, & Lowe, 2016). Support is given at home and may encompass providing meals, school materials, a place to complete homework, going to the library, going to museums (Rogers, Markel, Midgett, Ryan, & Tannock, 2014), and sharing advice or consejos (Alfaro et al., 2014; Andrews, 2013; Carpenter et al., 2016; Garbacz, Zerr, Dishion, Seeley, & Stormshak, 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Lewis, Kim, & Ashby Bey, 2011; Valdés, 1996; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil,

2014). *Consejos* translated into English means advice or tips, but in the Latino culture, the word *consejos* has a deeper meaning of powerful stories that invoke strong views, feelings, and actions about life and education. These *consejos* are often spontaneous and used to support the teaching of morals and values as well as to motivate children to be academically successful (Alfaro et al., 2014; Altschul, 2011; Gilbert et al., 2017; Vega et al., 2015). Academic socialization as described by Benner, Boyle, and Sadler (2016) may be similar to *consejos*. Academic socialization is when parents discuss academic goals and aspirations with their child.

***Parenting.*** Parenting as developed in the traditional approach to parental involvement encompasses several methods through which schools provide families with information regarding basic needs of children. Parents provide food, clothing, and shelter for their children. Parents also teach values, beliefs, and behavioral norms to their children. The support from home encourages children to be more focused on educational goals at school. Parenting also involves two-way communication between the home and school (Daniel, 2015; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Kaplan Toren & Seginer, 2015; Lewis et al., 2011).

Latino parenting is similar to the description above, but the person who is parenting may not be the mother or father of the child. The grandmother, aunt, uncle, or extended family may also live in the home and provide the basic needs of the child (Durand, 2011). Durand (2011) did not mention if the adult was involved in the child's education. However, Myers and Myers (2015) found a higher level of parental involvement with biological married or cohabiting parents than that of a single parent; in addition, step-parents had a higher level of parental involvement than did a single parent. Yap and Baharudin (2016) found that both paternal and maternal involvement are essential to child development.

Berryhill (2017) focused on parental school involvement with coparenting families who lived in the same household and found positive connections between the school and family with parents who supported each other's parenting techniques and nontraditional (home based) parental involvement. The positive connection was greater for mothers than for fathers; perhaps due to the historical role of motherhood. Fathers were noted as being involved at the school level through conversations and information shared by mothers who were physically involved either through school attendance, receiving of information, or supporting with homework. Berryhill did not study divorced coparenting families. Understanding that a second adult may have caused the increase in parental involvement is beneficial to relating to the family dynamics which influence a child's upbringing.

Family values, beliefs, and behavioral norms are taught traditionally and through consejos (Alfaro et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996). Benner et al.'s (2016) description of academic socialization resembles the definition of consejos in that the discussions that parents held with their child involved educational expectations and the promotion of educational goals. Academic socialization has shown positive connections with a child's academic intrinsic motivation (Wehrspann et al., 2016). M.-T. Wang et al. (2014) observed an increase in academic socialization as children entered middle school and high school and suggested that the relationship between parent and child may have entered the stage when parental guidance was needed to support a greater sense of child autonomy. Parenting styles differ from one home to another and may affect student behavior and academic achievement (Majumder, 2016; Rahmqvist, Wells, Sarkadi, 2014; Straight & Yeo, 2014). Schools that provide parenting programs can support parents with positive parenting skills which will support parental involvement and student success (Cankar, Deutsch, & Sentocnik 2012; Foster, 2012;

Georgis et al., 2014; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Majumder, 2016; Rahmqvist et al., 2014; Reece, Staudt, & Ogle, 2013; Straight & Yeo, 2014; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

***Communication.*** Communication as developed in the traditional approach to parental involvement suggests that communication between the home and school is two-way, but also that the communication is the obligation of the school. Schools are charged with providing parents with information about their children's academic progress, behavior, and academic goals. Communication between home and school is provided in several forms such as emails, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, notes or memos from teachers, newsletters, report cards, interim progress reports, websites, and more. Parents are encouraged to reciprocate the communication in order to support their children's education. Information provided to parents by schools include student's academic progress or needs and may include opportunities for parents to volunteer at their children's school (Bulotsky-Shearer, Bouza, Bichay, Fernandez, & Gaona Hernandez, 2016; Daniel, 2015; Duppong Hurley et al., 2017; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Garbacz et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; Porterfield, 2014; Ray, 2013; Vega et al., 2015). Communication must be two-way. Educators must listen to what parents have to say about their children and the suggestions that may benefit classroom lessons (McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Latino parents who do not speak English are unable to communicate freely with educators who do not speak Spanish. Latino parents felt more welcomed when they were able to speak to someone who understood Spanish (Carpenter et al., 2016; Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996). Although some written information in Spanish may be sent home, not all parents are able to read in Spanish, which puts

them at a disadvantage. Some families rely on the child to translate information given by the school in order to be able to communicate with educators (Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Other parents who are between the ages of 18 and 33 are categorized by Ray (2013) as “digital natives” (p. 332). These parents are those who had a computer or some sort of technology at a young age and are very comfortable with technology and electronic communications. Along with direct electronic mail, these parents are part of social network sites and communicate with many other people with the click of a button and may look for schools to communicate through social media (Ray, 2013). With the increase of technology, schools tend to send information through email or social media, excluding those who do not have means to technology, and those who do have the technology are at a disadvantage due to the inability to read in English (Alfaro et al., 2014; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Georgis et al., 2014; Mundt et al., 2015; Ray, 2013; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996).

***Volunteering.*** Volunteering as developed in the traditional approach to parental involvement suggests the value of inviting parents and others to participate in school events or spend time supporting classroom and school endeavors, which promotes student success. Attending school functions during the day, after school, on weekends, and during the summer requires parents and families to devote their time to education. Zucher (2016) stated that the use of parents in the classroom is a resource that is not utilized as often as possible. Some activities may include mentoring other students or giving class presentations regarding life lessons or career choices. Zucher (2016) found that educators consistently state that there is not enough time to teach writing and suggested allowing parents to support teachers in writing classes. This opportunity should not be offered as a one-time event as in with workshops, but rather as an on-going opportunity which may support relationship building between teachers and parents

(Zucher, 2016). Volunteer opportunities also include assisting the teacher with duties such as calling other parents, making copies of materials for students, coaching, and tutoring (Daniel, 2015; Duppong Hurley et al., 2017; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Lewis et al., 2011). Some parents do not know what is expected and may shy away from volunteering for a variety of reasons that include language barriers, lack of education, and feelings of inferiority (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Park & Holloway, 2013; Suizzo et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996; Y. Wang, Deng, & Yan, 2016).

***Learning at home.*** Learning at home as developed in the traditional approach to parental involvement espouses that parents become more involved in curricular-related activities and decisions. Parents are guided to support their children's learning at home in a variety of ways such as homework assistance, grade monitoring, and communication with their children. Lowe and Dotterer (2013) found that increases in parental monitoring had positive academic results. The learning in this category is traditional because the learning enriches what is taught in school (Daniel, 2015; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Lewis et al., 2011). Shukla, Tombari, Toland, and Danner (2015) contributed to the research regarding parental involvement and learning at home through their research involving high school students, parental support, and mathematics. Shukla et al. (2015) found that student perceptions of home-based support were related to student mastery goals. Parental support may encourage mastery of the concept taught at school or achievement of an academic performance goal such as a high letter or number grade (Madjar, Shklar, & Moshe, 2016). Madjar et al. (2016) suggested that parents follow teacher recommendations and guidelines with reference to homework support.



Schools may develop parent workshops or programs to encourage parents to support their children's learning at home. Some workshops or programs such as those that focus on reading, math, strengthening family interactions, or teacher collective efficacy may promote positive relationships between teachers and parents (Baek & Bullock, 2015; Belfi, Gielen, Frain, Verschueren, & Meredith, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2016; Maloney, Converse, Gibbs, Levine, & Beilock, 2015; Sampson, 2013).

***Decision-making.*** Decision-making in the traditional approach to parental involvement encompasses parents' engagement with school decisions, governance, and advocacy. Organizations such as parent-teacher organizations or parent-teacher associations are developed to encourage parents to participate in creating rules and policies for the school. When parents' views and input are valued, parents are more prone to participate in their children's education. Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) studied three community and school-based Latino parent involvement programs and found that those who participated in the programs had a "sense of belonging, purpose, and need for community action as well as a means of challenging their cultural isolation and promoting new avenues for localized participation and citizenship" (p. 84). Parents who are able to effectively articulate their needs and wants as well as the needs and wants of other parents support change in schools. It is imperative to seek parent input when developing programs or implementing ideas (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). The needs and wants of parents can be communicated in a variety of methods which include, but are not limited to, physical meetings at school, paper communication to and from home, and electronic communication through email, social networking, text, and more. Those who are invested in the school climate and policies strengthen relationships between school and home (Carpenter et al., 2016; Daniel, 2015; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Inoa, 2017; Lewis et

al., 2011; A. Li & Fisher, 2017; Ng, 2013; Ray, 2013; Santana, Rothstein, & Bain, 2016). Some parents who are technological-savvy and confident using social media may seek advice from online forums and social media in connection with the types of decisions that should be made regarding their children's education (Ray, 2013). The electronic forum may be the way parents communicate with the school and their community.

***Collaborating with the community.*** Collaborating with the community in the traditional approach to parental involvement calls for the school, parents, and the community to work together. The school provides information regarding community programs and services that support the family structure. Parents may not know what support is available with regards to community-based agencies that provide enrichment, tutoring, health, summer programs or cultural events. The partnership between schools and communities will allow information to be given to parents who then may participate in the programs. Parents may also be aware of events or organizations that benefit the school or other families. Parents who share the information with school personnel and policy makers promote parental engagement within the community (Daniel, 2015; Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Georgis et al., 2014; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; A. Li & Fischer, 2017; Park & Holloway, 2017; Reece et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2013; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

Poza et al. (2014) reported that community organizations such as the public library have supported parents who seek help with understanding the educational system, as well as to find homework help, language classes, and assistance with locating proper health care. Parents who do not seek help from the school itself, may find assistance from a church, library, or children's after care facility. In a study that involved Latino parents enrolled in a project about family

involvement at the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) examined the impact of the project on the levels of family involvement. O'Donnell and Kirkner found an improvement with contacting teachers, school involvement, and relationships with teachers for families that participated in the program. Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) also discussed improvement with school relationships and communication between the school and families involved in community-based programs.

**Levels for becoming involved.** Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) developed the theory of parental involvement based on the reasons parents are involved. The theory incorporates a 5-level system. The first three levels involve the psychological aspects, contextual reasoning, and the perception of how parental involvement impacts life (Walker et al., 2005). The last two levels target strategies that parents use, how they coincide with the expectations of the school and student outcomes (Walker et al., 2005). This current study was concentrated on the components of the first three levels of parental involvement as they address the parents' motivational beliefs, perceptions of invitations, time and energy, and skills and knowledge.

***Parent motivation beliefs.*** Parents who believe they are supposed to be involved in their children's education are motivated by this belief (Grolnick, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker et al., 2005; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). The belief that parents can positively influence their children to succeed also motivates parents to engage in their children's education (Avvisati et al., 2011). Grolnick (2015) stated that parents who were compelled-to-participate parents may have negative perceptions about parental involvement. Although parents believed they should participate, being forced to participate through school contingencies or parent contracts may discourage parents from participating more than the

minimum required events or meetings (Grolnick, 2015). Murray et al. (2014) found that most of the 44 parents involved in their study believed that parents should be part of their children's education. Many of the participants also noted that they were not involved as often as they should be or wanted to be (Murray et al., 2014). The involvement may be composed of having the parent physically in the school or giving advice about education at home (Alfaro, O'Reilly-Diaz, & Lopez, 2014; Andrews, 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996). Park and Holloway (2017) found that African American and Latino parents who had children in high school had a higher rate of nontraditional parental involvement than that of White parents.

*Parent perceptions of general invitations for involvement from others.* Parents who are invited to participate in school events also become more involved (Avvisati et al., 2011; Daniel, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Park & Holloway, 2013; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; Walker et al., 2005; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Invitations can come from educators or teachers and administrators, their children, or anyone who extends an invitation to participate in an event. Park and Holloway (2013) found that African American parents were more inclined to participate traditionally when educators informed them about school events. When parents believe that they are welcome to participate, they are encouraged to become more involved (Carpenter et al., 2016; Kinne, 2015; Mundt et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2014; Reininger & Santana López, 2017; Vega et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2005; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). Reininger and Santana López (2017) studied the motives for Chilean parental involvement and found that when children invited their parents to participate, they were more inclined to do so, rather than when invitations came from teachers. Invitations to become involved may come about due to negative circumstances, such as behavioral issues. Murray et

al. (2014) provided examples of parents who became involved due to perceived mistreatment of their children by teachers or other students; the children of the parents asked the parents for support and intervention. Invitations from teachers were reminders to attend mandatory conferences due to children misbehaving (Murray et al., 2014). Some parents of children who attend middle school have reported that their involvement decreased because their child wanted to have more autonomy (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2016; Perkins et al., 2016). M.-T. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil (2014) discussed the possibility that students were not comfortable with their parents going to school and the increase of nontraditional parental involvement for students in high school. In addition, M.-T. Wang and Sheikh-Khalil also showed that parents taking the time and energy to attend school functions gave students a sense that they were supported with their education and extra-curricular activities, which helped to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

***Time and energy.*** Parents consider the time and energy required to partake in an event when deciding to become involved (Avvisati et al., 2011; Grolnick, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Reece et al., 2013; Tekin, 2016; Walker et al., 2005). Parents who work or have other children may not be able to devote several hours after school to attend an event (Murray et al., 2014; Ryan et al., 2013; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; Y. Wang et al., 2016). Other provisions, like securing someone to watch their children, have to be completed before being able to participate. Parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, and other events held during the day may not have flexible meeting times and therefore may also deter parents from becoming involved (Avvisati et al., 2011; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; H. Chen & Zhu, 2017; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Murray et al. (2014) found that parents were unable to attend school events because they were not given enough time to make necessary arrangements

to participate. Ryan et al. (2013) found that parents had positive perceptions regarding school transportation to school and back home. Parents perceived the transportation as a time saver which lessens the stress involved with arranging transportation for their children and getting to work on time.

Another possible way that schools may save time is by creating an online social media presence or creating a blog or other means of electronic communication (Ray, 2013). The electronic communication may allow parents access to materials needed to support their children. Parents who are able to access information online may also seek support when they do not possess the skills and knowledge necessary to assist their children.

***Skills and knowledge.*** Parents evaluate their own skills and knowledge regarding education and the educational system (Avvisati et al., 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). Parents who understand the concepts needed to assist children with homework tend to be more involved than those who are apprehensive of the concepts taught in school. Some parents may oversee children as they complete their homework and projects, but also feel that the lack of knowledge prevents them from supporting their child. Parents who are unaware of the educational policies or procedures tend to shy away from participating in their children's education (Park & Holloway, 2013; Tekin, 2016; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014).

### **Cultural Capital Theory**

Cultural capital theory by Bourdieu originated in France in the 1970s (DiMaggio, 1979; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). Bourdieu's work was translated from French to English in 1990 (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Cultural capital is the knowledge and skills needed to negotiate from one social class level to another; possessing the pedagogic communication needed to foster

success in education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) espoused that those who are not well-educated or recognized by those in authority do not move from one social class to another. Their research has been the foundation of further research involving cultural differences (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). DiMaggio (1979) further explained this concept in education, stating that teachers treat students with an affluent cultural status better than they treat those in a lower cultural status.

Cultural capital theory has been the basis of a variety of studies conducted to investigate parental skill and knowledge of schooling and student achievement. These studies show that parents who understand the educational system are more likely to participate traditionally, than those who have less confidence in the schooling procedures (Avvisati et al., 2011; DiMaggio, 1979; Gonzales, 2012; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ramirez, Machida, Kline, & Huang, 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Suizzo et al., 2014; Vega et al., 2015; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014). Avvisati et al. (2011) discussed cultural capital theory in regard to schools being middle-class institutions that cater to middle-class values and beliefs. Additionally, Lareau and Weininger (2003) discussed the advantages to those who knew and understood the structure of education. One advantage included the comfort level of parents to question the school system and become more involved. Studies by researchers such as Lareau and Weininger (2003) and DiMaggio (1979) have addressed the correlation between cultural capital and academic achievement and suggest there is a positive correlation between cultural capital and academic achievement. Gonzales (2012), Rios-Ellis et al. (2015), and Vega et al. (2015) are among researchers that used cultural capital to examine the education of Latino students and their achievements.

When parents understand the educational system, they are able to navigate through the acquisition of supports needed for their family and the success of their children (Massing, Kirova, & Hennig, 2013). Parents who understand the positive effects of increased parental involvement and the school procedures regarding how to participate, are more likely to participate in school events. Parents who understand the educational system and vocabulary seem to be more valued than those who do not understand the educational system (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017).

In summary, the parental involvement theory of Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) and Epstein and Sanders (2002), and cultural capital theory by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) were used to ground this present research. Research conducted by Altschul (2011), Andrews (2013), Avvisati et al. (2010), and Bower and Griffin (2011) targeted the parental involvement theory and its implications in education. Cultural capital theory was explained and used in research conducted by DiMaggio (1979), Lareau and Weininger (2003), Gonzales (2012), Rios-Ellis et al. (2015), and Vega et al. (2015) with a focus on education. This current research advanced or extended the existing research through a concentration on parental involvement and cultural capital of the Latino parents of middle school children. The gap found in the literature encompassed the lack of studies that involved the life experiences of Latino parents of middle school children that impacted their participation in traditional (school-based) activities. The related literature is discussed further in the following sections.

### **Related Literature**

The U. S. government mandates parental involvement and teachers, school administrators, and policymakers are charged with increasing parental involvement in their schools (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Although parental involvement is encouraged,



teachers and administrators, along with parents, have positive and negative attitudes regarding parental involvement. There have been programs developed to encourage parental involvement as well as research conducted to study barriers that impede Latino parental involvement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015). The next section includes a review of the literature involving cultural connections, followed by a summary of the chapter.

### **Parents' Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**

Parents have had positive and negative attitudes toward parental involvement. Studies show that parents who received communication regarding their children's progress had more positive attitudes because they felt connected to their children's educational progress (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012). In addition, parents who received positive feedback regarding their children were also more positive about becoming involved (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Studies also indicate that when communication is delivered in the parents' first language, there is a sense that the teacher or administrator cared to take the time to literally speak their language (Carpenter et al., 2016; Lee et al., 2012). However, parents may not be aware that they are welcome at the school. According to Alexander, Cox, Behnke, and Larzelere (2017), children have noted that their parents felt uncomfortable at school due to the parents' perception that they were not welcome at the school. Although there may be bulk email sent to parents or automated phone calls regarding school events, parents who were invited individually to participate in school events or activities felt more welcomed at the school event or activity (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Individual emails and phone calls may encourage parents to communicate with school personnel. Hence, parents who have had two-

way communication via direct emails or phone calls from teachers and administrators feel valued (Foster, 2012).

There may be a variety of reasons for parents' negative attitudes with regard to parental involvement. Parents may have negative attitudes toward parental involvement when they do not feel valued by the educational system. Additionally, parents may not have the time or resources available to participate traditionally in their children's education. Parents may work during the hours that require parent participation in schools. The lack of visibility may have led to the assumption by educators that parents do not care about their children's education (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Kinne, 2015; Valdés, 1996; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Another reason that parents might not participate is that their past experiences as a child or as a parent may have been negative and parents generalize the negative experience to the encounters that they have with their children's schooling (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Murray et al. (2014) indicated that about half of the participants in their study had negative dealings with teachers, and these parents felt disrespected and devalued. M.-T. Wang et al. (2014) noted that at the secondary level of education (middle and high school) children have multiple teachers, and parents are not sure whom to contact with regard to receiving information or giving information about their child. The uncertainty of whom to contact lessens the prospect of having an open communication with educators. Shim (2013) found that when parents perceive that educators are negatively judging them they are intimidated and fail to communicate productively. When educators do not work with parents to resolve issues or have a meaningful discussion with parents, those parents feel excluded because their opinion is not valued (Shim, 2013).

Parents who feel that educational resources are unequally distributed between classes and race may also have negative attitudes toward education (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013). The sense that their child is not receiving the same education as other students are, due to bias, creates resentment for parents. Murray et al. (2014) reported that parents received invitations to participate in school conferences regarding negative behavior exhibited by the student. Parents in the study stated that they were not invited to the school for positive events or reports regarding their child (Murray et al., 2014). Parents' negative attitudes may develop when they feel that information is not provided in an understandable manner. Some paperwork may require parents to sign permission or give consent for a variety of aspects that deal with school, and the wording or vocabulary used to convey the message may not be easily understood by parents. Forms and documentation needed to volunteer may cost money or require information that parents are not willing to provide (e.g., police background checks, child abuse background checks, etc.). In addition, parents who do not understand educational language may be confused with the educator's use of education jargon. When parents do not understand the teacher request or the homework, parents are less likely to be engaged (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Valdés, 1996). When information is sent home in English, parents who cannot read English are at a disadvantage and may have their child translate the information (Poza et al., 2014; Valdés, 1996). Children may not be fluent in Spanish and may not be able to translate the information effectively for parents to be able to comply with what is being asked (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017). Suggestions derived from studies with regard to creating more positive relationships between parents and schools involve fostering better communication and promoting parental involvement (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

## **Educator Attitudes Toward Parental Involvement**

As with parents, educators display both positive and negative attitudes toward parental involvement. When educators understand the positive influence that parental involvement has on academic success, they have a more positive attitude regarding parental engagement (Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011). For example, Kyzar and Jimerson (2018) stated:

Once educators understand families from a systems perspective, they can then begin to analyze how the interactions between the family system and the school system influence families/ motivations for involvement. Professional learning around family systems can enable more thoughtful sense-making around parental engagement data, as well as more informed decision-making when planning engagement efforts. (p. 20)

Lee et al. (2012) noted that teachers had higher expectations for children who had engaged parents as opposed to children whose parents seemed to be disengaged with their children's education. Teachers tended to rate parent involvement higher if the parent was visible at school rather than those who seemed uninvolved and not visible (Lee et al., 2012). Gu and Yawkey (2010) conducted a study of kindergarten teachers in China and found that younger teachers correlated with higher positive attitudes toward parental involvement. One reason for this disparity may have been that courses offered to younger teachers regarding parental involvement were nonexistent for older teachers. In a study on the interactive effects of perceived parental involvement and personality on teacher satisfaction, C. Li and Hung (2012) found that teachers who had high parental involvement perceived themselves to be more satisfied in the workplace than those with low parental involvement. Teachers were able to increase parental involvement hence the perception of teacher satisfaction increased "through quality communication,

cooperation, coordination and collaboration” (C. Li & Hung, 2012, p. 515) with parents.

Through their study, C. Li and Hung (2012) reiterated the need for a reciprocal relationship between parents and educators to not only enhance parental involvement, but also to better educator attitudes toward parents becoming more engaged in their child’s education.

The lack of professional development and teacher training are contributing factors to the negative attitudes that some teachers have toward parental involvement. Some educators do not know the best methods to invite parents to participate, nor do they feel comfortable calling parents (Gu & Yawkey, 2010; Herman & Reinke, 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; Perkins et al., 2016). Perkins et al. (2016) suggested that schools promote better teacher-parent communication in order to support parent involvement. In prior research, scholars determined some educators interpreted the lack of traditional involvement to mean that parents did not care about their children’s academic achievement (Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Park & Holloway, 2013). Due to the lack of teacher training about cultural differences, educators tend to view the lack of questioning or traditional involvement by Latinos as disengagement (Poza et al., 2014). With proper training, educators could realize that the lack of questioning is cultural and a sign of respect for the educator and education (Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Lee et al., 2012). Shim (2013) indicated that some parents have a sense of being judged by teachers and that some teachers may not realize that they are judgmental towards parents who do not speak English. Herman and Reinke (2017, 2016) found that teacher training can change the perception that educators have towards parent involvement.

Some parents are not able to be involved in the traditional forms of parental involvement as suggested by the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). The lack of traditional involvement adds to the negative attitudes of some

educators, with the assumption that parents do not care enough to become involved in their children's education (Carpenter et al., 2016; Durand & Perez, 2013; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Park & Holloway, 2013; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Some educators view themselves as experts in their field and do not accept parental input for a variety of reasons that may include the perceived lower education of parents (Carpenter et al., 2016; Gilbert et al., 2017; Lewis et al., 2012). Another negative aspect of parental involvement is that educators may feel self-conscious with parents in their classroom (Cankar et al., 2012). Some educators may perceive that having parents come in to volunteer requires teachers to teach or instruct parents with the tasks that they are to perform, thus taking time used to prepare for teaching away from the teacher (McKenna & Millen, 2013; Zucher, 2016). Some teachers may feel that parents are scrutinizing the lessons or the methods used by the teacher. Teacher attitudes may inadvertently influence parents' views toward parental involvement by intimidating parents or making them feel inferior (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

### **Parental Involvement Programs**

As noted above, the U. S. government has mandated that school administrators, teachers, and policymakers increase parental involvement in their schools (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Stitt & Brooks, 2014; U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Studies have indicated that parenting style affects student behavior and academic success (Majumder, 2016; Rahmqvist et al., 2014; Straight & Yeo, 2014). Majumder (2016) stated there are four types of parenting styles: authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and uninvolved. Straight and Yeo (2014) found that parenting involved emotional support and control of behavior, thoughts, and emotions. Understanding the variety of parenting methods allows educators to create supportive parenting programs held at school that support positive parent and child relationships and academic

success. Parents who are involved want to help their child succeed, but they do not want to be told how to raise their child. Some parents may seek advice with regard to what strategies may work best. Through parent workshops, parents with an authoritarian parenting style would be able to learn that exerting too much control to get children to complete homework may have adverse effects regarding academic achievements (Núñez et al., 2017).

Núñez et al. (2017) recommended a balance between controlling and supportive encouragement to support homework completion. Fernandez-Alonso, Alvarez-Diaz, Woitschach, Alvarez, and Cuesta (2017) completed a study that echoed the results of Núñez et al. (2017) with regard to needing to balancing authoritarian parental role with maintaining communication with the child. When parents are able to discuss parenting techniques with educators, they are more willing to be traditionally involved with school (Rahmqvist et al., 2014). Evidence-based parenting programs are useful when creating school-based parenting programs (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Majumder, 2016; Rahmqvist et al., 2014; Straight & Yeo, 2014; Winslow et al., 2016). Programs or workshops that share how to improve nontraditional parental involvement also support school policies (Fernandez-Alonso et al., 2017).

Programs devised to increase parental involvement may be beneficial to Latino families (O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Jasis & Ordonez-Jasis, 2012). Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) noted that parents advocated for their child when given the opportunity to participate in parental programs because these parents felt a sense of activism and empowerment. Researchers have studied programs that focus on curricular programming that promotes parental involvement and made several suggestions that may increase the engagement level of parents (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Georgis et al., 2014; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; O'Donnell & Kirkner, 2014; Reece et al., 2013; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Curry and Adams

(2014) found that when parents have the opportunity to meet with each other, they are able to share ideas, procedures, and expectations which help to broaden parental social networking. Fostering parent-to-parent relationships at school may increase school-based parental involvement. A common suggestion was not to assume parents do not care about their children's education (Foster, 2012; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

Another suggestion is that when teachers are meeting with parents, teachers and administrators should not stay at their desk. When teachers sit at their desk, parents may feel distant and inferior to the teacher. There may be a sense that teachers are not willing to get on the same level as the parent. Teachers should sit closer in proximity to parents to promote a sense of togetherness (Foster, 2012). Teachers, administrators, and policymakers must understand that parental involvement does not look the same for every parent. There are varying reasons for the differences between one parent's involvement and another parent's involvement. The traditional parental involvement model may not support the time or resources of all parents (Avvisati et al., 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Reece et al., 2013; Walker et al., 2005). The most suggested methods to promote parental involvement involved communication.

### **Communication Between School and Home**

Communication may persuade or dissuade parental involvement (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). For example, parents who may not understand educational jargon are less likely to participate when they do not understand what is being said or read (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Valdés, 1996). Although parents may understand what teachers were saying, teachers should not assume that parents understand the acronyms and terms that are used in education. Parents want to be informed about their children's education and behavior (Cankar et al., 2012; Epstein & Sanders,



2002; Foster, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Williams & Sánchez, 2013).

When parents understand what is going on in the classroom, they are able to support the learning.

When parents understand the lesson, they are more likely to assist with assignments at home.

Stacer and Perrucci (2013) found that parents who were informed about how to help their child were more involved than parents who perceived they were not given information from the school. Parents who only receive negative feedback are more likely to be disengaged and their parental involvement may be diminished (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012).

Sebastian et al. (2017) noted that educators contacted parents of students who had issues with behavior more often than they contacted parents of students who did not have behavior issues. This finding is significant because parents who receive negative feedback about their children may be less inclined to participate in traditional school events (Sebastian et al., 2017). Foster (2012) noted that parents would like the teacher's phone number in order to facilitate two-way communication. There are a variety of methods used to communicate with parents, including emails, phone calls, parent-teacher conferences, notes or memos from teachers, newsletters, report cards, interim progress reports, websites, and more (Cankar et al., 2012; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Educators must not assume that parents have technological devices such as cell phones, computers, or access to technology (Cankar et al., 2012). When information is only given electronically, there may be parents who are missed. Miscommunication is one of the major reasons that parents are not involved with their children's education (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; Carpenter et al., 2016; Perkins et al., 2016).

### **Barriers to Parental Involvement**

There are a variety of reasons that keep parents from participating in their children's education. As stated above, communication is necessary to increase parental engagement.

Language barriers deter parents whose first language is not English from traditionally participating in their children's education (Alfaro et al., 2014; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; ; Georgis et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2017; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996). When educators rely on electronic communication without knowing which families could access technology, they may not get the information out to all parents. Considerable information may be given to children to relay to parents, and children may not be reliable with delivering information to and from the home. Although individual emails or phone calls require more time to be devoted to communicating with parents, the individuality is noted, welcomed, and respected by parents (Foster, 2012; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Even if parents accept the invitation to traditionally participate in their children's education, they may not be able to get to the school. Parents have also stated that lack of transportation is another reason for not participating traditionally in their children's education (Gonzalez et al., 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Vega et al., 2015). Time is another factor that may impede parental involvement (Avvisati et al., 2011; Inoa, 2017; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Vega et al., 2015; Y. Wang et al., 2016; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). School meetings are generally held during the day while parents are working. Over 70% of parents in the United States are working parents (Ryan et al., 2013). Lack of childcare during the scheduled time of involvement may also deter parental involvement (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012).

Reininger and Santana López's (2017) study of Chilean parental involvement confirmed that time and energy involved in participating in a school event does influence the parent to become involved or not to become involved. Another reason for parents not becoming traditionally involved deals with their prior experiences with education (LeFevre & Shaw, 2012;

Park & Holloway, 2013; Schueler, Capotosto, Bahena, McIntyre, & Gehlback, 2014; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). If parents have negative experiences as a child with school officials such as teachers, administrators, and policymakers, they tend not to participate traditionally with their children's education. Another barrier to parental involvement is the lack of awareness of school norms and procedures due to their cultural beliefs and values (Alfaro et al., 2014; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; Georgis et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015; Valdés, 1996).

### **Cultural Connections**

U. S. schools are increasingly more diverse than they were prior to the 1950s. As stated in Chapter One, the Latino population is the largest minority population in some areas of Pennsylvania (Dewey, 2011). There are schools that have reported the Latino enrollment to be 65% of the student body. Hence, teachers, administrators, and policymakers must understand the cultural differences between educators and parents as well as with students enrolled in their schools (Georgis et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Herman & Reinke, 2017; Valdés, 1996). Likewise, educators, administrators, and policymakers must be sensitive to the diverse culture of these families (Massing et al., 2013). Parents who may not understand educational norms and expectations are examples of those who lack the cultural capital needed to navigate through the educational system. This lack of understanding is described in cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Stacer and Perrucci (2013) noted that minority parents may not have been comfortable or familiar with school procedures which may inhibit parental involvement. When teachers, administrators, and policymakers are trained and educated about the Latino culture, they are more prepared to promote parental involvement (Mundt et al.,

2015; Tang et al., 2011). Durand's (2011) study provided evidence of this fact when he discussed cultural connections:

Connecting across the home-school border requires teachers and educators each to know and understand the cultural beliefs and values of the other... in order to begin to see and understand the beliefs or practices of another culture, we must first be willing to suspend those of our own. Since those in positions of power (e.g., teachers) are largely socialized *not* to do this, especially with low-income or ethnic minority parents, this process may be difficult. (p. 275-276)

Massing et al. (2013) advocated the use of first-language facilitators and cultural brokers to assist with the learning of and the transition to school norms. Some educators may believe that parents who are not traditionally involved are disengaged, but they do not understand that Latino parents regard educators with high esteem (Gonzalez et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996). Due to their cultural upbringing, Latino parents are reluctant to voice their opinions or concerns. Latino families may view the questioning of educators as disrespectful, which may be the reason for more informal school interactions by Latino families (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Park & Holloway, 2013; Suizzo et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996; Y. Wang et al., 2016). Contrary to these studies, Reininger & Santana López (2017) reported that educators in Chile were not regarded in high esteem and not respected. This disparity may be because of the historical conflict between the relationships of parents and education in Chile.

## **Summary**

As discussed in this chapter, the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) were used to ground this current research. Research conducted by Altschul (2011), Andrews (2013), Avvisati et al. (2010) and Bower and Griffin (2011) was focused on the parental involvement theory and the implications in education. Cultural capital theory as related to education was explained and used in research conducted by DiMaggio (1979), Lareau and Weininger (2003), Goldenberg (2014), Gonzales (2012), Rios-Ellis et al. (2015), and Vega et al. (2015). Further literature provided evidence regarding the importance of parental involvement and the necessity to increase Latino parental involvement (Durand & Perez, 2013). It is widely documented that parental involvement positively impacts student achievement and academic success (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Walker et al., 2005). Studies suggested that there is a discrepancy between academic culture and Latino culture connections (Georgis et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996; Vega et al., 2015). Despite the efforts of schools to close the cultural gap, there is low Latino parental involvement. Within recent years, educators have created programs, such as adult English as a second or other language and have changed policies to increase Latino parental involvement (Cankar et al., 2012; Carpenter et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2011). There is research to explain the barriers faced by Latino parents to becoming more involved in their children's middle school education (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015), but a lack of qualitative research focused on those who do participate. Therefore, the present research study demonstrated the opportunity to fill a substantial gap in the current framework of the literature. This research

advanced or extended the existing research by targeting the parental involvement and cultural capital of Latino parents of middle school children.

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. Chapter Three includes a discussion of the research design and a restatement of the research questions. The rationale for the setting is described, followed by the justification of participant selection. The procedures used for conducting the study are disclosed, along with the researcher's role. The data collection and analysis methods are also discussed. Trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and a concise summary of the research study methods conclude this chapter.

### **Design**

This was a qualitative phenomenological study with a transcendental approach. According to Moustakas (1994), transcendental phenomenological research allows for extensive and in-depth descriptions of a phenomenon while promoting an understanding of the essence of the studied event. Qualitative research is used to understand and create meaning from experiences in society and in history (Creswell, 2013). The experiences in this current study were shared by the participants in their own words and then analyzed to create meaning. This qualitative research allowed me, as the researcher, to create an intricate and complex account of the phenomenon regarding school involvement of Latino parents (Creswell, 2013). According to Creswell (2013), a transcendental phenomenological approach is used to analyze and narrate the meaning of a shared experience by the participants of the study. In the present study, the experiences of Latino parents and their approaches to parental involvement in their middle school children's education were investigated. A transcendental phenomenological approach

also allowed me to offer insight concerning the experiences of Latino parents who are traditionally involved in their child's middle school education while describing the parental decisions to participate (Moustakas, 1994). In addition, this study was conducted to investigate and better understand Latino parent perceptions of the ways their Latino life experiences impacted participation in their middle school child's education. Participant perceptions were viewed as the reality within the context of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

I disclosed my biases and prejudgments surrounding the ideas of Latino parental involvement with the intention of bracketing the topic (Moustakas, 1994). I accounted for the experiences that Latino parents shared with regard to participating in their child's middle school education. The essence of the experience was discovered through a variety of interactions with Latino parents of middle school children. Latino parents who were involved in this study expressed their experiences with school involvement and school communication. Their experiences developed my understanding of their involvement or noninvolvement with decision-making at their children's school. Participants described involvement with out-of-school organizations that are connected to their children's middle school. Allowing the participants to describe their experience and explain in detail how they experienced the phenomenon provided thick and rich descriptions. The interview questions elicited participants' responses regarding their perceptions of the phenomenon.

## **Research Questions**

### **Central Research Question**

What are Latino parents' perceptions of the ways their life experiences impact their participation in their middle school child's education?



## **Research Subquestions**

**SQ1:** What are Latino parent perceptions of the relationship between parenting at home, school-based involvement, and participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?

**SQ2:** What are Latino parent perceptions of the relationships between their interactions with school teachers and administrators and participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?

**SQ3:** As a lived experience, how do Latino parents perceive their engagement with community programs impacts their participation in their middle school child's education?

## **Setting**

The setting for the study was a middle school located in Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania. Lehigh Valley is the pseudonym used for the city in which the study took place. There are more than 15 public middle schools in the Lehigh Valley, which encompasses several school districts. This site was selected based on access allowed by the principal of the school and by the school district officials. The study site was also selected because the school is located in the community in which I reside. Three of my children attended Lehigh Valley Middle School and all four of my children and I graduated from Lehigh Valley High School. As the researcher in the present study, I am aware that the study was conducted in my community, but I included measures to remove my biases from the research. As noted, I live in the neighborhood surrounding the school. Two of my children attended Grades 6–8 at Lehigh Valley Middle School and a third completed sixth grade at Lehigh Valley Middle School. None of the children currently attend the middle school. The principal of the school was not employed at Lehigh Valley Middle School while my children attended the school. Lehigh Valley Middle School has high Latino enrollment

and is in an urban environment. Lehigh Valley Middle School is the pseudonym used for the setting of this study. Participants who agreed to partake in the study were parents of children who attended Lehigh Valley Middle School at the time of the study.

The participating school district serves about 16,300 students enrolled in Grades K–12. There are about 3,400 students who attend a middle school in this school district, of which Lehigh Valley Middle School encompasses 900 students. Reading and math achievements of the eighth graders in 2011 were 50.1% and 46.2%, respectively (New America Foundation, 2011). Economically, Lehigh Valley School District's poverty rate is 30.6% with 76.3% eligible to receive free or reduced lunch (New America Foundation, 2011).

The middle school's average student body is between the ages of 11 and 14. The racial demographics are 66% Hispanic, 16% Caucasian, 16% African American, 1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1% two or more races. There are slightly more males than females (51% and 49%, respectively). The free or reduced-price lunch program is provided to 87% of the student body. Lehigh Valley Middle School uses a variety of methods to encourage Latino parental involvement that was examined during this study.

### **Participants**

Participants for this transcendental phenomenological study were purposefully selected. In addition, criterion and snowball sampling measures were used to identify Latino parent participants for this study who have experienced the phenomenon of engaging in at least one traditional parental involvement event (Creswell, 2013). Participants included 12 Latino parents who had children in Grades six through eight at Lehigh Valley Middle School and who participated in at least one traditional form of parental involvement. In this study, Latino was defined as anyone who identifies as Latino with origins from Latin American countries such as

Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, South America, and Central America (U. S. Census, 2013).

Moustakas (1994) recommended that the demographics of participants be considered and that the participants have experienced the phenomenon. Although Moustakas did not indicate a number of participants, Creswell (2013) clarified Moustakas's methods by suggesting that a heterogeneous group of at least three individuals who have experienced the same phenomenon be identified for this type of study.

Parents who volunteered to participate verified their willingness to participate by signing a consent form (see Appendix A). The purpose of the study was explained to the parent participants along with the assurance of confidentiality. Prior to the interview and observations, participant consent forms were provided for approval and a signature of consent.

### **Procedures**

Initial contact with the principal of Lehigh Valley Middle School regarding the research study served to establish a rapport between the principal and me. A list of procedures is found in Appendix B. During the initial meeting, the research study was explained and the criteria for participants justified. The principal's knowledge of conducting research at Lehigh Valley School District guided me to the appropriate personnel in the district office. While seeking Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from Liberty University (Appendix C), I created a recruitment letter (Appendix D) and a flyer (Appendix E) to give to the principal who then distributed it to potential participants. The individual interview questions (Appendix F) and focus group questions (Appendix G) were reviewed by a small group of four volunteers who were not associated with Lehigh Valley Middle School, but who met the criteria of being a Latino parent involved traditionally in at least one school activity. I reviewed and edited questions as necessary, based on the recommendations provided.

Approval for the research from Liberty University's IRB (Appendix C) and Lehigh Valley site permission (Appendix H) were granted. Following approval from both review boards, I documented a full description of my experience of the phenomenon. The bracketing of my experiences, biases, and feelings were a necessary step of this transcendental phenomenological study as per Moustakas (1994). The principal of Lehigh Valley Middle school asked the secretary and the parent liaison to introduce me to potential participants.

After consent forms were signed, I scheduled participant interviews. Individual interviews lasted approximately 30–60 minutes and were held at a location chosen by the participant. Interviews were audio-recorded and checked by the participant. Pseudonyms were used in order to maintain the anonymity of participants. The interviews were translated into Spanish as needed.

Once individual interviews were completed, a focus group of three participants was created from those who participated in the individual interviews. The focus group interview took place at a time and location that has been decided between the participants. The focus group interview was approximately 85 minutes and was audio-recorded.

Participants in the focus group were observed during a school-based activity that they attended to determine their interaction with school personnel and parental engagement. Documentation of the event and participant interaction were noted through handwritten notation. The notes were transcribed and written digitally and then checked by the participants.

Programs and procedures utilized by Lehigh Valley Middle School were discussed with one of school secretaries and documented. The information was analyzed and coded for common themes related to parental participation. A review of the current practices was necessary to understand the correspondence between home and school. Interviews (individual

and focus group) along with observed participation and documents regarding programs and procedures were analyzed for common themes and coded in order to reveal the essence of the phenomenon.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My role in the study was to be a human instrument who established a rapport with the study participants. I practiced epoché or bracketing, which is the process of divulging my biases and feelings involved with the research topic. Understanding how I viewed the topic allowed me to observe the participants as well as to collect and analyze the data with clarity and openness. I interpreted and described the experiences of the participants as I sought to understand how the experiences of Latino parents and their approaches to parental involvement were used as a means to decide their school participation. I understood that as the human instrument, my biases or assumptions had to be understood as they pertained to the study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As a Latina nurtured by Latinas, I understand the culture and belief system of Latino parental involvement in the educational system. My family did not participate traditionally in education and so I did not participate traditionally in my children's education. These beliefs changed after I continued my journey as an educator and became more traditionally involved in my children's education. Even as an educator, I still identify with Latino families and their nontraditional parent involvement with regard to education.

Due to my personal experiences, I understand the traditional models of parental involvement as well as the nontraditional models that may not be recognized by educators. Being able to bracket my thoughts, beliefs, and feelings allowed me to refrain from imposing my views on the participants of the study. Focusing on the experiences of Latino parents and their

decision to become involved, rather than on the barriers that prevent their involvement, is one way to support relationship-building between the school and the home.

The epistemological assumption relates to the participants' reality as being true and allows for the reality of parental involvement to be co-created with multiple ways of knowing or understanding the experiences of parental involvement by the subjects of the study. I built a relationship with the participants which allowed a more detailed account of their parental involvement. My biases were understood so that I was not influencing the reality or account of the participants. My role as the researcher required me to become the vessel for the voice of my participants.

The axiological assumption relates to the respect of the values of the participants that needed to be problematized and interrogated through this study (Creswell, 2013). I respected the participants in the study by actually listening to what they were saying and allowing them to tell their story. As a Latina middle school educator, I see the need for parental involvement to promote the success of all students and wonder how to increase the involvement of Latino parents. I did not have any personal relationships with either the principal of Lehigh Valley Middle School or with the participants of the study. I live about three blocks from Lehigh Valley Middle School. Two of my children completed their middle school education at Lehigh Valley Middle School and a third completed sixth grade at the school. None of my children currently attend the middle school as they have graduated high school and are not part of Lehigh Valley School District. The principal of the school was not employed at Lehigh Valley Middle School while my children were enrolled in the school.

## **Data Collection**

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study were gathered following collection of the signed consent forms through individual interviews, a single focus group interview, and observations, as recommended by Moustakas (1994) and Creswell (2013). Data were audio-recorded and researcher field notes and memoing were used to document the observed experiences. A review of current programs or procedures aimed at increasing Latino parental involvement was also conducted.

### **Individual Interviews**

The first method of data collection used for the research study was individual interviews. According to Moustakas (1994), interviews are lengthy, and participants must understand the time involved in the process. Participants were interviewed individually once during the study. Creswell (2013) recommended “multiple interviews with the same individuals” (p. 149) be conducted for a study. Some participants were also interviewed in a focus group setting. I used notes and memos to document my thoughts and feelings about the interviews. These memos also included insight regarding the subject, environment, and overall interview (Creswell, 2013). I arranged interview meetings with each participant. Meetings took place in a location and at a time that was most convenient for the participant. Locations for interviews included the school, a participant’s home, restaurant, and an agreed location in the community. Interviews were semistructured with an open-ended format to allow each participant the opportunity to discuss their views and experiences. Interview questions were translated into Spanish as needed. Each interview was audio-recorded and saved digitally.

Although research questions that elicit rich detailed experiences regarding the parental involvement of Latino parents may be established prior to starting the study, Moustakas (1994)

suggested that researchers build trust between themselves and the participants by beginning with a “social conversation” (p. 114). Moustakas (1994) also explained that the questions may not be used at all during the interview. For the current study, interviews were semistructured with an open-ended format to allow each participant the opportunity to discuss his or her views and experiences (see Appendix F). Interviews were conducted in Spanish and then translated into English when needed. Following are the standardized, open-ended questions used during the semistructured individual interviews with the central research question (CQ) and research subquestions (SQs) addressed in parentheses.

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. In what grade(s) is/are your child(ren) enrolled?
5. What is your description of parenting with regards to education? (CQ and SQ1)
6. How do you perceive your parents’ involvement with your middle school education impacts your involvement with your child’s education? (CQ)
7. How do you perceive your interaction with Lehigh Valley Middle School? What occasions and people stand out for you? (SQ2)
8. What are your perceptions regarding communication between you and Lehigh Valley Middle School? (CQ and SQ2)
9. What thoughts stand out with regards to knowing what is going on with your child’s education and the ability to be involved in school decision-making? (SQ1)
10. Which factor(s) do you feel is/are most critical when deciding to participate, and why? (SQ2)



11. Explain how the experiences of participating affect you or other family members, your children, and educators. (SQ1 and SQ2)
12. What are your perceptions of the Latino culture with regards to parental involvement? (SQ2)
13. How do you perceive your experiences with participating in community, city, and government agency programs that support your children's education? (SQ3)
14. What else would you like to share that is significant with reference to parental involvement?

Questions 1 through 4 were designed to build a relationship between me and the participant. The questions were nonthreatening and support the engagement of a social conversation (Moustakas, 1994). Question 5 addressed the description of parenting, so that I could understand the experiences of Latino parents as they described the meaning of parenting. Epstein and Sanders (2002) described basic obligations and school-related decisions as parenting. I had to have an open mind and accept the participants' views as truth (Moustakas, 1994). The question guided the discussion towards describing the relationship between parents and school. I found that the participants' description of parenting was not very different than that described by Epstein and Sanders.

Question 6 addressed the experiences that participants had with their parents' participation during their middle school education. Through the participants' accounts, I was able to understand how the theory of cultural capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990) shaped the participants' role in parental involvement.

Asking Question 7 allowed participants to focus on the experiences within the setting of the study. Moustakas (1994) listed several general questions to foster the essential in-depth

description of the experience. Asking for the occasion(s) and the people involved evoked the memory of the event and promote more information to be explained.

Question 8 addressed the participants' experiences with communication between school and home. Communication was one of the six types of parental involvement discussed by Epstein and Sanders (2002). Understanding the parents' experiences and feelings about communication fostered a better understanding of the phenomenon. Asking participants about how they felt about an experience is part of Moustakas' (1994) general interview guide.

Question 9 was intended to promote a deeper dive into the idea of communication between home and school and connected to the idea of decision-making (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Parents are in a position to become more involved in and with the shaping of school policy and procedures when they are aware of what is going on in the school.

Questions 10 and 11 prompted participants to explain in detail their thoughts, feelings, motives, and their perceptions about how others felt about their parental participation in their children's middle school education. One of Moustakas's (1994) questions found on the general interview guide asked if information was shared with regard to the experience. Asking guiding questions elicited the information about being involved in a school activity. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) discussed motivations and considerations for parental participation. Parents supported a more detailed narrative when they described their decisions to participate and the factors that are considered.

Question 12 enabled me to gain an understanding participants' perceptions of how their culture may have shaped their views of parental involvement in education. The description fostered a deeper understanding of the role that cultural capital has with the decision of parents to participate (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Question 13 addressed parents' involvement with community, city, and government agencies. According to Epstein and Sanders (2002), outside agencies contact schools about programs aimed to support parents and students. Details Latino parents' experiences during these interactions supported the understanding of the parental involvement phenomenon.

Lastly, Question 14 was constructed after reviewing Moustakas' (1994) general interview guide. The idea was to allow the participants to add any details of experiences involving parental involvement that may have been overlooked during the interview.

### **Focus Group Interview**

The dynamics of the focus group interview allowed participants to hear and share experiences with others. This group was not a problem-solving group nor a decision-making group (Patton, 2015). A focus group interview comprised of three Latino parents was created as a second method of data collection (Creswell, 2013). I selected participants from the individual interviews to participate in the focus group interview. Data were collected from the discussion held between the participants of the focus group interview (Patton, 2015). As with the individual interviews, the focus group interview was semistructured with an open-ended format to allow each participant the opportunity to discuss their views and experiences (see Appendix G). Consensus among participants of the focus group determined the location for the focus group meeting. The interview was audio-recorded and saved digitally. Questions were not needed in Spanish. Following are the standardized, open-ended questions used during the semistructured focus group interview with the central research question (CQ) and research subquestions (SQs) addressed in parentheses.

1. Please introduce yourself to the group and share if you are familiar with each other.
2. State your child(ren)'s grade(s).

3. Converse about the experiences of your Latino culture with regard to parental involvement. (SQ2)
4. What are your perceptions of an event that you participated in at Lehigh Valley Middle School? Explain if you participated in the event someone else discussed. (CQ, SQ2, and SQ3)
5. What are your perceptions with regard to other parent participants? (SQ2)
6. What motivated you to participate in this event? (CQ and SQ2)
7. What are your perceptions regarding how welcomed you are when coming in to the school? (CQ and SQ2)
8. Discuss your experiences with participating in community activities and expand on your experiences if you find that you participated in the same activities. (SQ3)
9. What else would you like to share that is significant with reference to parental involvement?

Questions 1 and 2 were designed to build a relationship between the participants. The questions were nonthreatening and supported the engagement of a social conversation (Moustakas, 1994). One of the members of the focus group was familiar with the other two participants. All participants understood that they shared the experience of having a child at the school to allow for a common experience.

Question 3 enabled me to gain an understanding of how the participants described their culture in a group setting and how it may have shaped their views of parental involvement in education. The participants were Latina, but within the Latino culture, participants identify with specific cultures such Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South American, and Central American (U. S. Census, 2013). Participants shared similarities and differences within their cultural values

regarding parental involvement. The descriptions of the participant's life experiences fostered a deeper understanding of the role of cultural capital with the decision of parents to participate in their child's education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990).

Questions 4 through 6 emphasized the description of events that participants may have participated in at the same time. Participants focused on the experiences within the setting of the Lehigh Valley Middle School. Moustakas (1994) listed several general questions to foster the essential in-depth description of the experience. Asking for the occasion(s) and the people involved evoked the memory of the event and promote more information to be explained. Prompting participants to discuss the experience in a group supported the understanding of the events from a variety of perspectives. Understanding the event from different angles allowed me to have an open mind in order to accept the participants' views as truth (Moustakas, 1994).

Question 7 addressed the experiences of the participants with regard to the school atmosphere. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) discussed motivations and considerations for parental participation. Parents who perceived a positive reaction from the school were more likely to continue to participate in school activities. In a group setting, parents remembered an event that was not discussed in the individual interview. Understanding parents' experiences and feelings about the communication fostered a better understanding of the phenomenon. Asking participants about how they felt about an experience was part of Moustakas' (1994) general interview guide.

Question 8 addressed parents' involvement with community, city, and government agencies. According to Epstein and Sanders (2002), outside agencies contact schools about programs aimed to support parents and students. Details about the experiences that Latino parents had during these interactions supported the understanding of the parental involvement

phenomenon. I was able to get a deeper understanding of parental involvement with regard to the shared experience during the group discussion.

Lastly, Question 9 was constructed after reviewing Moustakas' (1994) general interview guide. The idea was to allow the participants to add any details of experiences involving parental involvement that may have been overlooked during the interview.

### **Observations**

I observed parents who participated in the focus group interview at the following school-based (traditional) parental involvement events: Family Dinner, Community Fun Day, Strengthening Families Program, an IEP workshop, a school board meeting, a Parent Network membership information and sign-up day, and a Parent Network meeting. Notes regarding my observations as well as my thoughts and feelings were digitally recorded and handwritten. The notes that were written manually were transferred into a digital format. The purpose of the observation was to witness, memo, and describe parental involvement during different situations.

Descriptive and reflective notes were electronically recorded (auditory) as well as written (Creswell, 2013). The observations were scheduled since the activities are scheduled school events. My role was that of an observer of and not as a participant in the event. I also examined and documented current programs or procedures aimed at increasing Latino parental involvement.

### **Audiovisual and Documented Materials**

Parent-teacher organization meetings, parent workshops, and other traditional parental involvement activities were video-recorded and documented in order to assist with analyzing the observed events. I wrote field notes throughout the events to document my thoughts and feelings

regarding the subject, environment, and overall scenario (Creswell, 2013). The ability to review the events allowed me to note ideas or feelings that were missed during the event.

### **Data Analysis**

Researchers must consider how to prepare and organize data prior to analyzing the data collected. After the data were collected and organized, the interviews were transcribed, prior to horizontalization of the data, which facilitated the coding of relevant statements. The codes were then clustered into themes and synthesized in order to determine the essence of the phenomenon.

Data analysis followed Moustakas' (1994) "modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data" (p. 121). The first step was to consider how data was to be managed. Data for the current study were collected and electronically stored on a computer, an external back-up drive, and cloud storage. The individual and focus group interviews were recorded using the "Google Voice Recorder" application on my cell phone. The interview recordings were initially saved on my cell phone and then uploaded to my computer, an external back-up drive, and cloud storage after they were roughly transcribed. I also saved observation notes as well as audiovisual and documented materials on my computer, an external back-up drive, and cloud storage. Interviews, recordings, memos and reflections, and observation and field notes were transcribed and stored electronically. Notes and memos were electronically scanned and rewritten, saved on a computer, and used throughout the study. Creswell (2013) recommended "the transcription of information from the study and computer files be used to support the study" (p. 149). According to Creswell (2013), data management enables the ease of information retrieval during the analysis of the data.

Second, a full description of personal experiences with parental involvement at the middle school level was documented. Moustakas (1994) explained this step as epoché or

bracketing, which is the process of setting aside researcher bias as one feature that distinguishes a transcendental phenomenological research study. I have similar demographic descriptors as the participants of the study: I am Latina and had children who attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. Documenting my beliefs and experiences assisted with realizing potential biases; in this step, I focused on the experience of parental involvement and on the phenomenon as I have experienced it. My epoché is the first transcription that was analyzed using Moustakas's (1994) method of analysis.

Moustakas (1994) recognized that data must be transcribed in order for data organization and analysis to begin. The third step of data analysis was to study the data in reference to the significance of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Transcription of the personal narratives of each participant was utilized and the significance of each statement was considered with regard to the description of parental involvement. Any interviews conducted in Spanish were transcribed then translated into English. The recordings were then crudely transcribed to text using the "Speech to Text" feature of the application. I was able to retrieve the transcribed interviews while using Otranscribe and Otter Voice Notes which are transcription programs found on the Internet. Using Otranscribe allowed me to listen to the recording and type or edit the already transcribed interviews for use during the analysis stage of the study. I assigned a number to each interview after it was transcribed. I then numbered the lines of the interviews. I also numbered the lines of the observations and audiovisual notes and documented materials.

The fourth step was to record the statements that were relevant to the description of the experience of parental involvement. Statements that repeated or overlapped were listed. Meaningful units of the experience that did not change were sought throughout the analysis of the statements. These meaningful units are also known as *horizons* (Moustakas, 1994). Each



statement found in both types of interviews, the observations, and the audiovisual and documented materials were recorded on sticky notes. The number of the interview and the line of the statements that repeated or overlapped were written down.

Next, the horizons were reviewed for relationships and clustered into themes. This is known as horizontalization of the data as described by Moustakas (1994). Horizontalization describes the technique in which I organized and categorized the thoughts, themes, and or feelings that repeated in the data regarding the phenomenon with the use of category names and or numbers. Along with horizontalization, I coded recurring themes in order to better categorize the repetition of experiences and description of the lived experiences given by the participants. After reviewing the data as individual lines and statements, codes were revealed, and the thoughts and feelings of the participants were clustered into themes and subthemes. Each data set (individual and focus group questions, observations, and audiovisual and documents) was used to create the themes.

Following the horizontalization of data, the constant themes were synthesized into textural and structural descriptions, which included verbatim examples from the transcribed data. Textural and structural descriptions include exact words of the participants to explain their experiences and how the experience happened (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The main source of textual and structural descriptions were the individual interviews. The focus group interview did produce information, but not as much as did the individual interviews. The observations and the audiovisual and document materials provided little information. Photos of the observations and a still shot of the audiovisual are provided in the results of this study. All data sources were used to construct the textural and structural descriptions.

The seventh step required the construction of a textural-structural description of the meanings and the essence of the experiences of Latino parental involvement at the middle school level. The essence of the experiences emerged through the reading and rereading of the transcriptions. This allowed for the understanding of the participant interviews. Individual and focus group interviews were transcribed. The observations noted during the study were reviewed, read, and transcribed. The audiovisual and documented materials were reviewed as well as the memoing and notes that were taken during observations, audio-video recording, and reading of documented materials. The data were incorporated in the analysis of the phenomenon.

Data analysis continued after transcribing participant interviews and observations. Considering each statement with regard to the significance of the Latino parents' experiences of parental involvement supported the understanding of the life experiences that impacted their participation. Recording each relevant statement using horizontalization, clustering the meanings into themes, synthesizing the meanings, creating a description of textures of the experience, and constructing a textural-structural description of the meaning allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Finally, the essence of the phenomenon was constructed using a composite textural-structural description of the experiences of Latino parental involvement (Moustakas, 1994). A universal description of the experiences of Latino parental involvement and the impact their experiences have on their participation in their child's middle school education was created. The essence of the phenomenon was used to represent the participants as a whole. The data were expressed visually using tables, figures, and verbatim transcriptions (Creswell, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness, also known as “validation of data,” by Moustakas (1994, p. 110), was developed throughout the research study. Moustakas stated that providing all the participants with clear procedures that are maintained by the researcher supports the trustworthiness of a study. Adhering to the methods and procedures of conducting a phenomenological study also promotes the trustworthiness of a study. Trustworthiness in the present study included measures to ensure credibility, dependability and confirmability, and transferability.

#### **Credibility**

I triangulated the data and evidence of the phenomenon by collecting data from various participants who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). As stated in the section of data analysis, epoché and the process of setting aside researcher bias were necessary for a transcendental phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) clarified that this process allows the researcher to be aware of the experiences that may influence the “interpretation and approach” of the research (p. 251). Reflexivity supported the reduction of the bias I may have possessed (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Memoing and bracketing supported the transparency of the researcher by allowing the reader to my thoughts regarding the phenomenon. Triangulation of data required a variety of methods for data collection (Creswell, 2013). The data were collected through individual interviews, a focus group, observations of activities, audiovisual and documented materials. The data had to be dependable in order to be considered trustworthy.

#### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Participants of the study assured the dependability and confirmability of the information gathered. Member checks were implemented to ensure the information provided by the

participants was accurate and reflective of what was shared (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). As noted previously, multiple participants provided data using multiple data collection techniques. The data collected were transcribed and interpreted using rich, thick descriptions to ensure trustworthiness of the study. Giving participants the opportunity to verify the transcription as valid ensured that the voice of the participant was analyzed in the study. Audio- and video-recording of interviews and events allowed me to review the interviews and events for accuracy. Transcribed testimony was sent to participants for validation. No participant contested the contents of the transcriptions.

Finally, dependability and confirmability were achieved through an “audit trail” (Creswell, 2013, p. 333), which supported the research transparency and trustworthiness. All details of the research were documented along with my decisions and activities with regard to the study. My dissertation chair and the committee held me accountable for the process and findings of the study. Constant communication was maintained between the dissertation chair and me. Updates were emailed or given to other committee members throughout the study process. All questions that I had regarding interviews, observations, and documents were referred to the dissertation chair and all recommendations were followed.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the ability for readers to use the findings in other settings (Creswell, 2013). I sought peer review of the study. Those who reviewed the study were able to determine if the findings were transferable through the thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Although parents in this study were Latinos, the study findings could be transferred to other parents with similar experiences. The findings and recommendations would be beneficial

for those seeking to increase the parental involvement of any ethnic group; especially those whose first language is not English.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Moustakas (1994) suggested researchers establish “clear agreements with participants” (p. 109). Confidentiality and transparency were evident and upheld throughout the study. For this research study, ethical consideration for the participants as well as the data was maintained. Data were not collected until all the appropriate approvals were received from Liberty University’s IRB and the Lehigh Valley school district. Electronically saved data were password protected. Additionally, research procedures were provided to participants. I provided participants with details of how all the confidential data and written consent forms were handled. Participants were assured that they could ask questions and discuss any issues with me at any time during and after the study. Participants also understood that they could discontinue participation in the study at any time (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the life experiences of Latino parents to understand the impact their experiences have on their participation in their child’s middle school education. Chapter Three of this study included an explanation of the design for the research, which was clearly identified as a transcendental phenomenological research study. Rationalization for the research design was provided and explained. The selection of the setting was described and discussed. The criteria for participant selection were provided along with the ethical considerations of the study. Triangulation using different methods of data collection was identified and explanations of each method were provided. Analysis of the data, once collected, was described to follow a method of transcription, horizontalization, interpretation, and divulging

the essence of the study (Moustakas, 1994). The trustworthiness of the study was promoted through a thorough description of the research method. The ethical considerations were outlined and discussed with assurances of anonymity through the use of pseudonyms for the setting and participants of the study. This study served to explore the life experiences and social relationships among Latino parents, their middle school children, and school personnel such as teachers, administrators, and policymakers for the purpose of understanding how the life experiences of Latino parents impacted their participation in their child's middle school education. The relationship deserved a thorough examination through a transcendental phenomenological study approach (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. An overview of the participants is provided followed by the results of the study. The results are presented in themes that have been categorized according to the related research questions. The four themes presented in this chapter include (a) defining parental involvement, (b) communication, (c) reasons for participation, and (d) perceptions about those involved. Each overarching theme comprises two to three subthemes.

The primary source of data was individual interviews. The secondary source of data was from the focus group interview which comprised of three participants from the individual interviews. Another source of data was from the notes written during the observation. The fourth source of data was the notes from the audiovisual and documented materials. Finally, data received after reviewing and memoing information about the current practices for increasing parental involvement was included in the study findings. The chapter also includes answers to the research questions after the discussion of the themes, concluding with a summary of the chapter.

### **Participants**

Initially, criterion sampling was used because potential participant contact information was given to me by one of the school secretaries or the parent liaison. After conducting the first interview, I used snowball sampling because potential participant contact information was given to me by participants or at a school event that I was invited to attend. This study included 12 participants, all of whom identified themselves as Latino parents with at least one middle school

child and who participated in at least one school event. The middle school children were enrolled at Lehigh Valley Middle School during the time of interviews. There was one father and 11 mothers who participated in this study. Participants were between 29 and 47 years of age. Of the participants, 10 identified their ethnicity as Puerto Rican, one identified her ethnicity as Venezuelan and the other as Columbian. Most of the participants—eight of the 12—reported that their parents were not involved in their middle school education.

Most interviews were conducted at the home of the participant. One interview was held at Lehigh Valley Middle School, two were held at Panera Bread (a coffee shop–restaurant), and one in a hospital family room. Table 1 includes an overview of the pseudonyms used for each participant along with their age, grade(s) of their child(ren), ethnicity, and if their parent was involved in their middle school education. Individual descriptions of each participant are provided following the table.



Table 1

*Participant Demographics*

Participant	Age	Child 1 grade	Child 2 grade	Child 3 grade	Child 4 grade	Ethnicity	Parents involved in education
Anna	38	3	7	8	11	Puerto Rican	No
Celia	34	8	9			Puerto Rican	Yes
Christina	40	4	7			Puerto Rican	No
Claribel	31	7	8	12+		Puerto Rican	No
Emelia	47	7	12+			Columbian	No
Jose	36	3	7	8	11	Puerto Rican	No
Juana	33	4	7			Puerto Rican	No
Julia	33	1	6	9		Puerto Rican	No
Lilliana	30	K	7			Puerto Rican	No
Lucia	29	1	3	6		Puerto Rican	Yes
Maria	38	7				Venezuelan	Yes
Paulina	36	3	5	7		Puerto Rican	Yes

The following is a more detailed description of each of the participants. The details include the language used (English or Spanish) to complete the interview. Also shared are the participant's description of parenting with regards to education. Finally, the participants' thoughts regarding if their parents were engaged in their education are included. The participants are listed in alphabetical order by their assigned pseudonyms.

**Anna**

Anna was 38 years old at the time of the interview, and she is a Puerto Rican mother of four children. Anna's interview was conducted in her home. She is fluent in English and in Spanish. At the time of the interview, her children were in elementary, middle, and high school;

she had two children attending Lehigh Valley Middle School. She said that her mother was not involved with her middle school education which prompted her to be more involved with her children's educational lives. Her mother just made sure she was up for school and returned home. The only time her mother thought about entering the school was if she received a negative phone call regarding Anna; however, she was not a behavior or academic issue, so her mother never had to go into the school. She recalled "wishing if Mommy did this a little bit more, things would have been different." She said her mother "was there but wasn't there." Anna explained that she was more involved with her children's education because she does not want her children to feel the way she did when she did not see her mother present at school events. She described herself as "that crazy parent that teachers always see and sometimes want to wring my neck." Anna described parenting with regard to education as "being important for the parents to engage with [their] child . . . that's [their] best job in education. To make sure [they] are interacting with homework, interacting with teachers . . . knowing, going to all school things."

### **Celia**

Celia was 34 years old during the interview, and she is a Puerto Rican mother of two children. Celia's interview was conducted in Spanish at Lehigh Valley Middle School. She understood very little English, and preferred Spanish. Her children were in middle and high school at the time of the interview, with one child who attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. She was born and raised in Puerto Rico. She explained that her parents would go to school to get her report card and attend other school activities, but she is more involved than her parents were. Celia explained that even though she does not have a car, she would do what she needed to do to attend her children's school events; for example, she has walked across town when an event was

at another school. She does take the bus, but it is not always possible. When the events take place after 4 p.m., her husband is not working and is able to drive to the events. She explained that she often relies on school transportation to get her children to events if they have to arrive before her husband is home. She described parenting with regard to education as wanting her children to move forward: “To be good students [so] they can be someone in life.”

### **Christina**

Christina was 40 years old at the time of the interview, and a Puerto Rican mother of two children in elementary and middle school. Christina’s interview was conducted at Panera Bread. She is fluent in both English and Spanish. She had one child that attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. She explained that her parents tried to help her as best as they could, but were not as involved as she is with the education of her children. Christina noted that she did attend conferences and some sporting events, but due to her work schedule it was hard to attend some events. She shared that she gauged “how interested my kid was in [a] specific type of activity. If I felt that it was something important for my daughter, then I’m all in.” She explained that at that point the schedule did not matter, and she would make things work so she could attend. She felt that there was not a lot of parental involvement at Lehigh Valley Middle School and wished that there were more. She noted that there was a lack of parental involvement with all the parents, not just the Latino parents. Christina explained that there may be a variety of reasons that parents do not show up and it saddens her. She said that parenting with regard to education was “always being involved.”

### **Claribel**

Claribel was 31 years old during the interview, and a Puerto Rican mother of three. Claribel’s interview was conducted in English in her home. She was fluent in both English and

Spanish. During the interview, I was able to hear that English was not her first language. She has three children: two children attended Lehigh Valley Middle School and one was in college. She said that her mother “was there, but she wasn’t there.” Her parents were always present and involved in her life but did not go into the school. She felt that times were different from when she went to school. She stated that she is more protective of her children than her mother was with her. She felt that “it was kind of rough [growing up]. I don’t want my kids to go through that so that’s why I am always there as a mother for my kids.” Claribel does not want her children to experience the difficulty that she experienced by not having her mother educationally involved. She described parenting as pushing one’s children to “do their best and be there for them as their parent. To prove to them [children] that they can do better every day . . . education comes first.”

### **Emelia**

Emelia was 47 years old during the interview, and a Columbian mother of two with one child in college and the other attending Lehigh Valley Middle School. Emelia’s interview was conducted at Panera Bread in English. She was fluent in both English and Spanish. She stated that although her parents did not speak English and did not understand the school system, they knew what was going on at school. She described her mother as being involved in her educational life by constantly asking about school and knowing what was going on with grades and providing a space for homework, but she was never physically at the school. Her description of parenting with regard to education was “that parents are the first and foremost teacher a child can have.” She also noted, “Parents could mean whoever is taking the role of parenting a child.” She explained that not all parents were biologically the child’s mother or father. She knew many

grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who were raising children that were not their biological child.

### **Jose**

Jose was 36 years old at the time of the interview, and a Puerto Rican father of four whose children attended elementary, middle, and high school. Jose's interview was conducted in English. He is fluent in both English and Spanish, but preferred English. Two of his children attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. He described his parents as always being part of his life, but with regard to school, they were not there. He remembered his father waking him up for school, making sure he got to school, and picking him up at the end of the day. His father only spoke Spanish and his mother was always busy. He felt that his parents did not push him to do what he was supposed to do in school. He explained that he dropped out of high school and felt that his parents did not really care. He stated that he then realized how important education was and earned his GED. His description of parenting with regard to education was to be involved:

You gotta know everything that's going on at all times . . . the only way to do that is to be involved and to have open communication, not only with teachers, but with all the staff at the school so you can know what is going on.

### **Juana**

Juana was 33 years old during the interview, and a Puerto Rican mother of two children, one of whom attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. Juana's interview was conducted in her home in Spanish because she understood little English. Her description of parenting with regard to education was that "it's important that kids have a good education . . . make sure [your children] are in school every day and that they do their homework." Her parents were not present in any activity or anything major that involved school. She stated that she did not have

problems in school and they never went to school, except to pick up her report card. Juana said she is very different than her parents. She attends anything that the school is hosting. She explained that before she had her baby, she was even more involved. She would volunteer as a homeroom aide and would have continued if it were possible. She said she does not want her children to study alone and wants them to know that she will support them in anything that they do. She wants them to be able to confide in her and to know that she will always be there.

### **Julia**

Julia is was 33 years old at the time of the interview, and a Puerto Rican parent of three children, in elementary, middle, and high school. Julia's interview was conducted at one of the area hospitals. Her child was having health issues during the time that we scheduled the interview and Julia asked me to see her at the hospital. Her interview was conducted in English and she was fluent in both English and Spanish. She had one child attending Lehigh Valley Middle School. Julia said, "The reason I am the way I am today is because my mom was never involved." Julia explained that she made a promise to herself about being there for her children. She noted that she has kept her word and has not missed a basketball game, award show, or spelling bee. She is also part of the elementary school Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). Her description of parenting with regard to education was, "Education is number one at home. We strive to do our best and always give 110%."

### **Lilliana**

Lilliana was 30 years old during the interview, and a Puerto Rican mother with two children. Lilliana's interview was conducted in her home in English. She is fluent in both English and Spanish. She was nervous about the interview and explained that she was "bad" at answering questions and was afraid of being judged harshly. After helping Lilliana to

understand that there were no right or wrong answers because the questions were all about her experiences, I explained the anonymity of the participants and she felt more comfortable. One of her children was in kindergarten and the other attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. Lilliana described parenting with regard to education as, “[wanting my] kids to do and to go far in their education; to go further than where I went and where I am at.” She said her parents did not care much about her education. They did not push her, and she wants a better life for her children.

### **Lucia**

Lucia was 29 years old at the time of the interview, and a Puerto Rican parent of two children in elementary and middle school. Her interview was completed in her home in English. Lucia explained that she understands some Spanish but does not speak it well. Lucia stated she does not miss an individualized education plan (IEP) meeting or conference and she also attends some sporting events. She wished she could attend more events at school, but her work schedule does not allow it. One of her children attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. She described her mother as being involved in her education: “She was part of the PTA.” Lucia’s description of parenting with regard to education was to be involved: “Take time to do homework every day after school.”

### **Maria**

Maria was 38 years old during the interview, and a Venezuelan mother with a child who attended Lehigh Valley Middle School. Maria’s interview was conducted in her home in Spanish because she understood little English. She said that her mother attended school activities and participated in her education. She explained that she was involved in her children’s education because her mother was very involved in her education. She described parenting with regard to education as “being informed, more informed, participate more in

meetings and be more devoted and more attentive to the environment both inside and outside the school.”

### **Paulina**

Paulina was 36 years old during the interview, and a Puerto Rican parent of three children in elementary, middle, and high school. Her interview was completed at her home in English. She is fluent in both English and in Spanish. Paulina is very active with her children’s education and she feels that parents must speak up for their children. She attends many school events and is involved in several community committees that promote student success. She had one child attending Lehigh Valley Middle School. She described her mother as being very involved in her education. The principals, teachers, guidance counselors and other parents knew her. Paulina’s description of parenting with regard to education was that parenting and education “go hand-in-hand. You must be able to provide education to your children in and outside of the school environment.” She explained that core values began “long before children even enter school. Having parents who have also taken on the role of an educator is imperative to having solid children.”

## **Results**

This study was based on one central question with three sub-questions that addressed Latino parents’ perceptions of how their life experiences impacted their participation in their child’s middle school education. Perceived relationships between parents, school personnel, and community programs were discussed to expand on the information regarding parental participation. Following are the themes and subthemes that were developed while reviewing the data. An explanation of how each theme was used to answer the research questions follow the discussion of subthemes. These horizons were then reviewed and clustered into themes,



subthemes, and codes. The data analysis produced four major themes, 10 subthemes, and 38 codes.

The four major themes that are presented in this chapter include (a) defining parental involvement, (b) communication, (c) reasons for participation, and (d) perceptions of those involved. Each major theme is discussed using the subthemes and textural and structural descriptions to illuminate the experiences of the participants.

### **Major Theme 1: Defining Parental Involvement**

The first major theme found during data analysis was defining parental involvement. One of the theories that guided this study and the development of the research questions was parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). It was important to understand the experiences of the participants as well as how they defined parental involvement. There were two subthemes that supported the first major theme: understanding and reiterating the importance of education and encouraging children to succeed (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Theme 1: Defining Parental Involvement*

Theme 1: Defining Parental Involvement	
Subtheme	Code
Understanding and reiterating the importance of education	Importance of education (5)
	Priority of education (5)
	Parent as teacher (4)
	Team effort between school and home (5)
Encouraging children to succeed	Motivate to do their best (7)
	Engage with school activities (5)
	Help with homework (6)
	Support student achievement (4)

**Understanding and reiterating the importance of education.** The first subtheme to emerge from Theme 1 was understanding and reiterating the importance of education. With

regard to education, participants described parenting as understanding and reiterating the importance of education to their children. According to Juana, “It’s important that kids have a good education . . . I take them every day. I make sure they are in school every day.” Anna expressed that being engaged with school shows children the importance of education:

They get to see how important we find school if we go after hours or are interacting with teachers. So, I think that in itself . . . them seeing it is a big impact and it tells them how important all of that is to us.

Jose spoke from the point of view of not having his parents involved in his education and the need for parents to stress the importance of education. He spoke about dropping out and not understanding the importance of education until after he dropped out: “It’s just important, man; I think it’s very important to stay in school. I mean, like I said, everybody has their own situation . . . me speaking as a kid that came from parents that weren’t involved, it’s very important.” Maria added, “As a parent, you need to tell [your children] how important it is to study and do well in school.”

Several participants noted that education must be set as a priority. Julia explained, “We strive to do our best. Always give 110% at everything that you do, school comes first, always. Education comes first.” Claribel stated, “Well, education is number one at home.” During the focus group interview, Emelia also said that education was number one, and “They know I don’t play when it comes to school.”

According to Emelia, “I believe that parents are at the first and foremost teacher a child can have.” She and other participants explained that a parent is a child’s teacher. Maria stated that parents need “to participate more in the programs to educate [themselves] and workshops to know first as parents then to meet children where they are.” Anna and Lucia’s remarks were

similar to Maria's. Anna commented, "as a parent, knowing, going to all school the things they do and teaching them." Lucia remarked, "I know there's workshops. I do a lot of Google, which helps me, then I can help him." Attending school events and workshops supports working as a team.

Jose said, "When an educator feels like, 'alright, this kid's parent is involved. This kid's parent is this . . . is that' and it's a team effort they aren't going to end up having an issue with the child." The focus group participants all agreed on the importance of teamwork between home and school. During Anna's interview, she stated,

I think it's just, the whole thing, I will say, just a team effort. You work it out with the teacher. It's all a whole other marriage. They are like "We can take care of it. It'll fix . . ." You know. "Whether we fix it here or they fix it at home, or we fix it together. It's something that will be done." Interacting with teachers . . . all that stuff, I think, is important.

**Encouraging children to succeed.** The second subtheme to be revealed from Theme 1 was encouraging children to succeed. Participants also indicated that encouraging children to succeed was also part of parenting with regard to education. There were four codes that encompassed the subtheme of encouraging children to succeed: motivate to do their best, engage with school activities, help with homework, and support student achievement.

The first code created was the need to motivate children to do their best. Celia stated that as a parent, she "[wants] them to move forward . . . to be good students so they could be someone in life." Lilliana stated, "I try to push him as much as I can . . . [my parents] wouldn't push me the way I pushed my kids." Jose stated, "I don't stop pushing them. Always, always, always, on them." Julia said, "We strive to do our best."

The second code addressed engaging with school activities. As Anna stated, “It’s important for the parents to engaged with [their] child. You make sure your child is doing everything right with, like, that’s your best your job in education.” Lucia stated she agreed to “get more involved with him to help him with school.” Maria’s insight was for parents to “be informed, more informed, participate more in meeting, be more devoted and more attentive to the environment both inside and outside of the school.” She continued,

I participate in anything and everything that is beneficial for me and my kids . . . It is to teach me because there are many things that as a mother I still do not know and that is why the workshops we attended is for us to know our children more. I try to know more about my daughter and to know more about myself. The more I participate, the more I learn.

Jose added, “You gotta know everything that’s going on at all times . . . the only way to do that is to be involved.”

The next code that addressed engaging with school activities was information about helping with homework. Anna declared, “Make sure you’re interacting with homework.” Juana indicated that she “[makes] sure that they have and that they do their homework.” Lucia stated, “We’d take time to do homework every day after school, make sure that’s done before they can play or watch TV or do anything else.” Christina also discussed homework: “I’m always trying to help them as much as I can with the homework, because sometimes the homework is a little difficult.”

The final code related to engaging with school activities was supporting student achievement. Lucia felt that supporting student achievement was “part of growing and if they don’t have that backbone to help them through their education, how can you expect them to do

well?” Lilliana stated, “I want my kids to do and to go far and their education further than where I went and where I’m at.” Supporting one’s children was also discussed during the focus group. Emelia noted, “We work, will complement what they’re doing at school. Because it’s very important.”

## **Major Theme 2: Communication**

The second major theme that emerged during the study was communication. Communication is one of Epstein and Sanders’s (2002) types of traditional parent involvement. Current practices for increasing parental involvement require schools to contact parents with regard to student achievement and parental involvement. There is no district policy indicating the form of communication; administrators, teachers, and school personnel can choose the method of communication. There were three subthemes related to communication that emerged from the study. The subthemes included how parents perceived communication between school and home, the means of communication and parents’ general feelings regarding decision-making with regard to their child’s education (see Table 3).

Table 3

*Theme 2: Communication*

Theme 2: Communication	
Subtheme	Code
Perceptions of communication	Language accommodations (7) Inconsistent communication (5) Communication updates (3) Communication builds relationships (4) Honest communication (3) Open communication (3)
Means of communication	Face to face (6) Phone calls or text (6) Class Dojo (4) Email (5) Sapphire System (5)
Decision-making	Decision-making and IEPs (11) Be their voice (5) Parents part of decision-making (4) Need to be more involved (3)

**Perceptions of communication.** The first subtheme to emerge from Theme 2, communication, was perceptions of communication. There were six codes that addressed how parents perceived the communication: (a) language accommodations, (b) inconsistent communication, (c) communication that dealt with educational updates, (d) the perception that communication can built relationships, (e) the need for honest communication, and (f) the need for open communication between home and school. All of the participants answered the question regarding how they perceived the communication between them and Lehigh Valley Middle School. Epstein and Sanders (2002) noted that communication is the responsibility of the school. The U. S. Department of Education (2004) expected and mandated that schools reach out to parents.

Several parents discussed the need for language accommodations in order to promote parental involvement. Celia, Juana, and Maria understand Spanish better than English and need correspondence from the school to be in Spanish. Celia stated that when she calls the school she looks for and speaks to anyone who speaks Spanish. Claribel noted, “A lot of the Latinos doesn’t speak most of the English. A lot of these teachers, you know, they speak English and is hard for [Latinos] to understand what they’re saying.” During the focus group interview, Emelia explained that she has heard parents say how they are intimidated to participate because they do not know English: “I heard a mom say, ‘Oh, but I am scared to come in because I don’t speak the language.’” Julia further discussed that the language accommodations are not only regarding English to Spanish and vice versa, but also with regard to academic language used by educators:

First of all, a lot of [parents], a lot of them don’t know these long and powerful words. So, if they don’t know what the heck they’re reading, they’re just going to look at it as just a piece of paper. If [educators] are not speaking their language—and I don’t mean Spanish—I mean, like, not dumbing it down, but use words that they use on a daily basis. Not “behooved” or, you know, not those kinds of words, because [parents] don’t speak like that.

Emelia also discussed the idea of not understanding academic language during her interview. She talked about how difficult it is for some parents to understand what teachers are saying especially if they are second language learners:

I think it’s just understanding that not and not everybody feels comfortable saying, “Um, I don’t know what you mean.” Teachers need to explain things as clear as possible. Why not say, “Oh, in this case . . .” and give an example. I remember asking, “What do you mean by decoding?” Not everyone asks questions. Speaking of questions, did you know

that there isn't such a thing as *WH* questions in Spanish? They don't start with *WH*, so that makes no sense to someone who doesn't understand English.

Emelia also noted that communication is not sufficient to encourage parents to ask questions or get information.

The next code involved inconsistent communication. Several participants explained that although they do get information from the school, they do not always receive all the messages. Paulina rated the communication as "an 8 out of 10." Lilliana said, "Communication is a little rough around the edges. Most teachers don't communicate with parents." Emelia explained that she is a persistent parent and seeks information without being afraid to ask questions. She stated that those who are not asking questions, do not get the information needed.

Although each participant discussed communication as being necessary, more than half expressed that communication is very important and it is necessary to update each other. Anna explained, "I think it's key because if we not communicating, we aren't on the same page." Juana said, "I think it's important because if there isn't any communication one wouldn't know anything. One wouldn't know how things are going or anything. For me it's important." Lucia mentioned that constant communication helps to keep parents connected.

By staying connected, parents and teachers can form a bond. Participants shared that communication can build relationships. Juana explained that when teachers see a parent constantly, they are more "willing to tell you things and it ends up being great as far as relationships go." Jose stated, "Relationships are stronger when you participate. When [teachers] see that you communicate, an educator feels like, 'alright, this kid's parent is involved.'" Jose pointed out that not only does communication help to create a bond, it also allows for honest communication.



Honest communication was discussed in a few of the interviews. Lucia indicated that teachers are to be honest and straightforward: “[Teachers] are really honest and upfront. I mean, they say when [my child is] doing wrong and you know, they even come up with options of how we can fix it. I just work with them to try to get him to do better.” Lilliana suggested that “administrators and teachers just need to be honest with parents,” while Julia explained,

You know, [teachers] need to be very straight up with [parents]. Don’t sugarcoat things. Say how it is . . . even if [they] have to put a curse word in there. You know, because people like real. People like honesty, you know. They don’t like, “I can’t explain it.” But if my son is going through something, be honest with me: “Hey, this is not working for your child. Let’s try this . . .” Like, “Yo, wake up! Like, this is real. Something’s going on with your child” or “Your son needs help; your daughter needs this!” Like, I think the teachers need to be 100% more honest with the parents.

Honest communication may lead to open communication between home and school.

It is important to have open communication. Anna described her communication with Lehigh Valley Middle School as being open. Christina’s sentiments were the same: “I always liked having those communications open, because I think that’s really important.” According to Jose, open communication is needed between the parent and all staff members: “I need open communication with teachers. Open communication, not only with teachers, but with all the staff at the school, you know, so that you can know what’s going on.” Paulina reiterated Jose’s statement in her interview: “[Parents need] to have an open flow of communication and making sure that everyone’s insight is being heard and felt.” Open communication was also discussed during the focus group interview and Paulina added to the concept by saying, “It leaves it more open to where the teacher could be like, “Listen, your kid is doing this and that” and it’s easier

on both sides.” There are a variety of ways that Lehigh Valley Middle School communicates with parents.

**Means of communication.** The second subtheme that supported Theme 2 was the means of communication between school and home. Before the invention of the telephone, there were two ways schools communicated with home: U. S. Postal Service and face-to-face. Technology has increased the methods by which schools can get the information out to parents. During the study, there were five notable forms of communication discussed. There was a brief mention of written notes or flyers by a few participants, but this method was not discussed as being the main means of communication. Julia stated, “I am more of like ‘call me, email me, text me.’” The major means of communication were face-to-face, phone calls, Class Dojo, email, and use of the Sapphire System.

The main form of communication discussed was face-to-face meetings or discussions. Juana was documented above alluding to face-to-face encounters with teachers. She stated, “The more they see your face, the more they’re willing to tell you things.” Maria shared that although she did not speak English well, she felt comfortable going into Lehigh Valley Middle School and discussing issues with school personnel. According to Claribel, “that means a lot, you know, just sitting down for them to understand how you are feeling.” Claribel also described how she felt when she when in to discuss an issue: “They fixed everything right there and I loved it. You know, it was a bang, bang, and let’s do this. That’s how it’s supposed to be done.” Lilliana noted that she “would go class to class and ask [teachers], ‘Hey you know, can [my child] do extra credit?’ They knew me.” During the focus group discussion, Anna, Emelia, and Paulina discussed a school event called “Coffee and Conversation” when teachers and administrators meet with parents and share ideas. The focus group also talked about conferences and open

house. Anna stated, “That’s when you first get to know the teachers- yeah, speaking with them from day one.”

Another form of communication discussed was phone calls and/or texts. Juana explained that although she does not speak much English, she does get phone calls and texts from teachers or the school. Maria also said, “They call me on the phone or send a text.” Lucia shared that she gets texts or phone calls about meetings or other events happening at the school: “I want the calls; I expect the calls.” During the focus group interview, participants discussed how easy it is to call and speak to someone at school to report an issue or make an appointment to speak with someone. Anna mentioned that she “[gets] tired of calling sometimes when she leaves a message and there is no response back”; she continued, “I speak to the secretary and I feel bad because they know my voice and know that the teacher or counselor didn’t get back to me. But it’s okay, I keep trying or find another way to communicate.”

The next form of communication is the use of Class Dojo, a technology that allows for two-way communication between educators and parents. According to Juana, “For the most part, the school uses Class Dojo. They send text messages from teachers to parents. It is used to communicate via text with the teachers and administrators regarding school-related things.” Lucia explained, “[Teachers] send me, on Class Dojo, [her son’s] homework, because he has trouble remembering things. They also send me when he has quizzes and what will be on the quizzes.” She also recalls a time that the teacher noted her son did not complete the assignment and she wrote back using Class Dojo that she remembered helping him with the work. She found it in his bookbag. “I took a picture of it right away and sent it through Class Dojo so she could see it.” Emelia explained that she stays “connected with [her son’s] teachers . . . outside of school hours through Class Dojo.” She stated that there have been times when she has asked her

son if he has homework and he would say, “no, and then when I open Class Dojo, I am like, ‘Oh by the way, you DO have math homework.’” Emelia explained that one of the great things about Class Dojo is that it can translate from English to Spanish and vice versa. She felt that not many parents use the system, or they do not know about the system.

Another form of electronic communication is email. According to Anna, “I get emails from the teachers ‘cause weekly, I check in. . . . I send emails about issues because I am that annoying parent. If I cannot get through on the phone, you will get an email.” Emelia stated that she often took “pictures of emails” to keep in a file when keeping track of important information or issues. She recalled a meeting when a teacher told her she could email every night for updates. She laughed and explained that she was emailing every night for a week:

I told him, “Be careful what you ask for because I will email you every single night to ask you what the homework is.” The very next week, he started using Class Dojo and then just post every homework or even the shortcuts to math.

Christina, Jose, and Paulina also mentioned that they use email as a means to communicate with teachers and administrators. Christina explained, “I can message a teacher and they’ll respond to me. Not necessarily have to be right away, but within a timely manner.”

The final form of communication between educators and parents is the school system called Sapphire. Emelia described the Sapphire System as a “parent portal and student portal” used to check grades and assignments. Anna also indicated that she used the Sapphire System to verify grades. She was shocked to see that her son “managed to get an F which I didn’t know about.” She was surprised because she was on top of his assignments. She felt that one of the problems was that lack of communication with that particular teacher. Lucia and Jose indicated that they also use Sapphire to look at grades, but they mainly rely on it for grades at the end of

the quarter. Lucia also recalled using it to see that her son's absences were noted as excused when he was out sick for over a week. Along with several other parents, Emelia explained that she is really on top of her children's assignments because her one child has a learning disability and "if the technology is out there, it might as well be used."

**Decision-making.** The final subtheme for Theme 2 was decision-making. Participants indicated that parents need to be more involved and they should be part of school-based decisions. Several stated that parents need to be the voice for their child; especially when the child has an IEP for learning disabilities.

Lilliana was straightforward with her view: "Parents should be more involved in their child's education." Maria felt the same as Lilliana with her comments regarding needing to be more involved: "Parents should participate more. I know that they need to work and it's 'work, work, work,' but we should focus more on the children." Christina was very sincere and seemed to be heartbroken when explaining her stance on parental involvement: "I just, I just feel that there's some parents out there that need to be more involved with their kids . . . I think it would change the kid's way of thinking and they would stay out of trouble." Christina also stated that increasing parental involvement "would change the negative concepts of students, parents, and teacher involvement with the whole district."

When parents are more involved, they may be more prone to be part of school-based decision-making. "I want to be part of that decision. I should be part of that decision" is what Anna declared during her interview about school-based decision-making. Claribel stated, "We all should be [able to make decisions] as parents. Why not? We should because it's our kids involved in this school." Lucia felt it was crucial to be part of decisions that affect children's education: "Who better to help the school with knowing the child and what can help in a

situation?” Julia expressed that she is able to make decisions at the elementary level as part of the PTA: “There isn’t a PTA or anything like that here so it’s up to the parent to find ways to be part of making decisions.” According to Julia, being able to help make decisions at school allows parents to become the voice of their children:

It’s also important to be involved in the decision-making because I like to know what changes are happening at school. I can give my opinion if this is going to work for my child. If something is not going to work for my son or my daughter, I need to be able to say so because it’s for their education.

Claribel stated, “[Parents] should have the right maybe to say, ‘Listen, well, maybe this should be the best for all of the kids or we should have some rights to say something.’” Christina recalled a time her child was struggling in a class. After she investigated further, she found there were other students falling behind because the teacher was going too fast. Christina explained,

The kids were going crazy . . . and I remember messaging the teacher and I messaged the principal. They both got working on a plan and they slowed down the teaching method because the kids were failing some of the tests. So that was a plus, because I felt like, okay. I spoke up about this, not only my student was able to strive in that class, but the rest of the students were as well. I had to speak up about it. . . . Something that not a lot of parents would do.

Claribel felt parents must listen to their children and speak up:

Go to school, sit down, and speak about it. That’s where a lot of parents are making a mistake about it. [They say] “Ahh, everything is ok.” [They] let it go. That’s the problem. That’s what we are going through. Hear your child out. If they are going

through a problem at school, they are going through problems with homework, go to school. Try to help them out.

Participants spoke about the importance of speaking up for their children, especially if their child has an IEP.

Participants discussed that they felt they were able to make decisions about their children's education during their children's IEP meeting. Lucia explained how she could not understand how her child's teachers would say he was progressing in school and doing well, but he read at a kindergarten level. "That wasn't okay. I kept pushing and pushing them that finally, the end of third grade, I was like "Look, someone's got to do something because if he doesn't get on track now, when he is in middle school he's just going to sink.'" She described how teachers did not feel that behavior was an issue, but because she noticed he had trouble focusing at home, she was able to have behavior in his IEP. Lucia stated, "When he can't stay focused, he has a rubber band strapped on the leg of his chair that he plays with. I mean it's just little things that have helped him."

According to Emelia, "I am a very involved parent because of my son's disability; I make it my business to understand what he needs." Emelia explained how part of her son's disability is that he is off task and he does not write things down. Teachers were to make sure he wrote his homework down or that the homework was sent home via email. According to Emelia, during a conference, a teacher stated, "Oh well, it's his responsibility." She reinforced the IEP accommodations and reminded them that the plan was put in to place by she and the teachers in the year prior. She felt the plan was not being followed, so she reminded them that the IEP was a legal document and it needed to be followed. She explained that she was at the meeting to amend the plan, but not at the expense of the progress her child was making.

Julia also spoke about decision-making in reference to her son's disability. "Well, for me it's important with regards to special education. It's important to at least make note if something isn't working and they let me know and how I can come help him or help him at home."

Lilliana's annoyance was evident when she discussed her ability to make decisions:

Oh, it's a little frustrating because I know they could do better for my son. I understand it's more of my son's responsibility as well, but my son also has Asperger's. So, I feel like he needs more one-on-one, but they think he does not. . . . I feel like they would understand my child better if I was there. I feel like they would make better decisions if I were involved.

Julia explained, "If you don't know your rights as a parent, they're not going to tell you." She continued by saying she "learned all the information on my own. Nobody told me, 'Hey, you have to do this to find an autistic support group so he can be successful.' No, I had to find these things out on my own." Juana mentioned that making decisions was of the most critical factors to her involvement. "If I have to go to a meeting like, let's say, an IEP or something for my daughter, like a parent meeting and decisions must be made." Becoming involved, being the voice for children, being part of making decisions at the school level or at an IEP meeting are all reasons for participating.

### **Major Theme 3: Reasons for Participation**

The third major theme found in analyzing the data was reasons for parents' participation. There were three subthemes used to support this theme: child-centered, school environment, and family- and community-centered.



Table 4

*Theme 3: Reasons for Participation*

Theme 3: Reasons for Participation	
Subtheme	Code
Child-centered	Important to child (7) Benefit to child (4)
School environment	Need to understand school system (10) Be aware of events (4) Sense of belonging (3)
Family- and community-centered	Community participation (24) Shared event (5)

**Child-centered.** The first subtheme to emerge from the third major theme was child-centered. The two codes used to create this subtheme included the importance of the event to the child and whether the event was a benefit to the child. As Jose explained,

They're more important to me than anything. You know what I mean? So, I want them to know . . . I want them to see that . . . I'm there. . . . They know that it's a time investment. [They] look at me, like, and say, "Ah man, Dad's not going to be there!" But it is something that they see that we're always there.

Christina said, "It doesn't matter what I have to do, but if it's something that I feel is important to her, it is to be important to me as well, as a parent." She continued the discussion by adding,

I have my kids trusting that I'm gonna be that parent [that] is always going to try to be as involved as I can in any type of activity at school, and it makes me feel good that my kid knows that I could be there and makes me feel good that the teachers are hoping that I could be there.

Lilliana also stated, “If my kids are interested in that, we would participate.” Anna felt that when it is important to her kids and they see that she participates, “then it tells them how important all of that is to us.” Jose mentioned, “It’s very important for your kids . . . to be involved.”

Julia, Christina, and Maria discussed that they will attend events that are beneficial for their children. According to Julia, “I will participate in anything as long as it benefits the kids.” Christina mentioned, “Anything that’s positive for my kid and their experience at school, I believe is positive to go to.” Maria’s comments mirrored both Julia and Christina’s thoughts: “I participate in anything and everything that is beneficial for me and my kids.”

**School environment.** The second subtheme to emerge from Theme 3, reasons for participation, was school environment. The three codes used to create this subtheme were the need to understand school system, to be aware of the events, and to have a sense of belonging. Another theory that guided this study and the development of the research questions was Bourdieu and Passeron’s (1990) cultural capital theory. Understanding the school system would also be classified as being part of cultural capital. Emelia referred to the lack of understanding the school system throughout her interview. Early in her interview she stated, “My parents didn’t speak English and they didn’t understand the school system. . . . It’s not something that’s easy to navigate, but my mom . . . was never involved in our school.” Emelia stated that even though her mother did not physically go to the school and did not understand the system, she was emotionally present in her life by asking about school and things that went on at school. Claribel also stated, “It’s hard sometimes for a lot of Latino parents to understand what’s going on in a school.” Anna explained that going to math night helped her to understand the new math learning because her children kept telling her she was not doing it right. She was confused because she was getting the right answer, but according to her children, the process was wrong.

The concept of not understanding was also discussed during the focus group. Anna described an issue that she had with the attendance system: “I was almost taken to court because of this issue. It was a big ordeal. We don’t know what we should know.” Paulina responded, “and nobody says anything.” Emelia responded: “and this is not just in the school system, it happens everywhere: at private schools, colleges, at the doctor’s office.” Paulina continued the discussion and said, “People will give you absolutely the least amount of information possible. The more information you have, the more empowered you’re going to be.” Emelia then said, “I’ve been going to classes for the past 2 years to understand the system.” Paulina stated,

We have to train ourselves as well. I’ve had to attend meetings and workshops to learn how to understand an IEP, how to read an evaluation and they say, “sign here, sign there, this is what we’re going to do.”

The focus group also discussed the job of the school parent liaison. Paulina noted that the liaison’s job was to “help parents navigate the system.” They explained that parents do not know the role of a parent liaison, let alone the name of the parent liaison for some schools. Emelia asked, “How do we educate parents to say, ‘Listen, I need to go in with somebody that’s going to help . . . somebody that’s going to advocate, and somebody that’s going to at least understand how it works.’” They focus group agreed that parent really do want to understand the system.

Another code used to construct the subtheme of school environment is being aware of what is happening in school. As Juana stated, “The more they see your face, the more they’re willing to tell you things.” Emelia explained that her children “know that mom is aware of what’s going on” and she is “very aware of what’s happening” in school. Juana welcomed information from school: “I like to know what changes are happening at school.” Anna noted

that she does know what is happening with her children, but felt that she did not know what was going on in school as a whole:

With the teachers, with them, each individual as themselves I know what's happening with my child, yes. But what's going on in the school? No, I even ask the principal cause I don't even . . . there's certain things that are happening that I don't have access to and I get, "You miss it." That's because there are certain places that they send information. They have to communicate with the parents more.

During the focus group interview, participants discussed going to school board meetings. "At the board meeting I could address all my concerns as to what's happening in school, me as a parent." "Yeah, what you're seeing, what you want to see, what you want the board to be aware of can be brought up there."

The third code used to form the subtheme of school environment is the sense of belonging. In this area, parents also noted the school's environment needed to be welcoming. Anna noted how she felt at the school last year: "Last year, the school had such an unwelcoming, parental atmosphere. I felt like I was not welcome in the school. I came in and nobody smiled." Emelia explained, "I think, first of all, you have to have a welcoming environment. You have to feel welcomed in order to even try to or to attempt to enter a school." Paulina stated, "It's so important that [parents] get that sense of community and empowerment." She then described an event that took place prior to our interview: "We had the first ever Family Summit for the community. It was a phenomenal event. We've never had an event of that kind. It was so inclusive and welcoming. It was just fabulous for the families." Maria also described the feelings she had after an event: "We get to know other cultures; we get to know other families and teachers. We are able to exchange ideas and information at events. The events are positive,

and we learn from each other.” The focus group discussed the need for a welcoming environment to create a sense of belonging. Emelia suggested the following:

We need to have parents in, but if they’re not feeling welcomed, they will not come in.

The parent support groups should set up a table during orientation night. People like the parent liaison, counselors, secretaries should introduce themselves and say what they do at the school and how they can help parents.

The group did make it a point to note that things were better, but there was a lot of room for improvement.

**Family- and community-centered.** The third subtheme to emerge from this major theme was family- and community-centered. The two codes used to create this subtheme were community participation and shared events between family members. Parents indicated that there were a variety of different community programs or partnerships in which their children participated. Programs that were discussed during the interviews were The School of Art, Job Search, the community center, the heritage museum, the city museum, the library; community sports leagues, including basketball, baseball, soccer, hockey, and cheerleading; National History Day, the area colleges, a variety of bookbag give-a-ways, and church and community events.

Anna mentioned, “Job Search was supposed to help eighth graders get summer jobs; I thought that was an amazing idea.” She also said, “You can find art programs. I know the museum has them.” Anna also mentioned that her daughter was involved with a community basketball league. Lilliana stated that her son went to The School of Art. She noted that she found out about the program “through school and they gave transportation to get there and come back.” Paulina noted that her family is very active with community programs, including baseball, basketball, and cheerleading. Her husband coaches both baseball and basketball. She

was ecstatic when she discussed her child's participation in the National History Day Contest sponsored by the city. According to Lucia,

My kids play sports and my daughter is a cheerleader. My son plays football and baseball. He wants to start soccer, but there's still a balance. "If you're not doing good in school, then we're not going to be signing up for sports even though that is something you like to do and it's a physical activity" there still has to be a balance.

Christina also noted "we went to the heritage museum, for the Martin Luther King Jr. essay. I think it was just a good experience overall."

Although Anna, Christina, Lilliana, and Lucia said they received information from the school, Julia and Emelia felt strongly about getting information outside of the school. Julia stated, "If you don't research it, you're not going to know about it." In addition, Emelia explained,

Yeah, I get information from the school, but I learned that in order for you to best support your children you have to be an informed parent. Information is key. I always say this to my own children, "people are not going to come knock on your door and say, 'Hey, I have this great program that can help you and you should apply to this and that.' You have to inform yourself. Ask 'What are other people doing?' and 'Why are they going there?' 'We have great colleges in the area so go visit, ask questions.'"

Emelia did point out that there were some programs she learned about from the school, like the library's book buddies and programs at the YMCA.

Juana noted that her children go to a community center: "I think it's excellent. It's a well-balanced program between tutors for help, they talk about drugs and nutrition." She

indicated that she heard about the program from the school at registration. Maria also discussed the programs at the community center:

My daughter is involved in activities with [the community center]. It was the best decision to help her learn English. They gave her music lessons and theater lessons.

They helped her with her homework. They helped her to socialize and not be so shy.

Jose mentioned the community has many events like bookbag give-a-ways and churches have community tree give-a-ways. He said he gets information from flyers that the kids bring home.

The next code that supported this subtheme was shared events between family members. According to Anna, “I like anything that is family-oriented because to me, the school does family things and it’s nice to meet other families and get out there to meet other people from the community.” Juana stated, “Generally, my family goes to everything. They go to all the meetings for the kids, it doesn’t matter what it is.” Paulina laughed and said, “I drag them into everything. They’re on billboards, the school website, I dragged them to the family summit, whatever is going on we go together.” Christina noted that she “went to the little things here and there as long as I’m not at work. I like participating in anything that has to do with sports. It’s nice to meet different people.” Anna invited me to attend and observe the Community Fun day which helps to connect school families with community programs.

#### **Major Theme 4: Perceptions About Those Involved**

The fourth and final major theme discovered during the data analysis was the perceptions about those who are involved. There are two subthemes that supported this theme: Latino culture and school personnel.

Table 5

*Theme 4: Perceptions About Those Involved*

Theme 4: Perceptions about Those Involved	
Subtheme	Code
Latino culture	Barriers to parental involvement (13) Emotionally present, physically absent (7) Latino families not involved (6) Caring nature (5) United as a culture (3)
School personnel	Teacher (27) Principal (6) Counselor (4)

**Latino culture.** The first subtheme to emerge from the Theme 4 was Latino culture. There were five codes that emerged under the subtheme of Latino culture: barriers to parental involvement, emotionally present but physically absent, Latino families are not involved, caring nature, and united as a culture. Participants were asked about their perceptions of the Latino culture with regard to parental involvement. The results were a mixture of reasons why Latino parents did not participate as well as how they do participate. The barriers to parental involvement echo those mentioned in Chapter Two. Anna commented during the focus group about being judged: “It is so frustrating, that label you get, and they judge you quick before they even get to know you.” Julia reiterated this notion and gave an example of what she witnessed:

I think they are afraid of being judged because a lot of them don’t have degrees, a lot of them are poor. They feel like no one understands them. I’ve seen where the teachers and the staff treat them disrespectfully, like they don’t treat them like they’re human. They just treat them like they’re nothing. I’ve seen that. So, in order for them not to go through that again, they won’t just show up.



Paulina would like for teachers “to be more understanding and not to be so quick to judge or make assumptions.”

According to Emelia, “There are a lot of challenges that our teachers face as well as our parents. On both sides. One of them being a language barrier in many cases and also understanding.” Jose stated that there are a variety of reasons Latinos have for not participating: “For another group of Latino families, it’s a language barrier or they don’t understand what their kids need or what they are doing.” Emelia discussed this barrier through personal experiences: “My parents didn’t speak English and they didn’t understand the school system.” As previously mentioned in the section on communication, Julia noted that the use of academic language may be a deterrent to Latino parental involvement.

Another barrier to Latino parental participation that was discussed was transportation and work schedules. Emelia pointed out, “I think transportation has played a big role on parental involvement.” Celia noted that she did not have a car, only her husband did, and he needed it to go to work: “I do whatever possible to get to where they are. I have walked to the other side of town or take the bus. It’s easier if the school takes them, or they can wait until my husband gets off.” Emelia explained,

Some of Latino parents are working in factories that if they call off or answer the cell phone, they can get fired . . . the teachers want to meet with them, but they don’t get out of work until 3:30. “Can we meet at 4?” “No, it’s either 7:20 or at this other specific time.” There usually isn’t flexibility to accommodate the working family.

Jose justified why he missed some events: “There were a couple days where I missed a couple of things because I had to work.” He went on to explain that other families have situations in which “Dad got to work all the time or mom gotta work or they are juggling two jobs. You also have

your single parent homes. Maybe mom is working two jobs and cannot get off.” Lilliana is a single parent and disclosed why she could not participate in the past:

I had to come home and cook late and deal with all the homework they had. So, it’s kind of hard to come up with a schedule. It was just the time. I didn’t participate because I didn’t have the time. I usually had a lot of overtime at work. I am a single mother and I would have to pay extra for daycare. It was really, really, hard for me to be involved in school stuff for my kids. Then I got a better job and things were easier.

Lilliana, like Celia, mentioned that when the school provided transportation for her child, it made participating a little easier.

Another perception regarding Latino families is that there is not much parental involvement. As Anna explained,

We try to get parents involved. We try to do a couple of things for families and then we have friends on Facebook who rant and cry. We are like, “We did do a meeting and you could have come.” They just don’t show up.

Lilliana said, “I feel like the majority don’t and I feel they should participate.” Julia echoed Anna and Lilliana’s sentiments: “I don’t see a lot of involvement, to be honest, with Latinos and it saddens me because they don’t know where to break that chain.” Jose noted,

Just speaking from my experiences and from what I see, I’m going to say that a lot of Latino families don’t feel it’s important to be there. I mean not all of them . . . some have to work, but a lot don’t.

Some participants perceived that Latino parents were involved and wanted their children to have a better experience than the parents did. Jose explained his thoughts:

Some people say, “The parents don’t care.” And it’s not like that. I know a lot of parents that are very involved with their kids. Latino parents that are involved with the kids . . . because they strive for things to be better than what they were when they were younger, or when they were their kids age. So, I think a lot of the times, at least in my point, I believe that I want to give them the best experiences or the best experience that I didn’t have at that age. I want to give that to my kids.

As Maria explained, “We, as a whole, participate in all the events either in culture or in music either in English or Spanish. We may be different, but we express ourselves and also show our ideas.”

Emelia stated, “Sometimes parents are physically present, but emotionally absent.”

Claribel explained, “I needed my mom for most of the stuff and um . . . she was there, but she wasn’t there for school. That’s why I am always there, as a mother, for my kids.” Anna stated, “Mommy wakes you up and that’s it. Mommy makes sure you come home and you’re good unless you got a teacher call home.” Jose’s experiences were similar:

My parents were always there, but as far as school goes; they weren’t. My father would wake me up in the morning, make sure I went to school and pick me up. As far as open school nights and help out with homework and projects and stuff, I don’t get none of that. I mean my dad more because he spoke mostly Spanish . . . my mom was always busy . . . they didn’t push me to do what I was supposed to do in school.

Emelia explained, “Although my mom never stepped foot in one of our schools ever. My mom was very involved in our education, in our lives.”

A code that supported the creation of the subtheme of Latino culture was the statements involving the caring nature of parents. Paulina noted, “There’s a lot of parents that care and

want to be involved and want to be a part of their child's school." Claribel described the Latino culture as having a "caring nature," and being "united." According to Emelia, when parents participate in workshops, "That creates a culture of 'Oh, they care.' It's a place where we are all learning and growing." Anna commented, "[Teachers] see that we care, and it ends up being great as far as relationships go." Emelia recounted a time that illustrates this idea:

[The school] announced that parents have the option to come pick up their kids because the temperatures were above 100 degrees in school. It was incredible to see how many of our parents just came to pick up their kids because they care.

Another perception of the Latino culture is that it is a united culture. Claribel stated, "United Latinos will never be defeated." She explained, "We all, as Latinos, go to participate, we try to be together to be stronger than ever. Emelia noted, "The Latino culture is a caring, trusting culture that is united when they feel attacked." "We need to continue to be united to help our children."

**School personnel.** The second subtheme to emerge from Theme 4 was school personnel. Participants discussed their perceptions of those who work at the school. Some of the interactions were positive, while others were not. There are three codes that encompassed this subtheme: teacher, principal, and counselor.

Discussing her general opinion of the teachers, Anna stated, "There are so many amazing teachers who understand and who want your kids to succeed." However, she discussed an incident with a teacher by saying, "She is absolutely toxic. And I think that not only she is probably tired of her occupation, she does not care for the group of students that she teaches." Emelia felt teachers have "an expectation like 'you're a parent, you get involved in school' or 'you're a parent and you communicate with the teachers.'" Christina discussed having open

communications with teachers and felt she was able to discuss an issue related to the pace of a lesson and the issue was resolved: “I am always talking to teachers.” Emelia and Lucia both commented that they too are in contact with the teachers. Lucia stated, “If there is a problem or they just want to update me, they contact me.” Paulina felt comfortable sharing ideas with teachers at events or workshops. Jose discussed his perspective of teachers:

Some teachers don’t do more than they have to. They seem like a group of teachers that just came to work to get paid. I appreciate some teachers. As a kid, you remember your teachers that made such a big impact, but as a parent to know you’re on the other side. To know that this teacher is doing what he could most for your child. It’s like it means the world.

Julia stated, “the more you’re recognized by the educators, the principals, the teachers, and the secretaries . . . the more they see your face, the more they’re willing to tell you things.”

When the discussion was about the principal, Anna shook her head and said, “I’m just gonna say it, like, the principal and vice principal, we tend to clash.” However, she did explain that just because they do not always agree, it did not mean she was unhappy with the school administration: “Oh, my experience with [the school] was so awesome with my first child. Like honestly, it was like, amazing. I was like, oh my God, people talk bad about [the school] because of the school district, but I love it.” School leadership was also discussed during the focus group interview. Emelia stated, “School culture starts with leadership. Paulina agreed:

Absolutely and if you don’t have it, like I say our middle schools are our weak link and they are our weak link primarily, in my opinion, because of the leadership of those buildings. You can’t have a building where you’re molding young minds that is being led by someone who does not have their absolute best interest at heart. By someone who

does not have the leadership skills and, when I say leadership, leadership is such a huge word because it overall encompasses who you are . . . what your character is like . . . what you do . . . while you're at home . . . unfortunately I feel that it is lacking especially in our middle schools.

Anna added,

“You're right, [leadership] has a trickle-down effect because then that allows for teachers who don't care. There is no accountability. They are allowed to do as they wish and when it's all said and done, it's the kids who are affected and it creates a very negative atmosphere as parents. . . . I agree, that was my number one [complaint].

Other participants shared their views about the principal as well. Paulina stated, “I would say the principal is always visible. She's always available. I appreciate that. That's extremely important.” Jose made it a point to state, “the principal, she's pretty good too.” Claribel mentioned, “The main principal at the school is awesome. I love talking to her. She's the type of person that you could just go to and talk to.” Maria described going to the principal to discuss an issue her daughter had: “We talked about the main problem. We talked about everything that we were going to do.” She stated that she was happy with the results. Christina indicated that “I am always talking to the principal.”

The guidance counselor was the third person that participants discussed during their interview. Lucia explained, “I speak to the guidance counselor when I feel that there's an issue. I make sure that they're aware of that as well.” The focus group also discussed guidance counselors:

Sixth grade has an awesome, awesome guidance counselor. I cannot say enough. . . .

Yes, she is an amazing woman . . . the sixth-grade guidance counselor was so patient . . .

not just with you, but with the kids . . . and with the other parents . . . She is golden, like, unbelievable . . . So, we need more people like that.

Christina explained, “Besides the conferences, I’m always talking to the counselor because her counselor is actually super awesome.” Overall, participants were generally pleased with the school personnel. Those who expressed difficulties also expressed that they would not stop participating in school events. The following section of is focused on the central research question and research subquestions.

### **Observations**

I observed seven events. Although there was not a large amount of data received from the observations, I was able to use them to depict the themes that were developed. The first event I attended was a family dinner. Paulina invited me to the first family dinner held at the school. The event (Observation 1) took place on November 8, 2018. The event supported Theme 3: Reasons for Participation. The subthemes supported were school environment, and family- and community-centered. Families were aware of school events and shared in the participation of the event which may have led to a sense of belonging to the school community. The families received flyers with information about the event and information was posted on social media (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1.* Family dinner invitation.

The principal (with her family), the parent liaison, 13 teachers (some with their families), and 12 families attended the event. There was a diverse population that attended the dinner. It was noted that the parent liaison was the only Spanish-speaking school employee who attended. The principal, some teachers, and the parent liaison greeted parents and walked around speaking to parents. After the event Paulina mentioned that she wished more teachers and families were present, but she enjoyed the event nonetheless (see Figure 2).



*Figure 2.* First family dinner.

The next event that I observed was the event that Anna invited me to attend. Community Fun Day was held at the high school (see Figure 3). Representatives from community programs and partnerships between the school district, the city, and government were there with tables of information and resources. Students were dancing, singing, and playing instruments. Parents were able to network and meet others. The event (Observation 2) took place on November 10, 2018. This event also supports reasons for participation (Theme 3) through inviting parents to be part of the school environment and welcoming community resources to share information.





*Figure 3. Community Fun Day.*

The superintendent attended the event, in addition to many parents and community members. There were many resources available. Parents and students seemed to enjoy the day. Anna explained that she really loved coming to events like the Fun Day because she could see the children perform and see other families. She noted that she also recognized a few teachers.

Emelia was part of the Strengthening Families programs at the school. The culminating event (Observation 3) was a celebration of those who completed the program. There were seven sessions that met once a week. The last session, which was also the celebration, was held on November 13, 2018. Parents and students started the meeting together, then were separated to learn strategies or tools for communication or academic success (see Figure 4). Once again, the theme that this event showed was Theme 3: Reasons for Participation (subthemes: School environment and having a sense of belonging). This event was also child-centered as the sessions gave parenting support that benefited both parents and children.



*Figure 4. Strengthening Families Program.*

Due to the number of parents who needed English-to-Spanish translation, the program coordinators used portable translation devices (see Figure 5).



*Figure 5.* Portable translators for English-to-Spanish translation.

Emelia stated that she was excited to see the families, but she was sad because it was the last session. After the session, she revealed that she had heard about the portable translators and thought they were great. Although she did not need one, knowing that this is a tool that can help overcome the language barrier for others was an empowering moment. Emelia expressed that seeing the Latino members truly engaged with the superintendent's greeting and congratulatory remarks made her proud to be part of this community.

Emelia invited me to attend a parent workshop that was focused on student and parent rights with regard to IEPs. This event (Observation 4) took place on November 21, 2018. The themes that this observation supported were Themes 2 and 3. The workshop fostered ideas of how to communicate with educators while making decisions and helped parents to understand the school system. There was a total of 15 adults. Some were parents and some educational professionals like teachers and administrators. The setting was informal and questions were welcomed. There was considerable information provided about IEPs, 504s, reevaluations, and "red flags." Emelia was pleased with this workshop and was happy with the format. At the end of the workshop, parents who had specific questions were able to get individual attention.

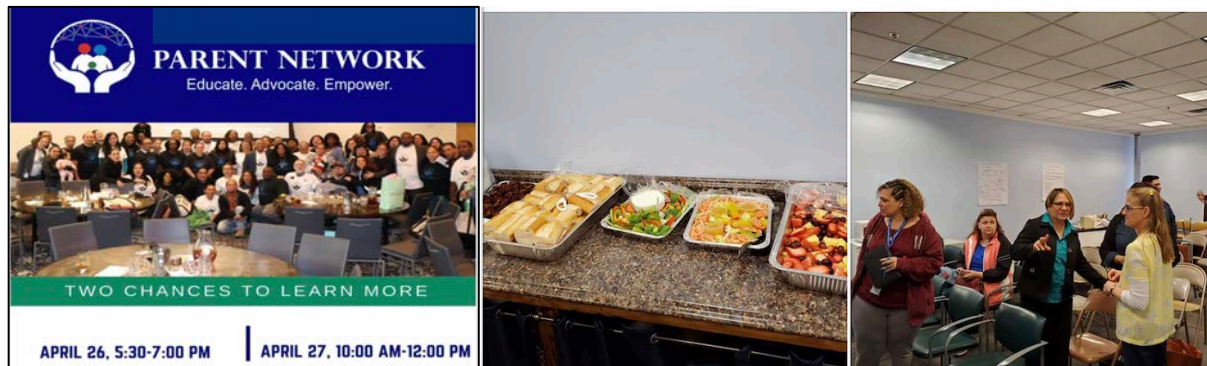
I was also invited to attend the school board meeting (Observation 5) by Emelia. Attending this event supported Theme 3 with the need to understand the school system. We met in the parking lot of the administration building on February 28, 2019. When we entered, she was greeted by a school district employee whom she introduced as the parent liaison coordinator. There were very few parents and community members. The largest group in attendance represented those advocating for an apprenticeship program. Once their presentation was completed, they left the meeting. No one addressed the board during the open forum.

Paulina was involved in the parent network group and invited me to an event they had on April 27, 2019, to increase membership and promote this new community outreach group. There was a table set up outside of the supermarket with bags, pens, pamphlets, and recruitment lists. I was introduced to a member of the city council who is an advocate for parents and education. She explained how the network was a new organization sponsored by several community and government sponsored agencies. Their mission is to “educate, advocate, and empower parents and community members” (Observation 6).

During this event, I met the district’s communication manager. She indicated that the district wants to have a more cohesive form of electronic communication, but they find it difficult. One problem is that not all parents have email or access to the Internet. Another problem was the need to train teachers with best practices for communicating with parents. She also noted that not all principals are tech savvy and also need guidance and training. An issue that they have been able to solve was the need to accommodate different languages on their website: the contents of the current site are translated into 12 different languages.

I was also invited to attend the network meeting on May 14, 2019 (Observation 7). This meeting included discussion of the purpose of the organization as well as their mission and

names of the current community partners. They discussed that they work closely with the school district but are not sponsored by the district. The district is an ally but does not mandate this organization. Observations 6 and 7 both support the subthemes found in Theme 3. The Parent Network fosters a sense of belonging, the need to understand the school system, and is family- and community-centered.



*Figure 6.* Parent Network membership event and meeting.

### **Research Question Responses**

This transcendental phenomenological study included one central research question and three research subquestions. The central question focused on the life experiences of Latino parents and how their experiences impacted their participation in their child's middle school education. The central research question was answered more specifically through the research subquestions. The research subquestions derived from Epstein and Sanders's (2002) parental involvement theory and Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) cultural capital theory. Although participants discussed their perceptions about those who are involved the most, they also described their definitions of parental involvement. Participants also described other experiences such as with communication between home and school and reasons for participating in traditional parental involvement activities. The following section comprises the descriptions of

participant responses used to answer the central research question and research subquestions of the study.

### **Central Research Question**

The central research question of this study was as follows: What are Latino parents' perceptions of the way their life experiences impact participation in their middle school child's education? The central research question was used to establish the description of the participants' life experiences and the prospective impact on their participation in their child's education. All of the participants described their own parents' involvement or lack of involvement with their education and how that influenced the manner in which they participate. Their descriptions of parenting with regard to education were not exactly the same but did include the importance of Latino parental involvement. Given that the subquestions supported the central question and that the themes explained the subquestions, all four of the major themes answered the central question. The accounts given by the participants, which defined parental involvement, described communication, gave reasons for participating in traditional school events, and shared their perceptions about those involved, revealed the essence of Latino parents' life experiences and how they impacted their participation in their child's education.

Only four of the 12 participants indicated that their parents participated traditionally in their education. Celia stated, "They would get my report card" and go to "school activities that were at school." Lucia explained, "When I was younger, my mom was involved in school. She was part of the PTA." Maria noted that when she was in school in the Dominican Republic, "Mom attended a lot of meetings and she would participate in the activities." Paulina remembered her mother being "very much involved" and described her mother's influence on how she now participates in her children's education: "That sort of helped to shape how I put

myself in the forefront of my children's education. She helped model how I am with mine in that regard." Celia, Lucia, and Maria indicated that because their parents (particularly their mothers) participated, they participate in their children's education. Lucia noted, "I am not part of the PTA because unfortunately, I don't have the time that [my mother] did."

Those who indicated that their parents were not involved in their education described how their own parents' lack of parental involvement encouraged them to be engaged in their children's education. Claribel stated, "wishing mommy did this a little more, things would have been a little different . . . I stepped it up a lot more." Claribel also mentioned how she is different than her parents. "Years ago, it was a little bit different . . . we take it a little step forward now and we take actions. Before, my mom, my dad, didn't see it like that." Christina mentioned, "[I] didn't see my parents being as involved as I with my kids now." Jose described how his "parents were there, but they weren't there." Emelia stated her parents were "emotionally present, but physically absent." Jose, Anna, and Emelia explained that their parents would wake them up for school but did not attend school functions or could not help with homework due to barriers such as language, time, or lack of understanding their needs.

Anna, Claribel, Lilliana, Jose, and Julia's sentiments were the same with regard to why they are actively involved in their children's education. Anna stated, "She taught me how not to be with my kids." Claribel explained, "She wasn't there, so it was kind of rough. I didn't want my kids to go through that." Lilliana stated, "They didn't push me the way I pushed my kids. . . . I wanted a better life for my kids." Jose mentioned, "They didn't push me to do the right things, so I like to stay on top of my kids because of that." According to Julia, "I am the way I am today because my mom was never involved."

The study participants not only described experiences with their own parents, but also described their experiences and perceptions of their participation in their child's education. Participants described several traditional methods of parental involvement that were labeled by Epstein and Sanders (2002). The subquestions support the descriptions needed to elicit a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and are explained below.

### **Research Subquestion 1**

The first research subquestion of the study was as follows: What are Latino parent perceptions of the relationship between parenting at home, school-based involvement, and participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience? The major themes used to answer this question were Themes 1, 2, and 4. These themes served to explain the participants' descriptions of parenting, communication between home and school, and their perceptions of those involved in parental engagement.

In the parental involvement theory, Epstein and Sanders (2002) described basic family obligations such as feeding, clothing, and housing children as "parenting" (p. 418). Included in this parental involvement type is parents teaching values, behaviors, and beliefs of the family to children. School-related activities and decisions that parents are engaged in are characterized under "learning at home" (Epstein & Sanders, 2002 p. 420). Both these types of parental involvement may be categorized as parenting. Understanding how Latino parents describe parenting will promote the understanding of the phenomenon.

The descriptions of parenting with regard to education given by the participants all included parental engagement in their child's learning and the importance of education. Paulina's description of parenting with regard to education was that parenting and education "go hand-in-hand. You must be able to provide education to your children in and outside of the

school environment.” She explained that core values began “long before children even enter school. Having parents who have also taken on the role of an educator is imperative to having solid children.” According to Emelia, parenting with regard to education also includes parents as teachers: “Parents are the first and foremost teacher a child can have.”

Speaking of parenting with regard to education, Julia stated “Education is number one at home. We strive to do our best and always give 110%.” Claribel described parenting as pushing one’s children to “do their best and be there for them as their parent. To prove to them that they can do better every day . . . education comes first.” Lilliana’s description echoed that of Claribel’s: “[wanting my] kids to do and to go far in their education; to go further than where I went and where I am at.” Celia described parenting with regard to education as wanting children to move forward: “To be good students [so] they can be someone in life.”

Other participants such as Juana, Anna, and Lucia described parenting with regard to education as including homework support and receiving a good education. According to Juana, “It’s important that kids have a good education . . . make sure [my children] are in school every day and that they do their homework.” Anna explained, “Being important for the parents to engage with [their] child . . . that’s [their] best job in education. To make sure [they] are interacting with homework, interacting with teachers . . . knowing, going to all school things.” Lucia’s description of parenting with regard to education was to be involved: “Take time to do homework every day after school.”

Christina, Jose, and Maria described that being involved was crucial to the description of parenting with regard to education: “always being involved.” Jose’s description of parenting with regard to education was to be involved:



You gotta know everything that's going on at all times . . . the only way to do that is to be involved and to have open communication, not only with teachers, but with all the staff at the school so you can know what is going on.

Maria described parenting with regard to education as “being informed, more informed, participate more in meetings and be more devoted and more attentive to the environment both inside and outside the school.”

This subquestion supported the notion that parental involvement was defined in a variety of ways by different parents. Although there are varying responses, the underlying message of needing to actively participate in the education of children is evident. The consensus of working as a team to better the education of students is also evident. The next subquestion prompted parents to describe their experiences with school personnel.

## **Research Subquestion 2**

The second subquestion of the study was as follows: What are Latino parent perceptions of the relationships between their interactions with school teachers and administrators and participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience? The major themes used to answer this question were Themes 2 and 4. Theme 2 addressed communication and the ability to make decisions and advocate for children. Theme 4 addressed participant experiences with teachers, administrators, and counselors along with perceived barriers to Latino parental engagement.

With Subquestion 2, parents were also able to describe their experiences with school personnel. These experiences include perceived communication between home and school. Understanding the experiences of Latino parents under the premise of cultural capital served to elicit deeper meaning from the participants' responses. Cultural capital theory can be used to

explain the cultural influences that may shape the experiences of the research participants (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). When parents share their experiences, researchers, teachers, administrators, and policymakers may have a better understanding of parental involvement with regards to personnel interactions and school involvement. This understanding can support the continuation or change of policies.

The encounters described by participants were both positive and negative experiences regarding communication, the ability to make school decisions, and school personnel. Participants discussed the importance of communication between school and home and how relationships are built through that communication. The need for honest and open communication with school personnel was a common concern among the participants. Lucia mentioned, “[Teachers] are really honest and upfront.” Lilliana pointed out, “[Teachers] need to be very straight-up with [parents]. Don’t sugar coat things.” Two concerns that were discussed regarding communication were that there were times that information was not received and the language in which the information was delivered. One participant rated communication between school and home as an 8 on a 10-point scale. Others indicated that communication was not always there, but they did get information. The forms of communication varied from face-to-face with principals, teachers, and counselors to electronic with Class Dojo, emails, and texts. Current district practices do not dictate what form of communication must be used or how many times a teacher is to contact parents.

Many participants discussed feeling judged by teachers and administrators along with issues regarding language. The language barrier not only referred to the translation or understanding of Spanish to English, but also the use of academic language rather than language parents understood. Anna claimed, “It’s frustrating . . . they judge you quick.” According to

Julia, “I think [parents] are afraid of being judged because a lot of them don’t have degrees.”

Paulina stated she would like teachers “to be more understanding and not to be so quick to judge or make assumptions.” The language barrier was discussed as a deterrent to parental involvement. As Emelia explained, “My parents didn’t speak English and they didn’t understand the school system.” Emelia also described how her parents had difficulty with the English language because their primary language was Spanish, they also did not understand the educational policies or how to navigate through the educational system. Emelia stated that “teachers need to explain things as clear as possible . . . and give examples.” Julia discussed the same thoughts about parents not knowing “these long and powerful words . . . if [educators] are not speaking their language and I don’t mean Spanish, I mean, like, not dumbing it down, but use words that they use on a daily basis.”

The majority of participants thought they should be involved in school decisions and advocacy, especially when dealing with their child’s IEP. Claribel said, “We should have some rights to say something . . . go to school, sit down, and speak about it.” As Emelia stated, “I am very involved because of my son’s disability.” Julia basically said the same thing as Emelia: “Well, for me, it’s important with regards to special education.” Lilliana was frustrated with the ability to make decisions for her son, who “has Asperger’s . . . I feel they would understand my child better if I were there. I feel they would make better decisions if I were involved.”

When attending the IEP workshop (Observation 4), I noted there are resources for parents with children who need specialized instruction. The workshop was open to parents and educators. The focus was on understanding parental rights and the IEP process.

The majority of the participants indicated that there were more positive interactions than negative ones with the principal, teachers, and the counselors. They noted that the school

environment must be welcoming. Paulina stated, “It’s so important that [parents] get that sense of community and empowerment.” Parents also mentioned that if the school event was important to their child and was beneficial for their child, they made it a point to attend. Anna discussed attending a math workshop where she was able to receive support from teachers to help her children with homework. Julia commented about the benefits of being recognized by school personnel:

The more you’re recognized by the educators, the principals, the teachers and the secretaries, out “the more [school personnel] see your face, the more they’re willing to tell you things . . . I like to know what changes are happening at school.

Although there was a discussion about teachers being judgmental and rude to parents by talking down to them, teachers who do not care, and of a teacher who was considered “toxic,” the majority of participants noted how “there are so many amazing teachers who understand and who want your kids to succeed,” as Anna stated. The ability to be contacted teachers and be comfortable with sharing ideas was also discussed. According to Lucia, “If there is a problem or they just want to update me, they contact me.”

One participant noted that she clashed with the administrators of the school, but that did not stop her from participating or from addressing concerns. Others had a very positive description of the principal. Claribel stated, “The main principal at the school is awesome. I love talking to her. She’s the type of person that you could just go to and talk to.” Paulina explained, “I would say the principal is always visible. She’s always available. I appreciate that. That’s extremely important.”

The guidance counselor was also a person who was discussed during the interviews. Parents described being able to speak with the counselor with ease. The sixth grade counselor

was described in the focus group as “an amazing woman” who “was so patient” with students and parents. Christina noted that she constantly speaks to the counselor who “is actually super awesome.”

### **Research Subquestion 3**

The third subquestion of the study was as follows: As a lived experience, how do Latino parents perceive their engagement with community programs impacts their participation in their middle school child’s education? The major theme that addressed this question was Theme 3, which includes reasons for parental participation; specifically, being centered in the community.

Participants described at least 15 different community events, programs, or entities of which they and their children had been or are members. When asked how they received the information about the community, city, and government agency programs, some said they got the information from the school. Juana mentioned she received information at an “open house of the school. They were giving their promotion.” Jose said he got information from flyers that the children brought home. Lucia explained, “School sends home the information. . . . It was just now, recently, that they got stuff sent home from the youth center. So that’s going to be an option that I’m going to take for them come summer, spring.”

Juana described the community center as having a well-balanced program “between tutors for help, they talk about drugs and nutrition.” Maria felt that allowing her daughter to participate in the community center program “was the best decision to help her learn English . . . helped her with her homework, they helped her to socialize.” Other programs discussed were the YMCA, library, museum, local churches, and little league or park programs.

Some parents did not get the information from school, they, as Emelia stated, “Google everything.” Julia explained that people did not know about the resources that are available.

If you don't research it, you're not going to know about it. If you don't know your rights as a parent, they're not going to tell you and that's what make me sad. . . . I learned that all on my own. Nobody told me, "Hey, you have to do this to have yourself finding autistic support so he can be successful." No, I had to find these things out on my own. There's more material or resources available to [school personnel] right away. I think it can help parents more if they share it.

Julia was not at the IEP workshop. She indicated that she did not know about the workshop. The parent advisory network group (Observation 6) may be a resource for parents to receive information regarding resources that are available. One of their missions is to build a relationship with the school district while advocating, empowering, and educating parents.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. Chapter Four included detailed descriptions of the 12 participants. Moustakas' (1994) "modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data" (p. 121) was the process used to develop the themes for this study. Further analysis of the transcripts disclosed four major themes: (a) defining parental involvement, (b) communication, (c) reasons for participation, and (d) perceptions about those involved. Direct quotes and summarized comments from each participant, the focus group, observations and information about current practices were used to expose the themes that emerged during the study. This chapter concluded with the development of themes and subthemes along with the response to the central research question and three research subquestions.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The goal of this study was to fill the gap in research regarding Latino parental involvement with their middle school student's education. Moreover, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of participation in their middle school child's education. A review explaining how the central research question and research subquestions were answered is included in the summary of research findings. The research findings are followed by a discussion of results, implications of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study, and suggestions for future research.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

The data were triangulated by gathering information from 12 participants in a variety of methods, including individual interviews, a focus group interview, observations of activities, and audiovisual and documented materials. The majority of data were derived from the individual interviews and the focus group interview. The observations, along with audiovisual and documented materials provided very little information, but the participants did discuss their thoughts, which were then memoed and included in the analysis of the data. Individual and focus group interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. A list of repeated words and phrases was compiled. Data derived from observations and audiovisual and documented materials were used to add supplemental insights and explanation. The four major themes revealed included (a) defining parental involvement, (b) communication, (c) reasons for participation, and (d) perceptions about those who are involved in Latino parental participation.

The central research question of this study addressed Latino parents' perceptions of how their life experiences impact their participation in their child's middle school education. The purpose of this question was to prompt Latino parents to share their experiences and their perceptions of how their involvement impacts their children's education to foster a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Answers given concentrated on how participants were raised by their parents and how they felt about having their parents present or not present in their academic life. One quote that resonated with me was that some "parents are emotionally present, but physically absent." This phrase was used to describe parents who may have been part of the children's lives, but not physically involved. Several parents indicated that they encourage their children to excel in school because their parents did not have education as a priority. Four of the 12 participants indicated that their parents were involved with their academics, hence they modeled that behavior to continue participating in their own children's education.

Research Subquestion 1 was used to ask Latino parents about their perceptions of the relationship between parenting at home, school-based involvement, and their participation in their children's middle school education. Understanding how Latino parents describe parenting promoted greater clarity of the phenomenon. The participants had varying descriptions of the relationship between parenting at home and school-based involvement, but the common message was that the relationship was reciprocal such that home and school-based were combined to motivate, encourage, and empower student achievement.

Research Subquestion 2 was used to investigate Latino parent perceptions of how their interactions with school teachers and administrators impact participation in their middle school child's education, as a lived experience?



Understanding parental perceptions and experiences with school personnel can support the continuation or change of policies. The participants described both positive and negative experiences. Participants also discussed experiences of other Latinos who do and do not participate in their children's education. Barriers to Latino involvement included language, transportation, and time. The issue of language was not only between the use of English and Spanish, but also regarding academic language versus common language. Another barrier was not having a welcoming environment and the fear of being judged. Communication between parents and educators was a major theme. Parents described the need for open, honest communication and that not all information is shared or received. Most participants noted that the principal was visible and approachable. They shared that teachers and counselors, for the most part, were caring and welcoming. There were some who shared experiences of teachers who seemed not to care and who negatively judged parents as well as students.

Research Subquestion 3 was used to ask Latino parents to articulate how they perceive engagement with community programs impacts participation in their middle school child's education. Schools have partnerships with community, city, and government agencies or programs. Understanding how Latino parents describe their involvement with the community will promote the understanding of the phenomenon by giving insight to whether or not those who participate in school-based activities participate in other programs. Most of those who participated indicated that their children participate in community, city, or government programs outside of school. Several participants indicated that they received information about the nonschool agencies through a flyer, email, social media, or from a school employee. One parent indicated that she used participation in the outside activity as an incentive for positive school feedback. Another parent stated that the community agency supported her children's learning by

providing tutoring and English as a second language sessions. Parents described several events as positive because they were shared events for the entire family, or they were able to meet other parents.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this research are closely related to the theoretical and empirical literature presented in Chapter Two. This study was guided by two theories: the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and the cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The parental involvement theory has several components that together comprise the theory of parental involvement such as parenting, communication, learning at home, making educational decisions, and community partnerships (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The cultural capital theory is focused on cultural experiences and the knowledge needed to navigate from one social class to another using the academic communication need to succeed (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The following sections explain how this study related to the empirical and theoretical foundations of the literature and presents additional information regarding Latino parental involvement at the middle school level.

### **Empirical Literature**

Study participants repeatedly verified the literature that was presented in Chapter Two. Parents shared experiences with their attitudes towards parental involvement, their perceived educator attitudes toward parental involvement, communication between school and home, parental involvement programs, and barriers to parental involvement which included cultural connections. The narrative accounts coincided with the literature. Studies were limited with regard to the representation of Latino parents who do participate in traditional forms of educational parental involvement.

Chapter Two started with an examination of parents' and teachers' attitudes toward parental involvement. This study was focused on the lived experiences of parents; therefore, the perceived educator attitudes were shared and analyzed for the research. The literature in this section coincided with the concepts found in Theme 1 and Theme 4 of this study. Participants described parenting with regard to education as supporting one's children academically and emotionally in order for them to be successful. They discussed advocating for their children, helping them with homework, and working as a team with the school. Studies indicate that parents who have had negative experiences in the past may not participate in school events (Bhargava & Witherspoon, 2015; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). All participants of this current study participated in at least one traditional school event. In addition, eight participants noted that their parents did not participate in their education, which was a strong motivating factor to why they participated in their own children's education. As Christina summarized, "Latino parents are involved with the kids, because they strive things to be better than what they were when they were younger, or when they were their kid's age."

With regard to the perceived attitudes of educators, participants' accounts coincided with concepts found in the literature. Parents who were seen by teachers at school were rated higher on a parental involvement scale, and these parents experienced more positive attitudes from educators than those parents who were not visible at events (Carpenter et al., 2016; Durand & Perez, 2013; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Lee et al., 2012, Park & Holloway, 2013; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Jose, Julia, and Emelia's statements echoed the prior research findings. Jose stated, "When [teachers] see that you communicate, an educator feels like, 'Alright, this kid's parent is involved.'" Julia explained, "The more you're recognized

by the educators, the principals, the teachers, and the secretaries. . . . The more they see your face, the more they're willing to tell you things." Emelia felt teachers have "an expectation like 'You're a parent, you get involved in school' or 'You're a parent and you communicate with the teachers.'" Parents also discussed the principal and the counselor during their interview. The principal was easy to talk to, according to Paulina: "always visible . . . always available." The focus group participants agreed the counselor was "amazing."

Emelia recounted an incident when the school district announced students could be picked up early from school due to excessive heat. She felt that the school was not prepared to have many Latino parents show up to sign their child out. Her perception was that the school did not see many parents involved in school events, so they would not show up to pick up their child. Murray et al. (2014) noted that parents who felt disrespected and devalued may not participate. Lillian's experience of feeling that her input was not valued supported Murray et al.'s findings. Conversely to what Murry et al. (2014) noted, Lillian continued to participate in her children's education because she felt she was her children's advocate.

The next section in Chapter Two discussed the communication between school and home and parental involvement programs. The consensus of the data found in Theme 2 and Theme 3 emphasized the findings of the past literature. Parents felt that communication between home and school was crucial to their children's success. Many discussed the open and honest communication that they have or wanted with educators. Lucia said, [Teachers] are really honest and upfront. I mean, they say when [my child is] doing wrong and you know, they even come up with options of how we can fix it. I just work with them to try to get him to do better." Her account is similar to the findings of other studies regarding school communication (Cankar et al., 2012; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Foster, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997;

Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Participants noted the need for language accommodations with regard to educational language that is used. Researchers found that educational jargon may deter parental involvement (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Julia's words paralleled the findings:

If [educators] are not speaking their language—and I don't mean Spanish—I mean, like, not dumbing it down, but use words that they use on a daily basis. Not “behooved” or, you know, not those kinds of words, because [parents] don't speak like that.

In addition, educators were cautioned by Cankar et al. (2012) about presuming that parents have technological devices.

During Observation 5, I was able to speak to the communications manager and she mentioned that not all parents have technological means and may not have email or smartphones. McKenna and Millen (2013) noted that educators need to listen to parents when they talk about their children or make suggestions that may support a lesson. Christina had an experience when the teacher and the principal understood the issue her child was having and changed the pace of the lesson, helping her child and the rest of the students.

Parental involvement programs were also discussed in Chapter Two of this study. O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) and Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) noted that Latino families could benefit from programs designed to increase parental involvement. Anna noted that she enjoys participating in family-oriented activities because she was able to meet other parents.

I was able to observe the Strengthening Families program. This program was held for several weeks with a culminating celebration. Portable translators were used to translate for parents who did not speak English, and the majority of participants were Latino families. Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012) found that parents felt a sense of activism and empowerment when

they participate in parental programs and advocate for their children. I was able to observe the Parent Network group which supports the education, advocacy, and empowerment of parents. This group is a community-based program with hopes of increasing parental involvement. There were over 15 community, city, or government agencies that were discussed by participants that noted their children were active members. Most parents noted that they received information about the programs from school flyers or social media postings from the school. A few noted that they searched for information on their own. Emelia discussed the school workshops and that they create a “culture of ‘Oh, they care.’ It’s a place where [parents] are all learning and growing.”

The final section in Chapter Two was concentrated on barriers to parental involvement, which may include cultural connections. Not surprisingly, the majority of comments from parents found in Theme 4 echoed the research. Barriers such as feeling unwelcomed (Alexander et al., 2017), feeling judged (Shim, 2013), and the use of educational jargon (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Valdés, 1996) were also reported on in the beginning of Chapter Two with regard to parent and educator attitudes, but they were also expressed in this area.

An obvious barrier of Latino parental involvement was communication. Participants not only discussed the need for translations from English to Spanish, but also the realization that not all information is received by parents. Issues with technology were addressed above with regards to some parents not having access to technology. Child care and the time constraints that prevented participation were noted as deterrents to parental engagement by LeFevre and Shaw (2012) as well as Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012). Lilliana noted that she was a single parent and finding time to participate was difficult as well as needing to pay for extra child care

in order to participate. Jose recounted that he missed a few events and mentioned that some parents have two jobs and cannot get time off from work.

During the focus group, participants discussed that upon entering the school, no one smiled. This unwelcoming environment echoed a previous study conducted by Alexander et al. (2017). The current study focus group participants explained that a welcoming environment created a sense of belonging. Shim's (2013) study revealed parents felt they were judged by educators. Paulina asked for teachers not to be "quick to judge or make assumptions." Julia recounted an event when teachers and staff were treating parents disrespectfully and felt that parents did participate because of fear of judgement by educators.

Parents also discussed the use of educational language as a deterrent to parent participation, which mirrors the research discussed in Chapter Two (Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Along with this notion is not understanding what is being read or told by educators (Daniel, 2015; Foster, 2012; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Valdés, 1996). Julia noted parents "don't know these long and powerful words. So, if they don't know what the heck they're reading, they're just going to look at it as just a piece of paper."

Another barrier is the cultural capital of parents. Some parents indicated they did not know how to help their children with homework. Studies have been focused on nontraditional parental involvement, which is parental engagement that is not seen by school personnel (Daniel, 2015; Duppong Hurley et al., 2017; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Suizzo et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; Wehrspann et al., 2016). Emelia described this as parents who are "emotionally present and physically absent." Jose and others described their experiences as their parents being "there, but not there" or that their parents woke them up and made sure they went

to school. Some mentioned that their parents knew what was going on in school, but never went to the school. Participants discussed that Latinos have a trusting culture. They trust that educators have their children's best interest in mind and will educate them.

### **Theoretical Literature**

The current study consistently corroborated the theories that guided this study, including the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and the cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The first theory was parental involvement theory that addresses school-based and home-based parental involvement in education. The 12 study participants confirmed the six types of school-based parental involvement, home-based parental involvement, and the levels for becoming involved that are discussed in the parental involvement theory. The second theory was cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This theory involves the knowledge of the system in order to be successful within the system. In this case, the system is the educational system. The themes will be discussed further with regard to the theoretical frameworks that guided this research.

The first type of traditional parenting is called parenting (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). Theme 1 was defining parental involvement with subthemes that included, understanding and reiterating the importance of education and encouraging children to succeed. Participants discussed the importance of education, creating a team effort between school and home, motivating children to do their best, and supporting student achievement. Anna disclosed that when parents are involved with school activities, children will see the importance of education. Claribel stated, "We strive to do our best. Always give 110%." The focus group interview revealed the relationship with teachers was like working on a team, while Anna defined the collaboration with teachers as "a team effort . . . a whole other marriage." According to Celia,



motivating children allows them “to move forward . . . so they could be someone in life” while other participants felt that “to push [them] as much as” possible is also part of parenting. Home-based parenting (Alfaro et al., 2014; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996) was discussed with regard to helping with homework and how, in the past, parents would wake their child up and make sure they go to school. Jose also discussed how he dropped out of school and told his children about his struggles, so they do not follow in his footsteps.

Communication is another type of parental engagement that is part of the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). The perceptions of participants regarding communication, means of communication, and decision-making that were shared during the interviews were in alignment with the theory of parental involvement. The theory suggests that communication is the responsibility of the school. Participants noted that communication was inconsistent at times and needed to be honest and straightforward. Many parents noted the need for language accommodations which included translations and everyday vocabulary (Carpenter et al., 2016; Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2013; Valdés, 1996). There were a variety of methods used to allow two-way communication which included technology (Alfaro et al., 2014; Georgis et al., 2014; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; Mundt et al., 2015; Ray, 2013; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996).

Volunteering is a traditional method of parental involvement, but it was not discussed often during the interviews. Lucia mentioned volunteering for fundraisers or at the snack stand at a city-sponsored community sporting event. Maria discussed how she would like to volunteer or be a classroom aid but could not due to having a child too young to be in school.

Another type of traditional parental involvement was learning at home. Parents reinforced the learning from school by supporting their child at home (Daniel, 2015; Durisic &

Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Lewis et al., 2011). Lucia discussed that she Googled math methods to be able to support her child's learning. Anna explained that she attended a math workshop in order to get the help to facilitate her child's completion of homework.

Decision-making is another type of parental engagement discussed by Epstein and Sanders (2002). O'Donnell and Kirkner (2014) found that it is important to get parental input when creating programs or implementing ideas. Parents in this study discussed that they were able to support the decisions being made during the creation of their children's IEP. Some indicated being able to speak to teachers or the principal about procedures and felt their concerns or ideas were considered and valued. Studies show that there is a stronger relationship between parents and educators who are invested in the creation of the school climate and policies (Carpenter et al., 2016; Daniel, 2015; Durisic & Bunijevac, 2017; Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Inoa, 2017; Lewis et al., 2011; A. Li & Fisher, 2017; Ray, 2013; Santana et al., 2016; Ng, 2013).

The last type of parental engagement addressed in the parental involvement theory is collaborating with the community (Epstein & Sanders, 2002). O'Donnell and Kirkner's (2014) and Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis's (2012) studies indicated improved school relationships with families that participated in programs or organizations outside of school. In the current study, participants discussed belonging to numerous agencies such as the library, community center, YMCA, museums, sports and more. Lucia noted that there had to be a balance between the activities within and outside of school. She expressed the need for children to do well in school in order to participate in activities outside of school. Maria stated that her daughter was able to receive homework help, learn English, and be more social by joining the community center.

Epstein and Sanders (2002) also discussed the levels for becoming involved as part of the parental involvement theory. The concepts at the lower level are parent motivation beliefs, parent perceptions of invitations, time and energy, skills and knowledge. Current study participants discussed that if an event was important to their child, they made it a priority to take part. They discussed that if the activity benefitted their children's success they would also be engaged in the activity. Avvisati et al. (2011) found that when parents believed their involvement helped to positively influence their child to succeed, they were more willing to participate. In the current study, parents noted that they enjoyed the events that were family-oriented and/or allowed for networking with others. Time and energy were also considered by participants as they were in previous studies (Avvisati et al., 2011; Grolnick, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Reece et al., 2013; Tekin, 2016; Walker et al., 2005). Some parents had to work and were unable to attend all events. Jose noted that he was not happy that he missed a few events and that his children noticed his absence, but he had to work. Some researchers discussed the rigid school schedules (Avvisati et al., 2011; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; H. Chen & Zhu, 2017; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Emelia discussed how some meetings were set during a time that parents could not meet due to work obligations and the meeting would not be rescheduled for a more convenient time for the parent. Murray et al. (2014) discovered that parents wanted to be more involved than they were already. In the present study, parents indicated they wanted to be more engaged in school-based activities. One noted there was a time she did not participate because of her work schedule. Another stated that she had younger children in the household that prevented her from participating more. Others mentioned that their current work schedule prevented them from being more visible at school events. The lack of skills and knowledge regarding the school system is part of the parental

involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and is at the heart of the second theory that guided this study. This level of becoming involved is further discussed below.

The second theory used to ground this study was cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Studies show that parents who understand the educational system are more likely to participate traditionally, than those who have less confidence in the schooling procedures (Avvisati et al., 2011; DiMaggio, 1979; Gonzales, 2012; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Vega et al., 2015; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Suizzo et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014). Emelia noted that her parents not only did not speak English, but they also did not understand the school system. They knew what was going on in school, but they never attended school events or attended conferences. Claribel explained, “It’s hard sometimes for a lot of Latino parents to understand what’s going on in a school.” Anna noted that she attended workshops to help her understand the math work. During the focus group interview, one parent stated that she had to educate herself with regard to understanding IEP meetings. The discussion led to that of the roles of educators and how to educate parents. Community agencies may help parents who are searching to understand the school system (Poza et al., 2014). Organizations such as the Parent Network, community centers, and government agencies may help Latino parents who do not understand the expectations and procedures that will help them to navigate successfully through the school system.

### **Implications**

Parental involvement is mandated by the U. S. Department of Education (2004) and is the responsibility of school officials. Increasing parental engagement at the middle level of

education is an increasing concern of school districts. Because the Latino population is rapidly becoming the largest minority group throughout the state of Pennsylvania (Dewey, 2011), increasing parental engagement in this group would address the problem of the lack of school-based Latino parental involvement. Previous research regarding Latino parental involvement has been focused on the barriers to parental engagement and did not provide the opportunity for them to share their life experiences and how they impact their participation in their child's middle level education. This qualitative study filled that gap by adding to literature focused on parental involvement by including the qualitative richness of the Latino voice. There are theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study that are aimed to discover school district approaches to increasing Latino parental involvement.

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research has a variety of implications for educators, administrators, and policy makers who are working with the Latino community. Previous research focused on reasons Latino parents may not traditionally participate in their child's education. For example, studies have examined barriers to parental involvement, including not understanding English, the lack of transportation, and prior educational experiences (Alfaro et al., 2014; Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2016; ; Georgis et al., 2014; Gilbert et al., 2017; Gonzalez et al., 2013; LeFevre & Shaw, 2012; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014; Mundt et al., 2015; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2014; Schueler et al., 2014; Tang et al., 2011; Valdés, 1996; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). However, the present study provided more understanding of how life experiences of Latino parents impacted their involvement in their children's education. As they shared their lived experiences, participants described components of both the parental involvement theory (Epstein & Sanders, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997) and the

cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). The experiences that they shared included information about how they perceived their own parents' engagement and how that impacted their current parental involvement. Participants did not indicate that they knew about the theories, but the theories are valuable with regard to understanding how parental involvement and cultural capital are crucial to increasing parental engagement.

Teachers, administrators, and policymakers must be aware of the negative experiences that deter parental involvement and seek to minimize parental exposure to negative incidents. Some parents believe that they should be involved in their child's education; therefore, they want to attend school events (Grolnick, 2015; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Walker et al., 2005; Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013). Reaching a parent early with a friendly greeting and positive interactions, rather than negative concern, supports positive relationship-building. If a teacher or administrator invites a parent to a positive school event, rather than a disciplinary or academic meeting, the experience may support future engagement. Studies show an increase in parent involvement with parents who felt welcomed in the school environment (Carpenter et al., 2016; Kinne, 2015; Mundt et al., 2015; Murray et al., 2014; Reininger & Santana López, 2017; Vega et al., 2015; Walker et al., 2005; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). If the first communication between home and school is positive, parents are more willing to interact with educators.

Educators must have honest and open communication with parents to allow for two-way communication. Establishing the best way to communicate will allow for all those involved to be comfortable. Sending an email blast out to parents may be a time saver for educators, but not all parents have email. Some parents may not check their email daily. Several participants noted

that communication is the key to building the relationship needed to promote student success. The need for positive relationships is evident when striving to increase parental involvement.

Having open communication and a positive relationship will allow for parents to disclose when there is something that prevents them from attending an event. Understanding time constraints and the inability to be physically present supports positive relationships between home and school. Educators must be flexible when scheduling meetings. If the parent must be present, it is crucial that parents are given enough time to make arrangements to participate (Avvisati et al., 2011; Baquedano-López et al., 2013; H. Chen & Zhu, 2017; Murray et al., 2014; Vega et al., 2015; Williams & Sánchez, 2013). Educators who realize that time and transportation are an issue may consider having a phone conference or other means for accomplishing the intended goal of the meeting.

Not all parental involvement is school-based. Educators who are aware of the types of parental engagement with the knowledge that involvement is both school-based and home-based have a better understanding of how parents support their child. Realizing that not all involvement is witnessed at school supports the notion that a parent can be emotionally present and physically absent. The absence does not indicate that parents do not care about their children's education. Providing professional development to educate faculty about the needs and cultural differences of the Latino community will allow for the cultural compassion needed to build strong relationships. Professional development can also include the understanding of the verbiage or academic language that is used may not be understood by parents. Parents need to understand what is being said without feeling like they are being belittled.

Parents may also need professional development. The term used when instructing parents is not *professional development* it is *a workshop*. Parent workshops help to build the

cultural capital needed to navigate through the school system. Parents who are provided the knowledge and skills needed to support their children tend to feel more comfortable attending school events (Avvisati et al., 2011; DiMaggio 1979; Gonzales, 2012; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Park & Holloway, 2013; Ramirez et al., 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Vega et al., 2015; Inoa, 2017; Kyzar & Jimerson, 2018; Suizzo, et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang et al., 2014; M.-T. Wang & Sheikh-Khalil, 2014). When parents understand the school system, they may be able to feel more comfortable asking questions and willing to provide input to school or policy decision-making.

### **Empirical Implications**

The majority of Latino parental involvement literature that existed focused on the reasons Latino parents did not participate in school-based activities (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015). Additionally, there was little research that explored the lived experiences of parents with children at the middle level of education. This study filled the gaps found in the literature.

Interviewing 12 participants with children who attended the same school provided a variety of perspectives from parents who were engaged in a variety of school-based activities. Surprisingly, the responses from many parents mirrored each other's perspective. Some participants who attended school in Spanish-speaking countries had the same experiences with their parents as some who attended school in the United States. Juana went to school in Puerto Rico and Anna went to school in New York. Both participants recounted that their mother only went to school to pick up the report card unless there was a behavior issue that required her to attend. Both women noted that there were no behavior issues requiring parental involvement. Maria attended school in the Dominican Republic and Lucia attend school in Pennsylvania.



Maria and Lucia indicated that they were involved in their child's education because their mothers were involved in their education.

There were few differences in the participants' definition of parenting with regard to education and communication. Education was noted as being important and communication was crucial to building a positive relationship between home and school. Participants claimed that not all the information sent home from school was received. Parents must be informed about events allowing time for arrangements to be made for them to attend. Some parents may need childcare, others may need transportation, and others may need to request off from work.

Although some parents indicated negative interactions with some educators, they all believed in creating a trusting relationship to support their child's success. Participants explained that if educators saw them at school, they would be more willing to speak to them. Anna, Emelia, and Juana noted that the open house was the first event they would attend every year so they could meet the teachers. Anna explained that during the open house she got to know who her child's teachers were and she would let the teachers know how to contact her. Other contributors indicated that they attended conferences not only to get updated with their child's progress, but also to meet their child's teachers.

When participants spoke about the Latino culture in general, they did have some varying responses. Some noted that Latino families did not participate, and others said they had participated, while others noted that although parents cared, there were barriers to participation. Parents in this study noted several barriers to Latino parent participation which included language, time, transportation, the lack of understanding school norms, and navigating through school system. Although participants were engaged in their children's education, they did reveal areas of concerns. The two areas highlighted as needing improvement with regard to the barriers

of Latino parent involvement were language accommodations and understanding the school system. Celia declared that when she calls the school, she asks for anyone who speaks Spanish. She and two other participants did not speak English well, so their interviews were completed in Spanish. Having the ability to communicate in their first language allowed them to feel comfortable enough to participate. The same is true for participating in school events.

When parents are able to communicate in their native language, they are more willing to participate in school events. The use of portable translators allows parents to participate in events without having to stop the speaker in order to translate the speech. Parents noted that language accommodations were not exclusive to translation from English to Spanish, but also included the use of common language (i.e., not educational jargon). Several participants spoke about attending IEP meetings and not understanding the language used during the meeting. The field of education has a barrage of words that makes sense to teachers and administrators, but to the common parent, they have no meaning. Participants caution educators with regard to oversimplifying words to prevent being viewed as having a condescending tone. Stating that information is on the school website seems easy enough, but if a parent does not understand the school system the information may not be accessible. Although the information is available, parents who do not know how to navigate through the school system may have issues understanding how to support their child. Attendance, grades, and other information may be found on the school grading network. A parent who has problems working the system should have a way to get the support he or she needs.

### **Practical Implications**

Finally, this study provided practical implications for the teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders involved in education. Parents described the importance of being respected

by teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders. Parents look to create positive relationships with those who are entrusted with the education of their children. It is imperative to have honest, open, two-way communication to support the growth of strong relationships. Ask the parent what the best mode of communication would be to increase the likelihood of receiving information. It is not practical for teachers or educators to be required to use five or more different modes of communication, but if there is a majority of parents who confer in a specific manner, then the teacher can use that manner and provide the outliers with a different way of communication. Perhaps having the parent choose between the teacher's two or three most commonly used methods would be beneficial. Allowing the teacher to choose the methods also allows for the teacher to feel comfortable to foster relationships to form.

Schools must be welcoming to parents. Those who greet parents should smile and say hello and genuinely want to foster an inviting environment. The first event that a parent is invited to should not be a disciplinary or negative meeting. Inviting parents to visit the school during open house or an event where they can meet teachers in a nonthreatening manner allows for the meeting to be positive. Educators and administrators must be aware that a personal invitation may be more valued than a general invitation. If possible, a direct phone call, email, or other means of direct contact should be given to parents rather than a mass email or voice message. Not all parents indicated that the environment was uninviting, but those who did noted that they felt disrespected. Educators should not label or judge absent parents as uncaring parents. There may be valid reasons for a parent not to attend events. Consider that parents may be working, may need transportation, have other children, or may have other barriers. Being physically absent does not mean a parent is emotionally absent. Educators must understand that there are forms of parental involvement that are not seen, such as getting school materials,

getting clothing, providing food, helping with homework; or giving advice or consejos, which are more like life lessons.

Educators and policymakers must also be aware of the educational jargon that is used. Parents may not need English-to-Spanish translations, but rather, need the educational language-to-common language understanding. This understanding includes providing examples when explaining concepts, avoiding condescending tones and allowing parents to make connections needed to fully understand what is being said or read, and continuing to offer workshops that support the understanding of concepts or procedures.

Educators, administrators, and stakeholders must teach parents how to receive help with regard to the educational system. The system includes, but is not limited to, policies involving homework, clothing, behavior, attendance, seeking academic support for children, volunteering, and getting a translator if needed. Navigating through the system may require workshops or support offered at various times of the day, week, or month. It may also be necessary to utilize school personnel such as the parent liaison to facilitate informational sessions.

In addition, educators, administrators, and stakeholders should continue to partner with city, community, and government agencies outside of the school in order to share information or provide support for families. When there is a reciprocal sharing of information between school and community partners, parents are able to receive resources to support their lives and the lives of their children. Area churches, libraries, community centers, community clinics and schools serve the same group of parents. Parents who have a sense of belonging with one entity may feel more comfortable participating in the other entity if there is already a partnership between the groups.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

As the researcher, I made purposeful decisions to limit or define the boundaries of this study. The design of the study was a qualitative phenomenological study with a transcendental approach (Moustakas, 1994). This design allowed the phenomenon to be researched through in-depth descriptions from individual interviews, a focus group interview, observations, and audiovisual and documented materials in order to discover an understanding of the essence of the event. This approach also allowed me to write about my experiences regarding the phenomenon to expose or realize research bias.

Another delimitation was that the participants selected were restricted by two criteria. Participants had to be Latino with at least one child who attended the school and who participated in at least one school-based activity. This delimitation allowed me to research the phenomenon through data collected from participants who have experienced the same phenomenon.

A third delimitation was the site location of the study. I selected the school because of the number of Latino students who attended. I also selected the school because it was a school that was in my neighborhood. Although my children did not attend at the time of the study, two of my children did attend the school.

Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled and the sample of participants for this study had several limitations. For example, most parents were female. There was one male and 11 females who participated in the study. Although there are 22 Spanish-speaking countries, there were three Latin ethnicities represented: Puerto Rican, Venezuelan, and Columbian. Of the 12 participants, 10 identified themselves as Puerto Rican. Three interviews were conducted in Spanish and then translated into English. Another limitation

regarding the sample was that I had to rely on school personnel, other participants, or an introduction at an event in order to find willing parents to partake in the study. The focus group size was limited to three participants. There was going to be four, but there were health complications that prevented the last participant from attending.

A second limitation was the location of the site. The site selection was a delimitation, but I decided to note it as a limitation as well. It was a limitation because there are other middle schools in the area with high Latino populations. A limitation regarding location was the geographical location, which was eastern Pennsylvania. My thoughts (and they may be wrong) were that if this study were done in the southwestern part of the United States, the Latino participants would have identified more with the Mexican ethnic group. Perhaps if the study were conducted in southern Florida, the Latino participants could identify with a different ethnic group such as Cuban or Dominican.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Educators are faced with the continual problem of increasing parental engagement in school-based activities. The U. S. Department of Education (2004) recognized the importance of parental involvement and mandated schools to promote parent engagement. The Latino population continues to rise in Pennsylvania (Dewey, 2011) which, in turn, increases the number of Latino students enrolled in schools. The Latino population, in general, is the fastest-growing minority group and warrants further study with a focus on education (Durand & Perez, 2013; Espinosa-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2017; Guerra & Nelson, 2013; Valdez et al., 2013). Schools are looking for innovative ideas for how to increase parent engagement (Baquedano-López et al., 2013; Cankar et al., 2012; Foster, 2012; Lee et al., 2012; Lewis et al., 2011; Vega et al., 2015). This study can be replicated in other schools within this

district, other school districts, or in other states. There are 22 Spanish-speaking countries and the representation of the Latino cultures could differ if the study were replicated in other areas of the United States.

A delimitation of this study was the location in which the study was completed. The research site was a public school in Pennsylvania. The area also has charter schools and private schools in which the study could be replicated in order to examine the experiences that parents describe and compare them to the current findings.

Another delimitation of the study was the targeted ethnicity of the participants. Peer review (as noted in the section of transferability on page 83 of this study) indicated that the findings were transferable. I recommend that the research study be replicated by changing the ethnicity of the targeted population. The definition of parenting differs between cultural models of ethnic and racial minority families (Altschul, 2011; Andrews, 2013; Bolívar & Chrispeels, 2011; Bower & Griffin, 2011; Ceballo et al., 2014; Chun & Dickson, 2011; Durand, 2011; Mundt et al., 2015; Nino, 2014). There are other racial or ethnic minority groups or various types of households that are represented in schools such as Asian, African American, Indian, Syrian, single-parent, grandparent or other members of the family as parents, and so forth that could be used as the targeted population. Those who reviewed this study also recommended that it could also be replicated with those who are categorized as having low socioeconomic status, regardless of their race and ethnicity.

This study was focused on the lived experiences of parents who participated in school-based activities. Further research could be focused on the perceptions of teachers, principals, counselors, or community agencies regarding Latino parental involvement. Studies suggest that the definition of parental involvement differs between researchers, educators, and policymakers

(Bower & Griffin, 2011; Carpenter et al., 2016; H. Chen & Zhu, 2017; Sebastian et al., 2017). Further research could also be focused on the lived experiences of educators and stakeholders who participate in school-based activities, or who participate in increasing Latino (or another group) parental involvement.

Another group of participants that could shed light to the phenomenon would be the Latino student. Latino children would be able to share their perspectives with regard to their parents' involvement with education can be studied. Students of various grade levels can be asked to participate in the study. Another recommendation would be to involve students of various ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds to understand the students' perceptions of how their parents participate to discover their feelings toward parental involvement.

The final recommendation for further study is to conduct a case study which takes place at one site with participants who are educators, parents, and/or students. This type of study could yield interesting results. The same could be said for a case study encompassing several schools within a school district or several schools from neighboring districts. The results would be geared to promote parental involvement.

### **Summary**

Studies show that parental involvement is beneficial to the academic success of students. School districts are responsible for increasing parental involvement and keeping parents informed about school events, student achievement, and student behavior. The fastest-growing demographic is the Latino population. There have been many studies discussing the barriers to Latino parental participation. This current study was focused on the narratives given by those Latino parents who do participate in school-based activities. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand Latino parent perceptions of the lived experience of



participation in their middle school child's education. The findings from this study corroborated the findings of prior research and adds the Latino voice to the literature.

Parents have past experiences that foster or deter them from participating in the traditional, school-based activities that may be witnessed by educators. They are also engaged in nontraditional, home-based activities that are not observed by educators. The Latino parent who does not understand English has a difficult time understanding the norms and the expectations of the educational system. Latino parents who do understand English may not understand the academic language used to explain the educational system. Parents should not be judged for not attending school functions. There may be a myriad of reasons that they could not attend. Their absence does not equate to their lack of caring. He or she could be the parent that works two jobs and cannot miss a day of work. Perhaps the parent is a single parent without support. They could be the parent without transportation who walked across a bridge to catch a bus to attend a 10-minute meeting with a teacher but arrived 20 minutes too late. The parent could be emotionally present, but physically absent. This parent could leave for work before others wake up and is asleep when others get home. The parent could be emotionally available to ask how the day was and ask what materials are needed for the project, but physically unable to attend the exhibition. This parent could be an aunt or a grandmother or another adult in the life of the child. Regardless of the circumstance, this parent wants the best for his or her child.

The implications of this study are straightforward and clear. Parental involvement, particularly focused on the growing Latino community, needs to be understood and increased in order to promote the successful achievements of the Latino child. Parental engagement programs within the school and in the community must be implemented and utilized strategically to influence all parents. Community agencies must continue and build their partnerships with

school districts. Teachers and other educators need on-going professional development that address the concerns found in this study and the concerns brought to them by their Latino community. When educators address the Latino community's parental involvement, they should welcome all parents, because as participants of this study indicated, it is a team effort.

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## APPENDIX A: CONSENT FORMS

### CONSENT FORM

¡No me juzquez! The Life Experiences that Impact Latino Parent Participation in Their Child's Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Trinidad Y. Sierra  
Liberty University  
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study regarding the life experiences that impact Latino parent participation in their child's education. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a Latino parent of a student attending [REDACTED] who is involved in at least one school event. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Trinidad Y. Sierra, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

**Background Information:** The purpose of this study is to explore the life experiences of middle school Latino parents to understand the impact their experiences have on their participation in school-based activities.

**Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Be interviewed for approximately one hour at a location and time that best works with your availability. Interviews will be audio recorded.
2. Be one of four – five participants in a focus group. The focus group will meet for about an hour at a location that best meets the availability of the participants. (You do not have to partake in this part of the study if you only agree to the interview part of the study.) The focus group interview will be audio recorded.
3. Be observed and audio/video recorded during a school-based event which can be approximately half an hour to an hour depending on the event. Your family, children, school staff, and other spectators may be incidentally recorded at the event, but your participation will be the focus of the observation. Your interaction with the school personnel and your participation will be noted.
4. Review documents which include transcriptions of interviews for validity and accuracy which may take approximately an hour.

**Risks:** The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

**Benefits:** Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society may include the improvement of methods used to promote Latino parent school involvement.

**Compensation:** Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study. If the interview takes place at a coffee shop, the researcher (Trinidad Sierra) will buy your coffee.

**Confidentiality:** The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records. I may share the data I collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers; if I share the data that I collect about you, I will remove any information that could identify you, if applicable, before I share the data.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Individual interviews, focus group interviews, and observations will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or the [REDACTED]. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

**How to Withdraw from the Study:** If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group and observation data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group and observation data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group and observed activity will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

**Contacts and Questions:** The researcher conducting this study is Trinidad Y. Sierra. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, [REDACTED].

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

*Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.*

**Statement of Consent:** I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

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Signature of Participant

Date

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Signature of Investigator

Date

## FORMULARIO DEL CONSENTIMIENTO

¡No me juzquez! Las experiencias de vida que impactan a los padres latinos a participar en la educación de sus hijos: estudio fenomenológico trascendental

Trinidad Sierra  
Liberty University  
Escuela de Educación

Se le invita a usted a que participe en un estudio investigativo sobre las experiencias de vida de los padres latinos de la escuela intermedia para entender el impacto que sus experiencias tienen en su participación en la educación de sus hijos. Usted fue elegido como participante posible porque usted es un padre Latino de un estudiante que asiste a la escuela intermedia [REDACTED] y que está involucrado en por lo menos de un evento escolar. Se le pide a usted que lea este formulario y que haga cualquier pregunta o duda que pueda tener antes de afirmar estar de acuerdo con participar en el estudio.

Este estudio está siendo realizado por Trinidad Sierra y la Escuela de Educación.

**Información del Trasfondo:** El propósito del este estudio es explorar las experiencias de vida de los padres latinos de la escuela intermedia para entender el impacto que sus experiencias tienen en su participación en la educación de sus hijos.

**Procederes:** Si usted decide y afirma estar de acuerdo con participar en este estudio, nos gustaría pedirle que haga las siguientes cosas:

- 1. Entrevista durante aproximadamente una hora en una ubicación y tiempo que mejor funcione con su disponibilidad. Las entrevistas serán grabadas en audio.
- 2. Ser uno de cuatro – cinco participante en un grupo focal. El grupo de enfoque se reunirá durante aproximadamente una hora en un lugar que mejor satisfaga la disponibilidad de los participantes. (usted no tiene que participar en esta parte del estudio si sólo está de acuerdo con la entrevista del estudio. La entrevista del grupo focal será grabada en audio.
- 3. Permitir que se observen y vídeo audio grabado durante un acontecimiento basado en la escuela que puede ser aproximadamente media hora a una hora dependiendo del acontecimiento. Su familia, los niños, el personal de la escuela, y otros espectadores pueden ser registrados incidentalmente en el evento, pero su participación será el centro de la observación. Se anotará su interacción con el personal de la escuela y su participación.
- 4. Revisar los documentos que incluyen transcripciones de entrevistas para la validez y precisión que tardar aproximadamente una hora.

**Riesgos y Beneficios de Participar en el Estudio:** Los riesgos no exceden los que el participante encontraría en la vida diaria.

Los beneficios de participar no son directos. Sin embargo, usted nos ayudará a aprender cómo mejorar la participación de los padres de latinos.

**Compensación:** No hay compensación por participar en este estudio. Si nos reunimos en un café, la investigadora (Trinidad Sierra) le compra el café.

**Privacidad:** La información sobre este estudio se mantendrá privada. En cualquier tipo de informe que se pueda publicar sobre el estudio, no se incluirá cualquier información que pueda hacer posible la identificación del sujeto. La información de la investigación se guardará de manera segura y sólo los investigadores tendrán acceso a ella.

- Se usarán seudónimos para este estudio. Llevaré a cabo las entrevistas en un lugar donde otros no escucharán fácilmente la conversación.
- Los datos se almacenarán en un ordenador con contraseña bloqueada y se podrán utilizar en futuras presentaciones. Después de tres años, todos los registros electrónicos serán borrados.
- Entrevistas individuales, entrevistas con grupos focales y observaciones serán registradas y transcritas. Las grabaciones se almacenarán en un ordenador con contraseña bloqueada durante tres años se borrarán. Sólo la investigadora tendrá acceso a estas grabaciones.
- En caso del grupo de enfoque, no se puede asegurar que los otros participantes mantendrán la privacidad del tema. Entrevistas individuales, entrevistas de enfoque y observaciones serán registradas y transcritas.

**La Naturaleza Voluntaria del Estudio:** Participación en este estudio es voluntario. Su decisión de establecer o no participar no afectará a sus relaciones actuales o futuras con Liberty University o el distrito escolar de [REDACTED]. Si decide participar, usted es libre de no responder a cualquier pregunta o retirarse en cualquier momento sin que afecte a dichas relaciones.

**Cómo retirarse del estudio:** Si decide retirarse del estudio, póngase en contacto con la investigadora en la dirección de correo electrónico/número de teléfono que se incluye en el siguiente párrafo. Si usted decide retirarse, los datos recabados de usted, aparte de los datos de grupo focal y de observación, serán destruidos inmediatamente y no se incluirán en este estudio. El grupo focal y los datos de observación no serán destruidos, pero sus contribuciones al grupo focal y la actividad observada no se incluirán en el estudio si decide retirarse.

**Contactos y Preguntas:** Los investigadores que están realizando este estudio es Trinidad Sierra. Usted puede hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga ahora. Si usted tiene preguntas más tarde, **se le anima** a que se comunique con ella al [REDACTED] o [REDACTED]. También se puede comunicar con el [REDACTED].

Si usted tiene preguntas o dudas sobre este estudio y si desearía hablar con alguien que no sea el investigador (o los investigadores), **se le anima** a que se comunique con la Institutional Review Board (la Junta de Revisión Institucional), 1971 University Blvd, Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 o mandar un correo electrónico a [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu)

*Se le entregará a usted una copia de esta información para guardar en sus propios archivos.*

**Declaración de Consentimiento:** He leído y he entendido la información arriba. He hecho preguntas y he recibido respuestas. Consiento participar en el estudio.

☐ El investigador tiene mi permiso para audio a grabar o vídeo a grabar mí como parte de mi participación en este estudio.

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Firma

Fecha

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Firma del Investigador

Fecha



## **APPENDIX B: PROCEDURES**

- Met with the principal and discussed the study
- Secured IRB approval
- Contacted school district for site approval
- Spoke with principal, secretary, and parent liaison for potential participants
- Contacted potential participants and schedule interviews
- Conducted individual interviews
  - Interviews were audio recorded for transcription
  - Wrote notes to document thoughts and observations during the interviews
  - Asked for participants to recommend other potential participants
  - Transcribed interviews and asked participants to verify validity of transcription
  - Conducted interviews and asked participants if they were interested in joining the focus group.
  - Asked those interested in focus group if I could observe an event that would be recorded and documented
- Attend and document thoughts and feelings regarding the events of those who indicated focus group participation
  - Wrote notes to document thoughts and observations during the interviews
  - Transcribed notes digitally
- Completed focus group interview
  - Interview was audio recorded for transcription
  - Transcribed focus group interview
  - Conferred the validity of the focus group interview with participants
- Analyzed the data from the individual interviews
- Analyzed the data from the focus group and observations
- Constructed the essence of the phenomenon and write the completed report

## APPENDIX C: LIBERTY UNIVERSITY IRB APPROVAL



September 25, 2018

Trinidad Y. Sierra

IRB Approval 3428.092518: ¡No Me Juzgues! The Life Experiences That Impact Latino Parent Participation in Their Child's Education: A Transcendental Phenomenological Study

Dear Trinidad Y. Sierra,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

- 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
- 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



**G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP**  
*Administrative Chair of Institutional Research*  
**The Graduate School**



**APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT LETTER**

July 24, 2018



Dear Potential Participant:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore the life experiences of middle school Latino parents to understand the impact their experiences have on their participation in their child's education. I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a Latino parent of a student in grades six through eight at [REDACTED] who participates in at least one school event and are willing to participate, you will be asked to partake in an interview, be invited to participate in a focus group (4-5 participants), be observed during one school-based event and review the transcribed information for accuracy. It should take between two hours and six hours total to complete the procedures listed. Your name and some other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me to schedule an interview by calling or texting [REDACTED] or send an email [REDACTED].

A consent document will be given to you at the time of our interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. If you wish to participate in the focus group, please let me know at the end of the individual interview session.

If you choose to participate in the interview, and you wish to meet at a local coffee shop, I will purchase your coffee.

Sincerely,



Trinidad Y. Sierra  
Educational Specialist in Curriculum and Instruction

## APPENDIX E: INFORMATIONAL FLYER

# Research Participants Needed

**¡NO ME JUZGUEZ!**

## THE LIFE EXPERIENCES THAT IMPACT LATINO PARENT PARTICIPATION IN THEIR CHILD'S EDUCATION: A TRANSCENDENTAL PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

- Are you a Latino parent of a child attending [REDACTED]?
- Do you participate in at least one school based event?

If you answered **yes** to both of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a parental involvement research study.

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the life experiences of middle school Latino parents to understand the impact their experiences have on their participation in their child's education. Participants will be asked about their personal experiences with regards to parental involvement. You will partake in an interview, focus group, observation, and review transcripts of your participation. Your community, child's school, and school district may benefit from results and suggestions of this study.

**The study is being conducted at:**



**Or:**

At a location of your choosing

Trinidad Y. Sierra a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Please contact Trinidad at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

# Se Necesita Participantes

**¡NO ME JUZGUEZ!**

## **LAS EXPERIENCIAS DE VIDA QUE IMPACTAN LA PARTICIPACIÓN DE LOS PADRES LATINOS EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE DUS HIJOS: UN ESTUDO FENOMENOLÓGICO**

- ¿Es usted un padre Latino de un niño o niña que asiste a la escuela intermedia de [REDACTED]?
- ¿Participa en por lo menos de un evento escolar?

Si usted contesta afirmativamente a estas preguntas, puede ser elegible para participar en un estudio de investigación de participación de los padres.

El propósito de este estudio fenomenológico es explorar las experiencias de vida de los padres latinos de la escuela intermedia para entender el impacto que sus experiencias tienen sobre su participación en la educación de sus hijos. Se les preguntará a los participantes sobre sus experiencias personales en relación a la participación de los padres. Usted participará en una entrevista, grupo de enfoque, observación, y la revision de las transcripciones de su participación. Su comunidad, la escuela de su hijo/hija, y el distrito escolar pueden beneficiarse de los resultados y sugerencias de este estudio.

**El estudio se está llevando a cabo en:**



**O:**

En la ubicación de su elección

Trinidad Y. Sierra una candidata a doctorada en la Escuela de Educación de la Universidad de Liberty, está llevando a cabo este estudio.

**Por favor comuníquese con Trinidad al ([REDACTED]) or ([REDACTED]) para más información**

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515

**APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. What is your name?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. In what grade(s) is/are your child(ren) enrolled?
5. What is your description of parenting with regards to education?
6. How do you perceive your parents' involvement with your middle school education and how does it impact your involvement with your child's education?
7. How do you perceive your interaction with your school? What occasions and people stand out for you?
8. What are your perceptions regarding communication between you and your school?
9. What thoughts stand out with regards to knowing what is going on with your child's education and the ability to be involved in school decision-making?
10. Which factor(s) do you feel is/are most critical when deciding to participate, and why?
11. Explain how the experiences of participating affect you or other family members, your children, and educators.
12. What are your perceptions of the Latino culture with regards to parental involvement?
13. How do you perceive your experiences with participating in community, city, and government agency programs that support your children's education?
14. What else would you would like to share that is significant with reference to parental involvement?

### **Preguntas Individuales de la Entrevista**

1. ¿Cuál es su nombre?
2. ¿Cuántos años tienes?
3. ¿Cuál es su etnia?
4. ¿En qué grado (s) está matriculado su hijo (a)?
5. ¿Cuál es su descripción de la crianza de los hijos con respecto a la educación?
6. ¿Cómo percibe usted que la participación de sus padres en la educación de la escuela intermedia y cómo impacta su participación en la educación de su hijo?
7. ¿Cómo percibe su interacción con la escuela? ¿Qué ocasiones y personas se destacan por ti?
8. ¿Cuáles son sus percepciones acerca de la comunicación entre usted y la escuela?
9. ¿Qué pensamientos se destacan con respecto a saber lo que está sucediendo con la educación de su hijo y la capacidad de participar en la toma de decisiones en la escuela?
10. ¿Qué factor (es) sientes que es/son más críticos cuando decides participar, y por qué?
11. Explique cómo las experiencias de participación afectan a usted o a otros miembros de la familia, a sus hijos y a los educadores.
12. ¿Cuáles son sus percepciones de la cultura Latina con respecto a la participación de los padres?
13. ¿Cómo percibe sus experiencias con la participación en programas de agencias de la comunidad, la ciudad y el Gobierno que apoyan la educación de sus hijos?
14. ¿Qué otra cosa le gustaría compartir que es importante con referencia a la participación de los padres?

**APPENDIX G: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Please introduce yourself to the group and share if you are familiar with each other.
2. State in what grade(s) your child(ren) is/are enrolled.
3. Converse about the experiences of your Latino culture with regards to parental involvement.
4. Describe an event you participated in at your school. Explain if you participated in the event someone else discussed.
5. What thoughts do you have with regards to how other parent participate or do not participate in school events?
6. What helped you to decide to participate in this event?
7. Describe your experiences and feelings regarding how welcomed you are when coming in to the school.
8. Discuss your experiences with participating in community activities and expand on your experiences if you find that you participated in the same activities.
9. What else would you like to share that is significant with reference to parental involvement?



### **Preguntas de la Entrevista del Grupo de Enfoque**

1. Por favor preséntese al grupo y comparte si usted está familiarizado con el otro.
2. Indique qué grado (s) está matriculado/a su hijo/hija.
3. Converse acerca de las experiencias de su cultura Latina con respecto a la participación de los padres.
4. Describa un evento en el que participó en la escuela. Explique si participó en el evento que alguien más discutió.
5. ¿Qué pensamientos se destacan con respecto a otros padres que participan o no participan en eventos escolar?
6. ¿Qué te ayudó a decidirte a participar en este evento?
7. Describa sus experiencias y sentimientos con respecto a la bienvenida que tiene al entrar a la escuela.
8. Discuta sus experiencias con la participación en actividades de la comunidad y amplíe sus experiencias si usted encuentra que usted participó en las mismas actividades.
9. ¿Qué más le gustaría compartir que es importante con referencia a la participación de los padres?

**APPENDIX H: SITE PERMISSION**

September 24, 2018

Ms. Trinidad Sierra



Dear Ms. Sierra:

On behalf of the [REDACTED] I am pleased to grant you permission to conduct your research on "The life experiences that impact Latino parent participation in their child's education: A transcendental Phenomenological Study."

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Once again, I am pleased to support you in this endeavor, and good luck with your research.

Sincerely,



cc: File