FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AS A RELATIONSHIP:

RELATIONAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES THAT STRENGTHEN LATINO FAMILY ENGAGEMENT

by

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Family Engagement as a Relationship: Relational Beliefs and Practices that Strengthen Latino Family Engagement

Thesis directed by Professor Honorine D. Nocon

ABSTRACT

The number of children in the United States for whom English is not the language spoken at home is increasing. The National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Hammer, Scarpino, & Davison, 2011) reported that, in 2007, 10.8 million school-age children in the U.S. spoke a native language other than English, an 11% increase in just 25 years. Of these English language learners (ELLs), Latinos represent almost 80% (Jerome, 2009). Numerous studies have shown the importance to both students and schools of meaningfully engaging families in the school environment. This comparative case study focuses on the practices of two elementary schools that successfully promote the engagement of families of Latino ELL students and is intended to increase understanding of the necessary relational components, or the ways that individuals are connected, that promote family engagement in school environments with populations of primarily Latino students and a majority of English language learners (ELLs).

The form and content of this abstract are approved. I recommend its publication.

Approved: Honorine D. Nocon

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family and friends who supported me along the way, but most especially my partner in life, Matthew. Throughout this long and arduous journey, where many aspects of this experience and my life in general were unpredictable, to say the least, the one thing that remained unwavering was you. Your love, support, encouragement, and at times brutally honest feedback kept me moving forward and allowed me to achieve one of my greatest dreams. I love you, KT!

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I give great thanks to my advisor, Honorine Nocon, for her contribution and support of my research. Honorine has provided me with guidance and clarity when my path seemed unpredictable and unclear. Without her invaluable feedback and suggestions, this thesis may not have been completed and my sanity would definitely not be intact. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Kara Mitchell Viesca who provided me with numerous research opportunities that ultimately strengthened my understanding of the research process and gave me invaluable experience with which to ground my own work.

"Qualitative research… advances human rights and affirms human dignity…
by treating research subjects honorably… (and) with respect….
Negatively stereotyped portrayals of the routine practices of people –
portrayals that deceitfully distort the truth or silence it – are a violation of human rights"
(Erickson, 2009, p. 3).

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

One of the fundamental benefits of a case study is that it gleans information from a variety of sources towards a holistic understanding of a complex social phenomenon and its cultural influences (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). This comparative case study is intended to increase understanding of the necessary relational components, or the ways that individuals are connected, that promote family engagement in school environments with populations of primarily Latino students and a majority of English language learners (ELLs). The following research question was formed to specifically explore this phenomenon:

> What relational beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of families are present in elementary schools with primarily Latino and ELL student populations that have demonstrated unusual success?

Work by Ferlazzo & Hammond (2009) informed my definition of family engagement for this study's purposes as "schools and (families) leading together with the (families') self-interests in mind in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (p. 4). My conceptual framework and literature review further outline the complex nature of this inevitable relational partnership as well as the various components necessary to establish and sustain these invaluable relationships for the benefit of the students.

My interest in uncovering the relational aspects of family engagement practices, specifically at schools with populations primarily of Latino ELL students, guided this research. As stated by Christenson & Sheridan (2001), "…there is still more rhetoric

than reality about family and school working together as genuine partners" (p. 18). However, I will argue that through the interpretation of the findings of this study, I have found two elementary schools that have moved beyond the rhetoric and into the realms of true collaboration with families. The two case study schools, although presented as dissimilar in their philosophies and programmatic structures, illustrate very similar and specific beliefs and practices in regard to their relationships with their students' families.

There are eight sections in this chapter, including the problem statement, purpose of the study, conceptual framework and a brief review of the literature, research question, an overview of the methodology, a brief discussion of the findings and limitations, and finally a look at the implications. This chapter provides an outline for the remainder of the paper.

Problem Statement

The number of children in the United States for whom English is not the language spoken at home is increasing. The National Center for Education Statistics (as cited in Hammer, Scarpino, & Davison, 2011) reported that, in 2007, 10.8 million school-age children in the U.S. spoke a native language other than English, an 11% increase in just 25 years. Of these English language learners (ELLs), Latinos represent almost 80% (Jerome, 2009). Numbers of ELL students, specifically Latino, will undoubtedly continue to rise as it was reported in 2008 that one out of every five children in the U.S. was born into an immigrant family (Restrepo & Dubasik, 2008); and, between 1990 and 2000, the number of Spanish speakers in the United States increased from about 20 to 31 million (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2001). According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 16% of the U.S. population identified as being from Hispanic or Latino origins (Ennis, Rios-

Vargas, & Albert, 2011). This shows a 3% increase from the 2000 census numbers. Furthermore, "more than half of the growth in the total population of the United States between 2000 and 2010 was due to the increase in the Hispanic population" (p. 2). Although it is never a complete picture of our nation, census data do provide a quick snapshot of our growing diverse population and therefore warrant inclusion. To compound the situation of the rapidly growing Latino population, many U.S. schools are unsuccessful at engaging parents of this specific student population (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008), although parent engagement has been linked to student and school success (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Burns, 1993; Domina, 2005; Dorfman & Fisher, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Tolan & Woo, 2010). This will be discussed further in Chapter 2.

ELLs (and Latinos) in Our Classrooms – From the Big Picture to the Local Situation

The discussion of second language learners in the classroom is not a new one. In the 1948 district court case of Mendez et al. v. the Westminster School District of Orange County, it was ruled that speaking a language other than English in the classroom was considered "a handicap" and, therefore, required special instruction. In 2002, Pearlman (as cited in Herrell & Jordan, 2012) predicted that "…by the year 2015 more than 50% of all students enrolled in K-12 public schools across the United States will be English learners" (p. 1). Although more recent numbers do not substantiate this decade-old prediction, the needs of this population are far from diminishing. For example, based on

a collection of reports from 41 state education agencies, Kindler (as cited in Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005) reported "only 18.7% of students classified as limited English proficient met state norms for reading in English" (p. 364). As the population of ELLs, and specifically Latino students, in U.S. classrooms continues to rise each year, the need to acknowledge and support this group of learners has become increasingly crucial.

National numbers. The drastic rise in our schools' ELL populations is evident when numbers from various sources are compared. In 2000, ELLs specifically comprised 7% of the total U.S. school population (Jerome, 2009), of which 74% were Spanish speakers (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). During the 2008-2009 school year, 9.25% of the total school (PK-12) enrollment was listed as ELL (NCELA, 2011). Though this shows a slight increase over time, the most startling bit of data from the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) shows that there is a 51.01% increase of ELLs in our classrooms since the 1998-1999 school year. This is in contrast to a total growth in enrollment of 7.22% over the same period of time. Concurrently, the proportion of Latino students across the country is on the rise. In the 2000 Census, 15% of students enrolled in school identified as Hispanic (Davis & Bauman, 2013). This number rose to 20% in the comparable 2011 American Community Survey. Of course, these data represent an average for the country. Numerous states, regions, cities, and therefore schools are substantially more saturated. In parts of our nation, hypersegregated schools exist in which the student body has nonwhite enrollments between 90 and 100% (Orfield & Frankenberg as cited in Gandara, 2010). In 2005-2006,

more than 60% of Latinos living in the urban areas in the West attended these types of schools (Gandara, 2010).

Western State, USA and Metropolis School District. In Western State, USA, enrollment for the 2012-2013 school year showed 32.26% of the students identifying as Latino, in comparison to 28.37% in 2008-2009, 28.57% in 2009-2010, 31.55% in 2010-2011, 31.9% in 2011-2012 (Western State Department of Education, 2013). ELL enrollment in Western State schools for the 2012-2013 school year measured in at just under 125,000 students, 14.4% of the student population. This is an increase from 2010-2011, when 13.9% of the state's student population was labeled ELL. According to NCELA data (2011), Western State had an ELL population growth of greater than 200% from the 1998/99 to the 2008/09 school years. As of October 2012, Metropolis School District (MSD) had 58% Latino students and 35% ELLs enrolled in its schools (MSD Communication Office, 2011). Additionally, MSD data show that 39% of the student population in 2012 were Spanish speakers.

Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary. Two of the focus schools highlighted in the MSD-Western University Research Collaborative's *MSD Exemplary Schools Case Study: Cross-case Analysis* (2011) were Northwest K-8, a dual language school, and Southwest Elementary, a self-designated community school. Northwest K-8's school population is 57.9% ELL students and 94.6% of the student population is Latino. At Southwest, 64.1% of the students are ELLs and 84.8% identify as Latino. These schools can be considered hypersegregated as defined earlier. Both of these schools were chosen for the original study based on the high levels of ELLs enrolled, as

well as other qualifying criteria, and the success with which they serve these students. More detail about these schools is provided in the Chapter 3.

Parent Involvement & Student Success

Parent involvement has been a focal concern of American schools for decades (Herman & Yeh, 1983; Moles & Fege, 2011). A quick database search for 'home-school relations' produces academic literature from as early as the 40s and 50s. The more recent term, "parent involvement' begins to appear heavily in the 1970s. This is not surprising since numerous researchers have suggested the positive impacts of parental involvement on student success (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Burns, 1993; Domina, 2005; Dorfman & Fisher, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Tolan & Woo, 2010), overall school success (Epstein, 1995; Ferguson, 2008; Soo-Yin, 2003 as cited in Kalin & Steh, 2010), and even job satisfaction of teachers (Lareau, 1989).

According to many in the field, the forms and definitions of parental involvement can vary greatly (Domina, 2005; Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, M. G., & Simon, B. S., 1997; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Jeynes, 2007) but all agree that any increase in parent engagement to bridge the connection between a child's two settings can only be beneficial. Barnard (2004) even found a long-term effect, as parent involvement in elementary school was significantly associated with overall student success later in high school. In general, school connections with parents have been shown to contribute significantly to a student's overall development and academic success (Tolan & Woo, 2010).

Although there are not many empirical studies documenting the effects of Latino parental involvement on student success (Durand, 2011), it is known that high-achieving Latino students report high levels of family involvement both at home and at school (Delgado-Gaitan as cited in Durand, 2011). Additionally, Marschall (2006) did find in her research that schools that participated in culturally considerate outreach practices in regard to their family involvement initiatives had increased student performance. This claim is consistent with other qualitative studies as well. Reyes, Scribner, & Scribner (1999) found that schools with large Latino populations, which were culturally considerate in their family involvement practices, experienced similar results with their student performance.

Obstacles to Engagement of Parents and Families of Latino ELL Students

Numerous barriers to engagement of families of Latino ELL students have been suggested (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). These obstacles have been identified as originating from both parties individually, the schools and the families, and include some mutually shared barriers as well.

School-based obstacles. "School-based barriers for ELL parental engagement include a deficit perspective, a unidirectional approach to parental involvement, and negative (or unwelcoming) school climate" (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 8). Failing to acknowledge the "funds of knowledge" of all families and viewing these members instead through a deficit lens can cause schools to miss out on a tremendously valuable resource (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Additionally, some theorists believe that holding this deficit perspective in regard to ELL families can cause schools to view this population as a hindrance rather than evaluating their own institutional

actions towards improved engagement of these parents (Gibson, 2002). Similarly, schools that only seek to gain support from families without reciprocating, or that present an unwelcoming and unfamiliar environment for Latino families may discourage the very involvement that is integral to student success (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

Family-based obstacles. Although the importance of parent engagement is clear, many families of Latino ELL students do not engage with the school environment (Gandara, 2010). In different cultures, education and schooling have very different meanings (Valdes, 1996); for example, in much of Latin America, school is left to the teachers and families take responsibility for the education of life skills (Restrepo & Dubasik, 2008; Zarate, 2007). In some cases, due to their own low academic achievement or English language proficiency, Latino parents feel as though they have nothing to offer in the American school environment and therefore do not engage (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). "Without knowing the language and, therefore, the demands of the task sent home, Latino parents face additional obstacles in their effort to get involved in their child's learning at home" (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). To compound the issue, upon entry into the U.S., many immigrant families often discover that previous codes of conduct and former survival strategies are not successful in their new environment (Valdes, 1996). These factors, combined or in isolation, could lead to feelings of exclusion from the school setting, especially if families view themselves as participants within the school setting. "Of all human needs, few are as powerful as the need to be seen, included, and accepted by other people…(it is) not surprising that inclusion and acceptance are key aspects of privilege" (Johnson, 2006, p. 55).

Shared obstacles. Finally, barriers to family engagement shared by both the families and the schools exist as well. Unfortunately, many educators mistakenly assume that if parents are not participating in the school's activities, they have a lack of interest in their child's education (Ascher, 1988). In actuality, this could result from a disjuncture between school and home culture and the responsibilities that each presumes the other should meet (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). A lack of communication can further compound this issue. Finally, logistics can severely limit the engagement of families of ELL Latino students, as oftentimes, they have exhaustive schedules that conflict with school events or parent conferences (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008).

Purpose of This Study

As previously discussed, numerous studies have shown the importance to both students and schools of meaningfully engaging families in the school environment. This study focuses on the practices of two elementary schools that successfully promote the engagement of families of Latino ELL students and, more specifically, on the relational beliefs and practices that both establish and maintain this vital partnership. The exploration of the literature suggests that the majority of the field neglects the relational aspects of family engagement in favor of a more structural focus (Moorman Kim, Coutts, Holmes, Sheridan, Ransom, Sjuts, & Rispoli, 2012). This will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. My research question, and the resulting data and analysis, aim to more adequately explore this relational aspect of engagement as it relates to Latina/o ELL students at two schools and to provide exemplars to similar schools of the tools to improve family engagement practices so they may better support student learning.

Conceptual Framework

The relational aspect of family engagement is the focus for this study, rather than structural involvement as is the case with a majority of the literature within the field (Moorman Kim, Coutts, Holmes, Sheridan, Ransom, Sjuts, & Rispoli, 2012). This study makes the claim that relationships are inevitable among families and schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). In fact, for the purposes of this study, the family-school relationship is the lens through which family engagement is examined. It is my belief that the structural, or programmatic, portions can be implemented more successfully if the relational aspects of this connection are attended to first with thoughtful and intentional effort.

As the term relationship connotes, there is a reciprocal nature in the connections between families and schools. However, for the purposes of this study, an institutionally directed framework is being presented. Given the relative power of individual families and the obstacles to engagement as presented previously for Latina/o families, schools and, subsequently, school personnel seemed most appropriate as prescribed change agents. Additionally, studies suggest that, by and large, the strongest predictor of successful family engagement is intentional school practices aimed to engage families (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Clooson, 2005; Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). The conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) presented in this study highlights the school components needed to both *establish* and *maintain* a positive relationship with families, which support overall engagement. In this section, I first briefly describe the theory that provided the foundational

understanding for my conceptual framework. I then present the framework through a relational lens and describe each of the individual components in detail. I also explain the connections between the various components of the framework and my rationale for the inclusion and configuration of the components.

Bronfenbrenner

The basic tenet of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model, which directly relates to this study, is the recognition of the relationships between and within the nested

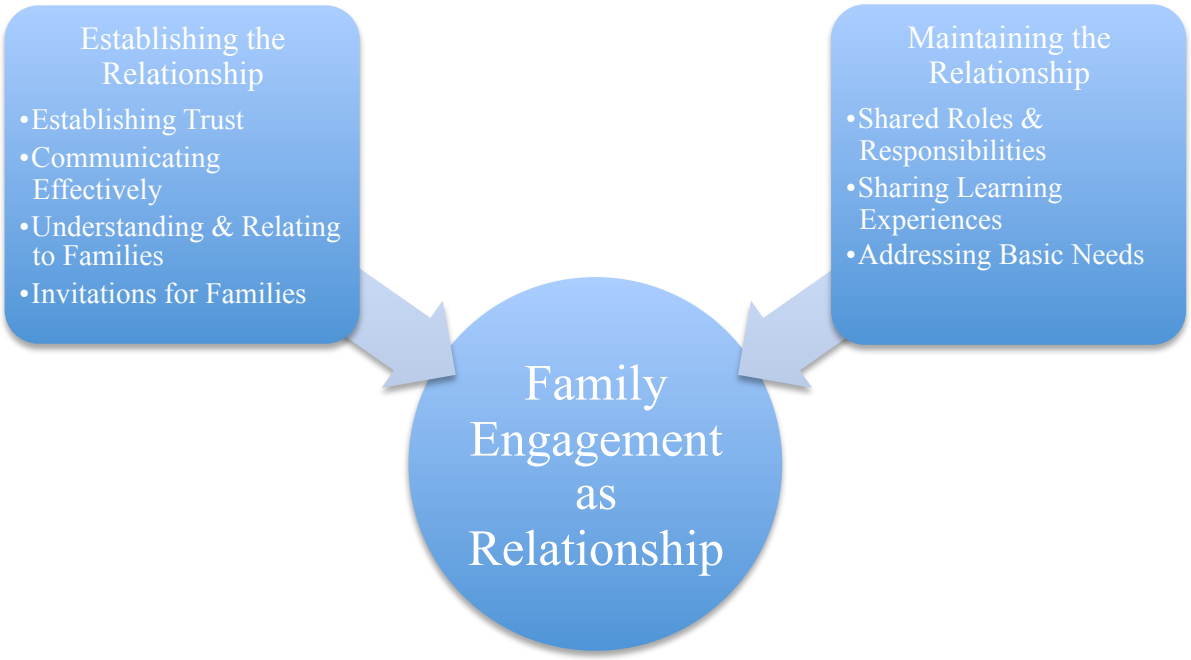

Figure 1.1. Conceptual Framework

levels of systems within a learner's internal and external environments (Figure 1.2). The model allows researchers to see how patterns of interactions within and between these layered systems influence the learner as well as the other systems. In this study, the relationship within the mesosystem between the family and the school is the specific focus. Also noteworthy for this study in particular, this theory encourages the

recognition of the influences of culture, as represented in each child's individual ecological system, on development. Bronfenbrenner's theory is described further in the literature review within Chapter 2.

Family Engagement as Relationship

There is not much focus in the literature on the difference between the terms *parental involvement* and *family engagement*; however, for this study a clear distinction between the two was necessary. The work by Ferlazzo & Hammond (2009) informed my

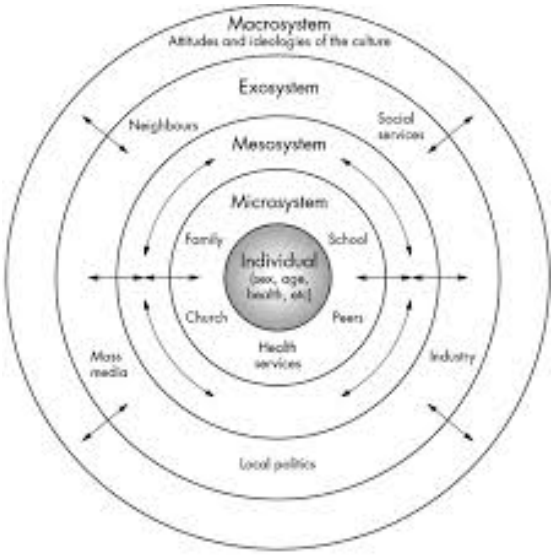

Figure 1.2. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

definition of *family engagement* as "schools and (families) leading together with the (families') self-interests in mind in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (p. 4). Creating an authentic partnership allows for all stakeholders to see themselves as vital components for success. "An individual's or group's position in relation to other individuals and groups has a significant impact on the perspectives, relationships, and experiences of all involved" (Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007). To effectively establish and maintain productive relationships with families, the delineation between the two terms

parental involvement and *family engagement* is necessary and a subtle shift in perspective regarding the more preferred *family engagement* is needed within the education field, specifically for those working with populations similar to those of the site schools in this study. Further discussion of this delineation can be found within the literature review in Chapter 2.

In looking at the relational focus for family engagement, Sheridan and her colleagues' (2012) meta-analysis delineated between the terms and functions of *parent/family involvement* versus *family-school partnerships* within the current literature. "*Parent involvement* is defined as the participation of significant caregivers in activities promoting the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being" (p. 3). Within this definition, the structures and practices of activities within the home and school are highlighted. In contrast, "*family-school partnership* is defined as a child-focused approach wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains" (Sheridan, Kim, Coutts, Sjuts, Holmes, Ransom, & Garbacz, 2012, p. 3). The *relationship* between the family and the school is emphasized in this latter definition. However, partnership is "an amorphous term that does not always make explicit the unresolved terrain or the precise nature of (school-family) relationships" (Lasky, 2000, p. 847) and the word does not accurately capture the dynamics that are present in effective family-school relationships (Lareau, 1989). Therefore, the term *family-school relationship* is used in this study.

In a nod to the complexity and interrelatedness of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) as described earlier, I acknowledge that there are numerous overlapping and, in some cases nested, relational variables impacting the engagement of families as allies with the school. In borrowing from Bronfenbrenner's model, my focus in building the specifics of the conceptual framework was more on the theory's concepts of complexity and interrelatedness of numerous systemic components than the nested structure of specific variables outlined by Bronfenbrenner. Systems are predictably influenced by multiple and dynamic factors. Therefore, it stands to reason that many factors can impact the functioning of the family-school relationship and consequently the engagement of families. Therefore, relationships, once established, need to be maintained.

"Beyond events that represent 'involvement' or 'participation' of families in learning-related or school events, the *establishment* and *maintenance* of relationships reflect a dynamic, interpersonal perspective" (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010, p. 61, emphasis added). When schools focus on *establishing* and *maintaining* respectful and trusting relationships between families and school staff, they can effectively utilize those connections for overall school success (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Specific relational components that support both the *establishment* and *maintenance* of the family-school relationship will be outlined in the following sections.

Establishing the Relationship

Research tells us that when schools reach out to establish relationships, despite education or income level, "families become more involved in their children's educational lives" (Dauber & Epstein as cited Christenson & Sheridan, 2001, p. 23).

Furthermore, families of lower-income children tend to become more engaged with the school environment when their children's school has inclusive practices that help build relationships where the families feel valued, encouraged, and supported (Lewis & Henderson, 1997). When relationships between schools and families are established in a positive and caring manner, benefits for the child, families, and the school are possible (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). In accordance with the outline provided in Figure 1.3, the specific components under the primary level theme, *establishing the relationship,* are described in detail from the school's perspective in the next section. Four secondary level themes, *establishing trust*, *communicating effectively*, *understanding and relating to families*, and *invitations for families* are detailed. Two of these secondary themes are broken down further into tertiary sub-themes to describe with even more detail the relational components necessary to enhance family engagement of Latino ELL students.

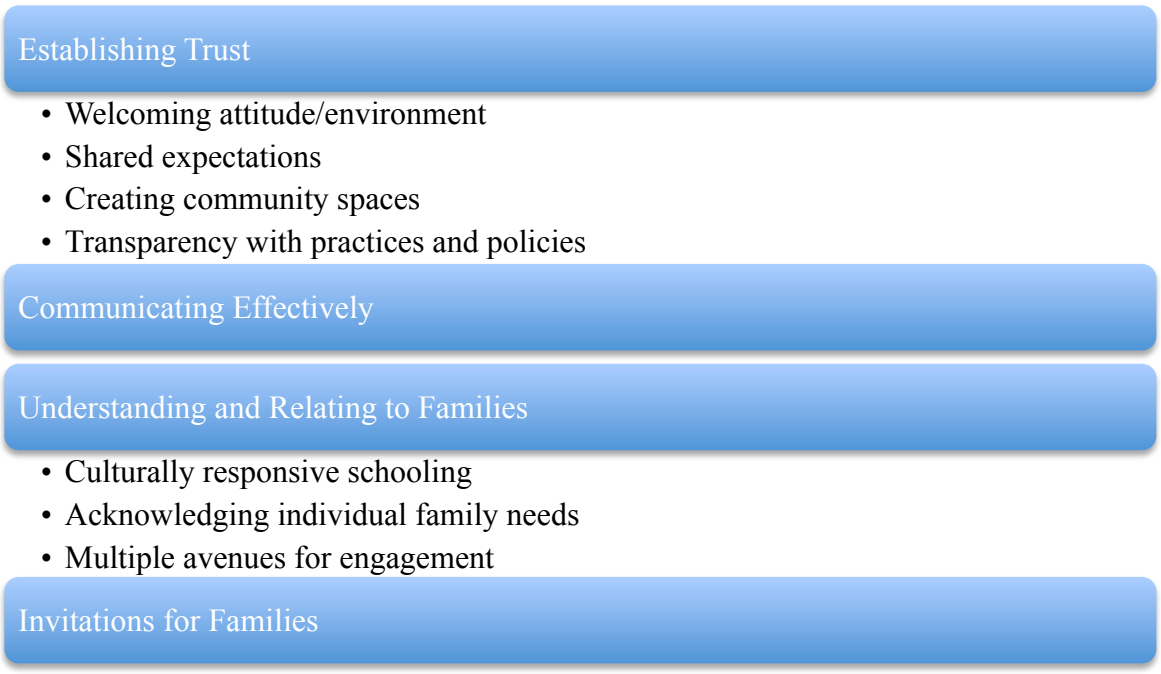

Figure 1.3. Conceptual Framework: Establishing the Relationship

Establishing trust. Both parents and professionals identify trust as a vital component of effective family–school relationships (Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, 1992). Adams and Christenson (2000) contend that trust between families and school is implicit for the establishment of an effective collaboration. When an atmosphere of mistrust is present, "it is difficult for educators and family members to create effective school-family partnerships to support student learning" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 11). Mapp (2002) found that the parents in her study emphasized trust as an important influence on their school engagement. Schools successful at engaging families from diverse backgrounds "focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).

"Despite its common usage, trust has been a difficult concept to adequately define" (Adams & Christenson, 2000, p. 479). For the purposes of this study, trust is defined as "reflecting confident expectations of positive outcomes" (Holmes & Rempel, 1989, p. 188). It is difficult to observe or gauge the trust that one individual has placed in another. Therefore, I have broken the concept of trust, in reference to the establishment of family-school relationships, into multiple factors. Each of the components listed below support the development of trust between the various participants in the family-school relationship.

For the purposes of this study, *establishing trust*, as guided by the literature and adapted for this study, consists of the following four components described below: welcoming attitude/environment, shared expectations, creating community spaces, and transparency with practices and policies.

Welcoming attitude/environment. "Programs that successfully connect with families…are welcoming" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 43). In fact, some contend the most influential factor in involving families is the way the school welcomes and reaches out to families (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Clooson, 2005). Ferguson (2008) stated, "The sense of welcome families feel has a direct effect on their involvement in their children's education" (p. 9). Families in one study reported "that the process of welcoming created a sense of belonging, one in which (they) felt that they belonged to the school and that the school also belonged to them" (Mapp, 2002, p. 9).

Both the attitude and the physical environment contribute to a sense of welcome (Mapp, 2002). Colorful walls with children's work displayed and the cleanliness of the school can impact the overall sense of welcome. Families also see personal greetings upon entry and welcome signs hanging by the doors as welcoming gestures that build trust (Adams & Christenson, 1998). Utilization of a welcoming committee or similar means to acknowledge new members in the community could also be effective and appreciated (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). When school-family partnerships are characterized by a sense of welcome, beliefs and practices are present that foster relationships between educators and families, allowing all involved to discover that each individual can support a child's education in meaningful ways (Ferguson, 2008).

In this study, a *welcoming attitude/environment* is defined as containing actions of individuals within the school and characteristics of the physical setting of the school that elicit a feeling of belonging and connection in all who enter. Examples may include, but

are not limited to, personal greetings upon entry, welcome signs, children's work on display, a welcoming committee, and connecting in regard to families' personal lives.

Shared expectations. Family-school relationships tend to be stronger when expectations, both about the child and about each other, are shared (Vickers & Minke, 1995); and, differing goals and expectations can act as a barrier to building trust (Hornby, 2011). Vosler-Hunter (1989) viewed shared expectations and goals as paramount to effective collaboration and trust between families and schools. In fact, shared values and common goals are some of the very conditions that can lead to a healthy family-school relationship (Lasky, 2000).

School staff and families both expressed shared goals as a value integral to their relationship (Miretzky, 2004). By collaborating with families to establish clear and high expectations, family-school connections are strengthened (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009). Through this, "parents and staff rally around a goal (because it) is meaningful and important to both" (Mapp, 2002, p. 11). This joint determination of shared goals and expectations is a necessary component of a healthy family-school collaboration (Voltz, 1994).

For the purposes of this study, *shared expectations* is defined as goals that are meaningful and important both to families and the school. These goals may or may not have been formed collaboratively.

Creating community spaces. Creating a warm environment for families to congregate at school builds overall relations, both with the school and among families (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). By designating a specific area for families to gather, trust is built (Adams & Christenson, 1998). Additionally, a dedicated space where

families can meet, talk, and gather together sends a message that families belong to the school community (Goodwin & King, 2002).

For this study, *creating community spaces* is defined as physical locations or events in the school that are created for and designated as spaces for community members to socialize. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, comfortable seating areas for multiple people to congregate and school events where school community members have time and space to socialize if desired.

Transparency with practices and policies. A key factor to establishing strong family-school connections is the openness to families that schools demonstrate through their contacts with them (Hornby, 2011). An open-door policy signifies transparency of information and policies (Bastiani, 1987). Administrators and teachers being open and available to families for discussions, clarifications, problem solving or airing of concerns solidifies the trust in the relationship. This type of visibility and accessibility of practices and communications with staff show families that schools have a vested interest in the relationship (Auerbach, 2007).

In this study, *transparency with practices and policies* is defined as behaviors from school personnel that create an overall sense of visibility with procedures to other members of the community, particularly family members. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, school personnel being available to answer questions about school practices and policies and classrooms, and the school in general, being accessible and open to families for visits or questions.

Communicating effectively. Effective communication practices allow both families and the school to recognize and acknowledge the goals and needs of the other

party, as well as to relay important information (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010). Families and school staff have expressed the importance of the presence of a few components related to the communication practices between them, including "listening carefully, avoiding the use of jargon, being nonjudgmental, sensitive and non-blaming" (p. 70). The frequency and use of multiple methods of communications has also been shown to affect the quality of the family-school relationship. Positive, on-going, personalized communication with families about their children's performance and progress (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009) rather than just when there is a student issue, show the school has a vested interest in the relationship (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Christenson and Sheridan (2001) found that educators tend to do poorly at providing specific information such as specifics regarding how families can help children learn at home, available community resources, school-led workshops or classes and opportunities where parents can actively be involved as decision makers.

Effective and meaningful communication with families of limited English proficiency includes personalized, timely and direct contact (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). When communication with families is general in nature, infrequent and without adequate notice, Latino families find the effort feels impersonal and lacking genuine interest (Zarate, 2007). "Lack of communication, misunderstandings, and miscommunication between schools and linguistically diverse families are very common because of stereotypes, assumptions, and generalizations" (Araujo, 2009, p. 120). Olivos (2009) also stated that consciously avoiding the use of jargon or references to legal or state mandates without explanation supports stronger relations with Latino families.

Additionally, providing all information, especially essential information, in Spanish strengthens the relationship between home and school (Zarate, 2007).

For the purposes of this study, *communicating effectively* is defined as school personnel utilizing successful and valuable means for corresponding with families. These communications, whether written or verbal, should include reciprocity, timeliness, frequency, personalization, consideration of differences in families, multiple methodologies, positive and nonjudgmental language, and availability on the part of school personnel. Specifically in consideration of the Latino population, communications that avoid the use of jargon, are in the families' home language, and include direct contact are also descriptors of this component of the framework.

Understanding and relating to families. Understanding that families play a consequential role in their children's success is an integral part of effective family engagement. Bronfenbrenner (1991) contends that the informal education that takes place in the family is "not merely a pleasant prelude, but rather a powerful prerequisite for success in formal education from the primary grades onward" (p. 5). "A knowledge of the total family setting could provide teachers with a wealth of information to use in making school a positive experience for the child and other family members" (Swick, 1979, p. 97). This general theme of *understanding and relating to families* is broken down further into three specific, supporting areas: culturally responsive schooling, acknowledging individual family needs/wants/desires, and offering multiple avenues for engagement. Each of these supporting areas is discussed more in detail below.

Culturally responsive schooling. "If educational institutions are serious about improving parental and family involvement, then they must change their approaches to

them…. School personnel must make it their business to learn about the ethnic groups they teach, and find out what customs and values they have" (Floyd, 1998, p. 134), especially since in stark contrast, the teaching population continues to be dominated by White, middle class, monolingual individuals (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). Understanding the varying contexts that impact the households of students is critical in understanding both teaching and learning, as well as relating to those who are important in the child's life (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Neuman (1995) contends that successful organizations are those that recognize these contextual factors and thoughtfully utilize them.

Creating family-school partnerships requires practitioners to show sensitivity to culturally relevant values that influence how parents participate in their children's schooling (Cooper & Christie, 2005). Schools successful at engaging families from diverse backgrounds "recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 48) including the cultural variations in the definitions of school involvement (Lopez, 2001). Culturally responsive schooling is the "behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity" in the learning environment (Gay, 2010, p. 31).

There are numerous actions in which schools can engage to express awareness of cultural differences and accompanying responsiveness. Viewing diversity as an asset for schools (Chamberlain, 2005), appreciating family dynamics and showing respect for cultural values and beliefs (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Valdes, 1996), utilizing cultural brokers for school families (Terriquez, 2013), and showing a willingness to transform the current curriculum and school environment to one

that addresses all of the students' and families' needs (Brown, 2007) are a few behavioral expressions that schools can put forth. Exploring school personnel's own biases and how those perceptions may impact their relationships with families is another action in which culturally responsive schools can engage (Ferguson, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Voltz, 1994). Schools can also exhibit cultural responsiveness by finding spaces for and encouraging the use of families' funds of knowledge (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Providing all communications in families' native language, in this case Spanish, is another culturally responsive behavior (Zarate, 2007). Finally, understanding how the differences in culture can impact the interactions families have with schools (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004) and accommodating for those differences within family engagement practices shows a school's cultural responsiveness.

For this study, *culturally responsive schooling* is defined as schools that respect, recognize and thoughtfully utilize the varying cultural contexts of members of the school community. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, being a cultural broker, acknowledging culture and diversity as an asset, using language that best supports connections with families, and advocating for best practices in relation to ELLs.

Acknowledging individual family needs. Schools aspiring to engage families must "recognize, respect and address families' needs" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7). Oftentimes issues exist within the family-school relationship because schools do not take the time to get to know the families they serve and their needs (Swick, 1979). Those wishing to make all families feel included would benefit from giving them the opportunity to self-identify and articulate their *own* needs (Cooper & Christie, 2005). In his study of Latino families specifically, Olivos (2009) suggests that getting to know the

needs of each family is integral to supporting the engagement of families, which ultimately can contribute to student success.

Schools and school staff can take many actions to learn about families and their specific needs (Swick, 1979). Allowing for flexible scheduling of school-family interactions so that all families have an opportunity to engage in both formal and informal activities with the school supports positive relations (Weiss, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke & Pinto, 2003). "Home visits, parent-teacher conferences, and family-school social and recreational activities offer opportunities" for schools to connect with families and inquire as to their needs (Swick, 1979, p. 97). Many times the needs of Latino families may include navigation of the school system or larger social structures (Terriquez, 2013). At times, "securing those resources and relationships that might help Latino parents navigate their social worlds may take precedent over (other) school engagement (practices)" (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012, p. 655).

In this study, *acknowledging individual family needs* is defined as school personnel recognizing and respecting the varying situations that their families bring to the relationship. This recognition can be displayed when families are given opportunities to express their specific needs to school personnel.

Multiple avenues for engagement. This concept emerged from the literature regarding multidimensional conceptualizations of family involvement (Epstein, 1995; Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Manz, Fantuzzo & Power, 2004). The idea put forth here is that a uni-dimensional understanding and acknowledgement of parent involvement can "perpetuate inaccurate impressions of underinvolvement in their children's education" (Manz, Fantuzzo & Power, 2004, p. 471). Some have argued that goals for family

engagement, particularly in low-income communities or families with diverse backgrounds, should not be equated with parental representation at school events, but should be shifted to family engagement with *all* of their children's educational experiences, including time outside school (Lareau, 1989; Mapp, 2002). This redefinition and expansion of what family engagement means helps to ensure that both families and school staff recognize a wide range of multiple avenues where families can contribute to the education of their children (Weiss, Mayer, Vaughan, Kreider, Dearing, Hencke & Pinto, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, *multiple avenues for engagement* is defined as the school recognizing the varying ways that families can participate as members of the school community and providing numerous opportunities for said participation.

Invitations for families. Establishing a relationship of inclusion and respect requires thoughtful and intentional actions. Inviting families to participate as valued members of the community is critical (Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and how that inclusion is treated is just as essential (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006). Families' perceptions of invitations from the school are key in establishing strong relationships (Hornby, 2011). Grace (as cited in Rudduck & Fielding, 2006) reminds us that "discourses are about what can be said and thought but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority" (p. 227). Authentic invitations in meaningful contexts from the school "suggest to the parent that participation in the child's learning is welcome, valuable, and expected by the school and its members" (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005).

Neuman (1995) reminds us that not only is the family influenced by the school but the school is greatly influenced by the family as well. With this in mind, parents do not just want to be educated by the school; they want to be included and feel as though they are an integral part of the community. Sigel (as cited in Valdes, 1996) rebukes most parent involvement programs as lacking engagement due to the fact that parents are seldom invited to help identify problem areas in the school environment or their children. Instead, school experts tend to approach families when a child is in need of 'treatment.' Additionally, when invitations do not take into account the families' life contexts, a respect for the family and an authenticity in the invitation are clearly lacking (Hoover-Dempsey et al, 2005).

For this study, *invitations for families* are defined as requests made by school personnel for family members to engage in school happenings, whether social or academic. The invitations are viewed as more authentic when family circumstances are taken into account and contributions from past participation is valued.

Maintaining the Relationship

Once a trusting and reciprocal relationship is established, families can then be invited and encouraged to engage within the school community in more ways (Floyd, 1998; Swick, 1979). Miretzky (2004) found the families and school staff both saw the nurturing and maintaining of their relationships as integral to continued effective collaboration. Three secondary themes, *shared roles and responsibilities*, *sharing learning experiences*, and *addressing basic needs*, described as necessary to maintain a healthy family-school relationship are detailed in the next section according to the outline

presented in Figure 1.4. Within those three, only one, *shared roles and responsibilities*, is delineated even further into tertiary sub-themes.

Shared roles and responsibilities. To fully engage family members, schools must view them within a collaborative relationship (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), where the school and family members "share joint responsibilities and rights, are seen as equals, and can jointly contribute to the process" (Vosler-Hunter, 1989, p. 15). Families feel respected and validated and are more invested in the family-school relationship when their ideas and concerns are heard

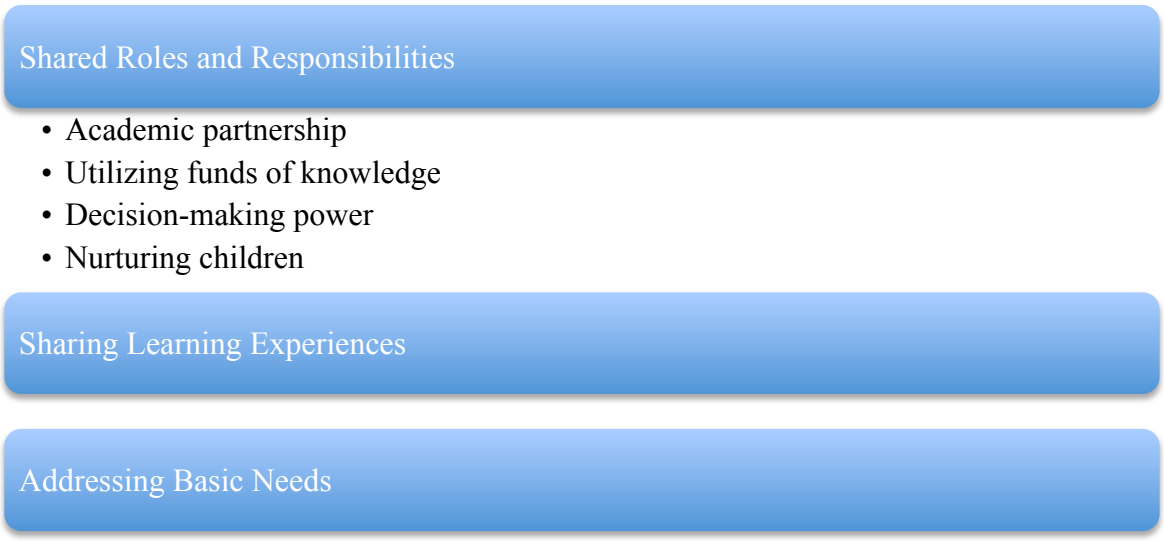

Figure 1.4. Conceptual Framework: Maintaining the Relationship

and taken seriously by school staff (Mapp, 2002). Although his research is geared toward the inclusion of student voice in education reform, Fielding (2001) alludes to this idea when he states that transformational moments can take place when all stakeholder voices are "acknowledged as legitimately different *and* of equal value" (p. 106, emphasis added). Some contend that, in the best of all possible worlds, the family–school relationship would be based not only on reciprocal communication and respect, but also on this idea of collaboration, where accountability is shared (Adams & Christenson, 2000). Schools

successful in engaging families "embrace (this) philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7). The following four points will describe the specific collaborative roles and responsibilities highlighted in the study: academic partnership, utilizing funds of knowledge, decision-making power, and nurturing children.

Academic partnership. "Effective programs to engage families…embrace a philosophy of partnership. The responsibility for children's educational development is a collaborative enterprise" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 51); and, in general, parents and families want to be more involved in academic contributions for their children (Hornby, 2011). The concept of an academic partnership between families and the school connotes a sense of inclusion and connectedness for families in both their child's academic achievement but also the school community. Families notice when the school "recognize(s) (them) as equal partners in the educational development of their children" (Mapp, 2002, p. 11). "When school staff engage in caring and trusting relationships with parents that recognize parents as partners in the educational development of children, these relationships enhance parents' desire to be involved and influence how they participate in their children's development" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 45). Relationships are stronger when there is both dependability in one another and availability when there are problems to be solved (Vickers & Minke, 1995). Members of a strong academic partnership can work together to identify, support and intervene in student development when necessary. Specifically in relation to language-minority students, Lucas, Henze & Donato (as cited by Commins & Miramontes, 2005) found that

schools experiencing success with these students encouraged parents to become engaged academic partners.

For the purposes of this study, *academic partnership* is defined as both families and the school being recognized as equal partners in the academic development of students. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, meetings to discuss goals for students, reciprocal communication regarding academic progress, and regular conversations to maintain alignment between the home and school contexts.

Utilizing funds of knowledge. "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p. ix). Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti elucidated the idea that families bring to the school environment a supply of resources, or "funds of knowledge," that must be leveraged for the sake of creating partnerships to support student growth. These various "social experiences, cultural practices, ways of thinking, and communication styles" (Zwiers, 2008, p. 2) provide families and their children with a wide but sometimes under-acknowledged foundation for future learning (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Jerome (2009) cited several strengths in relation to Latino families in particular that could serve as academic resources in the classroom.

Schools should devote more time to bringing families into the school to share their knowledge and expertise both in the classroom and in school wide leadership roles (Araujo, 2009). Dorfman and Fisher (2002) found that bringing families into the school had a profound impact on students. Children who saw their parents in leadership and educator roles in their school gained greater confidence and engagement in their own schoolwork.

In this study, *utilizing funds of knowledge* is defined as school personnel acknowledging and employing families' supplies of resources, based on their specific life experiences, into the classroom environment. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, two parents controlling the budget for a school committee based on their experience operating a small business and a grandmother cooking with a class of students as they learn how to follow multi-step directions.

Decision-making power. Establishing true partnerships with families requires schools to acknowledge and validate families' views and ultimately share power with them (Cooper & Christie, 2005). Many in the field stress the importance of including decision-making power as part of a comprehensive family engagement program (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), including the engagement of Latino families (Olivos, 2009). Envisioning the school community as a democratic site, where "traditional notions of power, control, and authority" are cast aside, could open the door to stronger, more productive relations with families (Miertzky, 2004, p. 843), because family involvement in decision-making initiatives shows purposeful inclusion of all stakeholder voices (Terriquez, 2013). Additionally, when families are involved in planning and decision-making processes, "program content will usually reflect needs they experience and thus give the program a sense of realism" (Swick, 1979, p. 98).

For this study, *decision-making power* is defined as schools acknowledging and including all stakeholder voices in certain decision-making settings. Examples include, but are not limited to, specific curricular choices, decisions for parent education topics, selection of student intervention, and school policies regarding dress or homework.

Nurturing children. "Parents become loyal advocates of the school when school staff demonstrate that they care about and are committed to educating their children" (Mapp, 2002, p. 11). Araujo (2009) contends that to fully engage parents of linguistically diverse students, families want school staff to show compassion and care for their children. Family involvement in the school may be increased when staff exhibit caring and an interest in children and their families (Zarate, 2007). Miretzky (2004) further contends that some parents need to feel that teachers and the school not only care for their children but also understand them.

In this study, *nurturing children* is defined as school personnel exhibiting compassion and care for students. Examples can include, but are not limited to, showing concern about situations in a student's life outside of school, greeting students with smiles and hugs, and taking the time to get to know students as individuals.

Sharing learning experiences. Shared learning activities show that teachers view family members as equals in the education lives of children (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010). "When schools create structures that foster a culture of complementary or reciprocal learning," families feel more valued (Ferguson, 2008, p. 10). Providing opportunities for families and teachers to be instructive to and with one another enhances the relationship (Adams & Christenson, 1998; Miretzky, 2004) and allows them to communicate strategies and information to enhance student learning (Swick & Graves, 1993).

For the purposes of this study, *sharing learning experiences* is defined as school activities where families can learn together as a unit, with staff, or with other families. These activities can be academically based or more social in nature. Examples include,

but are not limited to, family math/reading night, parent education events, exercise classes, and language classes.

Addressing basic needs. Maslow (1943) presented five sets of basic needs, which all humans seek: physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization (Figure 1.5). He placed these needs within a hierarchy and contended that our thoughts and actions will be monopolized by the needs that are most urgent to our wellbeing. Once a lower order need is satisfied, a prepotent need emerges to dominate the thoughts and behaviors of the individual. Some research suggests that "parents who struggle to meet their family's basic needs may face several important barriers to their school engagement" (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012, p. 654).

For the purposes of this study, *addressing basic needs* is defined as school personnel, or the school in general, providing or helping to obtain resources to support families' physiological or safety needs. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, supplying food or clothing, obtaining donations of school supplies, providing a safe environment, and connecting families with local services to provide shelter or counseling.

Figure 1.5. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Organization of the Conceptual Framework: Bringing the Pieces Together

The relational focus of family engagement and the review of the literature in this area of study helped to solidify the two major themes of *establishing* and *maintaining the relationship,* as outlined further in Chapter 2. Of additional note, the framework is broken into separate components of establishment and maintenance and the establishment components, by definition, clearly precede maintenance. However, all components should continue to be acknowledged and implemented throughout the relationship to preserve a meaningful family-school relationship. The framework from this point on is organized into secondary themes and tertiary sub-themes, which fall under one of the major themes.

As illustrated earlier, the majority of the components within my conceptual framework have been described in great detail or at least alluded to in the literature. However, a comprehensive framework describing the beliefs and practices needed to achieve a healthy and meaningful family-school relationship, specifically in relation to the population of focus for this study, is not in existence. The framework provided in this study organizes these components into manageable pieces for consideration individually. Each of the components described above is a necessary relational element when the overall goal is family engagement, specifically in regard to the majority population of the two study schools, the families of Latino ELL students.

Research Question

With the problem of practice as elaborated earlier in mind, the question addressed by this research study is:

What relational beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of families are present in elementary schools with primarily Latino and ELL student populations that have demonstrated unusual success?

Due to their success with high levels of ELL students, in general, and more specifically Latino students, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary have much to offer as exemplary cases. As the Latino population in our country continues to grow, the number of Latino children in the classrooms continues to rise concurrently. The investigation of these exemplary schools highlights best practices and provides tools for similar organizations to improve the parental and family engagement of this growing population.

Overview of Methodology

In this section, I review the design of the research study, the sampling procedures, the data collection, and the analysis methods.

Research Design

I conducted a comparative case study, a qualitative approach to research. In consideration of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model and its recognition of complexity, a qualitative approach facilitated in gaining a more holistic understanding of the numerous components that support engagement of Latino parents in these particular school settings. As I was not seeking a cause and effect answer but was rather searching for an understanding of the phenomena at these particular sites, an instrumental case study model was deemed most appropriate (Stake, 1995). Due to the identification of these schools in the Exemplary Schools Case Study (Nocon et al, 2010), these particular sites did a better job of providing information in regard to my research question than

other schools. Case study was also deemed appropriate since the views of all stakeholders were important within the framework of my study (Tellis, 1997). Additionally, Stake (1995) contends that case study design is not about "optimizing the production of generalizations" but rather is a study of particularization (p. 8). Finally, the use of a comparative case study model allowed me to uncover areas of agreement and difference (Abu-Lughod, 2007) in beliefs and practices of the two schools. Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary are both highly successful with their Latino ELL populations but embrace different theoretical stances in regard to parent engagement (H. Nocon, personal communication, June 7, 2011). This comparison allowed me to investigate two disparate philosophies that produce similar results in the hopes of optimizing my understanding of the research question (Stake, 1995).

The design of this comparative case study was created with the intention of making direct contributions to educational practice (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Identifying relational components that promote the engagement of Latino parents and families with their children's schools will contribute to the overall education goal of increased student achievement, specifically with this student population.

Sample

Site sample. Purposeful sampling techniques (Sharp, Mobley, Hammond, Withington, Drew, Stringfield, & Stipanovic, 2012) were used to identify the sites for the study. A research collaborative between Metropolis School District and Western University looked at identifying practices of schools that successfully serve large numbers of ELLs. Among eight identified schools, two, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary, were chosen for this extension study. The two school sites were selected

based on the following factors: both serve a large number of Latino students, the organizations hold different theoretical perspectives on parent engagement; and both serve an ECE population at their institutions, an area of specialization and continued interest for the researcher. The schools themselves served as the subjects for this study; therefore, observations of classrooms and school events, interviews with participants, including faculty, staff, and parents, and analysis of documents took place at both schools from December 2011 through May 2012.

Participant sample. The participant sample (N=27) included administrators and other staff members, faculty, and parents from both case study schools. A breakdown of the participants at each school and within each category can be found in Chapter 3 (Table 3.1). Purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) was utilized for the initial interviews in the study as principals and assistant principals seemed a logical place to begin regarding knowledge about school practices. These school leaders were also necessary allies to gain entry into the schools. Similar reasoning was employed when the secretaries were sought out as informants. Recruitment emails were utilized to obtain some of the staff and faculty interviews. Snowball sampling (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) was utilized from that point forward. During interviews with the principals, assistant principal, secretaries, and some teachers, inquiries were made as to who else might provide information regarding the parent engagement practices at the school. Specifically, recommendations for teachers and parents were elicited.

I am an outsider at these locations. I had no supervisory role or relationship with the participants in this study. I neither provided financial support for this work nor received financial compensation for this research.

Data Collection

To fully gain a variety of perspectives on the phenomena, appreciate the problem, and push for informed change, it is imperative to have an "understanding of the worlds from which these individuals come" (Valdes, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, multiple types of data were collected from many sources to gain a more holistic view of the phenomena being researched. The primary methods used to collect data in this comparative case study included interviews, documents, and observations. In Chapter 3, I will explicitly elaborate upon the methods used and articulate why each particular method was helpful in gaining the data needed to answer my research question.

Data Analysis

Constant comparative analysis (Seidman, 2006) was employed as the method for analyzing the data gathered as well as comparing the data between the two case schools. This process of studying, reducing, and analyzing the data was ongoing as a new code and sub-codes emerged. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to follow up with surprises (Taines, 2010), therefore it was hopeful that the analysis would lead to unexpected but relevant places of discovery. Whenever possible, each stage of analysis was integrated with the next stage of collection to continually inform the process as described in detail in Chapter 3.

Key Findings

Despite the fact that Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary were initially described as differing in their family engagement practices (H. Nocon, personal communication, June 7, 2011), both schools tended to view similar practices as important to the continued success of their relationships with families as evidenced through the data.

Two components stood out as essential, especially given the population of the students at the two schools, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. These findings were consistent throughout all data sources and types and helped to explain why they ranked as the most salient themes overall. Several other components were highlighted as important to the establishment and maintenance of family/school relationships, including *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, *acknowledging individual family needs*, *nurturing children*, *creating community spaces*, *addressing basic needs*, and *transparency with practices and policies*.

Evidence for many beliefs and practices deemed by the literature as contributing to the success of family engagement was observed at both case study schools. This provides credence that the framework presented herein may hold some validity in the field of family engagement. However, the findings have shown that there were two aspects of the framework, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*, that stood out as all-encompassing and, in many ways, tied to the rest of the components. Also, as mentioned above, there were other components that the evidence showed as more significant, including a time component that was previously mentioned but not considered. To illustrate the findings, an adapted framework (Figure 1.6) was designed prior to the interpretation phase to help make sense of the findings and to assist with the explanation of the interpretations. Descriptions of the findings in relation to these specific components can be found in Chapter 4. Comparisons of the two schools show similar behaviors and beliefs regarding their relationships with family members. Further discussions and interpretations of the findings and further discussion of my adapted framework can be found in Chapter 5.

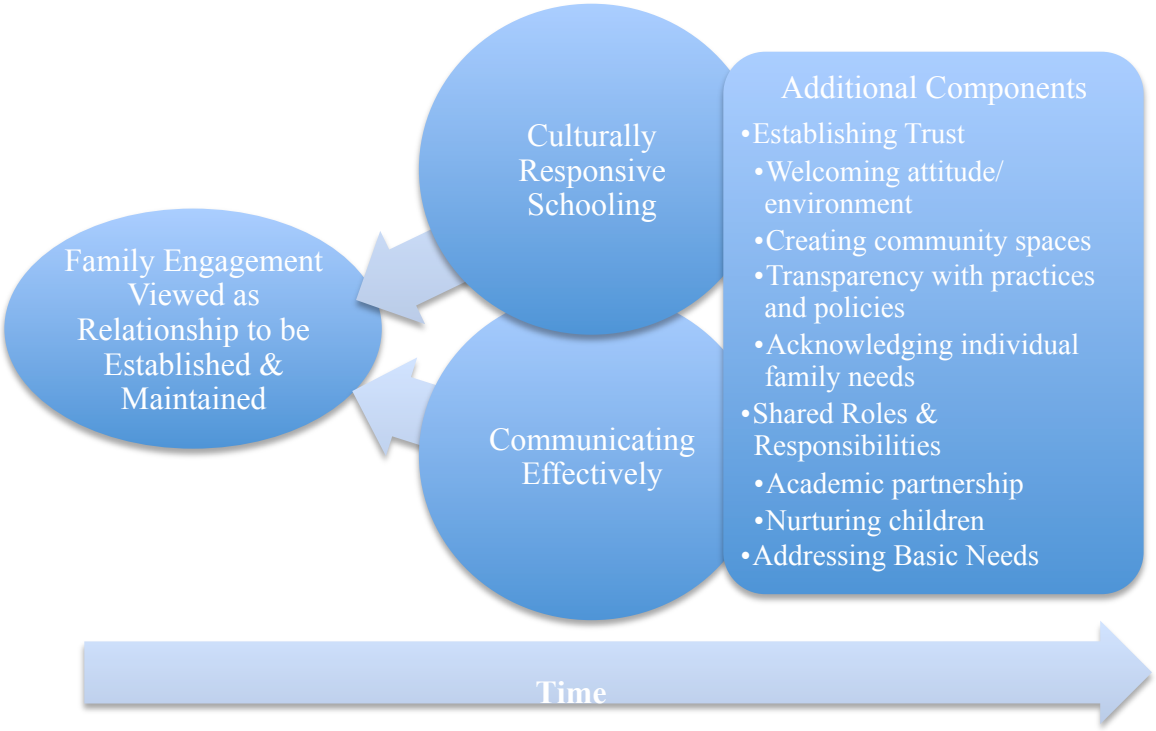

Figure 1.6. Adapted Conceptual Framework.

Limitations

There were several limitations to my study that I will briefly mention here and of which I discuss more in detail in Chapter 3. There were a few logistical matters that presented limitations to my research, such as a delay in approval, which limited time spent and observation of specific events at each site. Additionally, a smaller number of parents than were anticipated actually participated. I viewed this as due to two factors, the time constraint and my inability to speak Spanish. My inability to speak Spanish led to other limitations, including some confusion with regard to the parent survey questions and my inability to translate some potentially valuable interactions during observations. Due to the fact that snowball sampling (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) was utilized for many of my interviews, it was sometimes difficult to compare results between the two schools

based solely on participant roles, as some of the support staff roles were varied from location to location. This was also true for observations. Many events were school specific and therefore observations were not always congruent for comparison. Additionally, there were a few components discussed in the literature that, although were present, were not as prevalent in my findings. Some of these incongruent results were undoubtedly due to my adaptation of the components to fit into my conceptual framework and specifically the relational focus. Originally, some of these components were not mentioned specifically in regard to a relationship context. Finally, my lack of experience as a researcher caused me to miss out on some data collection opportunities that I realized during the full analysis would have benefitted the study, such as utilizing a more tactical method for gaining participants and having a better understanding of the research process prior to conducting the research.

Implications

A key predictor of student development and success, especially for students at risk in an urban environment, is a positive school culture of achievement, with strong measures of safety, cultural identification, and personalization (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Delpit, 1995). The necessity of garnering these important components seems to make a strong case for developing solid relationships among those adults that are important in the child's life. The evidence of the study suggest that specific beliefs and practices are present at the two case study schools, which have already been identified as successful at engaging the families of their Latino ELL students. The inclusion and implementation of several school beliefs and practices, as suggested by the findings, could support relationships with families at schools similar to the case study schools. These healthy

relationships may be achieved through the application of the conceptual framework presented in this study, at least in its adapted form (Figure 1.6) as mentioned earlier and discussed at length in Chapter 5.

Moreover, Auerbach (2007) mentioned the difficulties that schools and administrators sometimes face when they are presented with district mandates and expectations that prevent, or at times directly contradict, the engagement of families. As discussed in Chapter 5, examining proposed mandates through the lens of this conceptual framework prior to implementation to identify any areas of contradiction could alleviate the misuse of precious school resources, as well as prevent the creation of unhealthy family-school relationships.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The overarching theme that frames this study is that relationships are inevitable among families and schools (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). With this in mind, the educational problem addressed herein is the importance of family engagement on student success. The conceptual framework addresses how establishing and maintaining healthy and effective relationships can effectively engage the families of the rapidly growing population of Latino ELLs students. The two schools chosen for this study, which both have hypersegregated Latino populations (Gandara, 2010), have shown unusual success with their ELLs and reportedly have high parental involvement. Although this review of the literature suggests that much of the research on family engagement neglects to specifically address the relational aspects needed to both establish and maintain these vital relationships, there are a few resources that inspired the construction of the conceptual framework and will be discussed.

I have organized this literature review into six sections. Before discussing the importance of family engagement on student success, I first introduce the concept of 'family engagement,' delineate this preferred and more inclusive term from the more familiar 'parental involvement,' and present the case for its use in this study. Second, I define the use of the term student success and discuss the importance of family engagement on student success as presented in the literature. Additionally, within this section, I review the research on the barriers to family engagement, especially of Latino ELL students. Third, I discuss Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model, which provides an

integral foundational understanding for the construction of the conceptual framework for this study and many family engagement frameworks. Fourth, I describe a few of the current frameworks for family engagement found in the literature. Fifth, I discuss the concept of the inevitability of the family-school relationship, the central focus of the conceptual framework that guided this study. Finally, I provide a brief look at some of the literature used to support the construction of the conceptual framework for this study.

Family Engagement

According to many in the field, the forms of parental involvement can vary greatly (Domina, 2005; Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, M. G., & Simon, B. S., 1997; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Moles & Fege, 2011) and the way that schools encourage and support that involvement can vary just as significantly. Despite these variations, in general, school connections with parents have been shown to contribute significantly to a student's overall development and academic success (Tolan & Woo, 2010). Although successful parental involvement would be an admirable goal for any school, family engagement, as I will outline below, seems a necessity for the success of ELL students. For the purposes of this study, where I was looking to investigate the relational beliefs and practices that specifically elicit that engagement of families of ELL Latino students, I chose this more inclusive term 'family engagement.'

Family Engagement Distinctive from Parental Involvement

There is not much focus in the literature on the difference between the terms *parental involvement* and *family engagement*; however, for this study a clear distinction between the two was necessary. The theoretical work by Ferlazzo & Hammond (2009) informed my definition of *family engagement* for this study's purposes as "schools and

(families) leading together with the (families') self-interests in mind in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (p. 4). Creating an authentic partnership allows for all stakeholders to see themselves as vital components for success. "An individual's or group's position in relation to other individuals and groups has a significant impact on the perspectives, relationships, and experiences of all involved" (Cook-Sather & Youens, 2007, p. 62). To effectively establish and maintain productive relationships with families, the delineation between the two terms *parental involvement* and *family engagement* is necessary and a subtle shift in perspective regarding the more preferred *family engagement* is needed within the education field, specifically for those working with similar populations as the site schools in this study. The words of the term *family engagement* are described further individually and then in combination in relation to *parental involvement*.

Engagement Versus Involvement

The term *engagement* is preferred for this study rather than *involvement*. *Engagement* implies connectedness between two or more individuals in a collaborative effort towards a shared goal, whereas *involvement* connotes participation in an already established goal (Ferlazzo, 2011). The term *engagement* also denotes an inclusion of families' "orientations to the world and how those orientations frame the things they do" (Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005, p. 469). *Engagement* "suggests a deeper level of commitment and participation than *involvement*" (Moles & Fege, 2011, p. 5, emphasis added), where individuals, in this case family members, are asked to participate, or be involved in, the interests of the institution, in this case the school, rather than their own

(Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Ferlazzo (2011) sums it up best with the following: "involvement implies *doing to*; in contrast, engagement implies *doing with*" (p. 12).

Family Versus Parent

These words are not synonymous (Christenson & Sheridan, 2001) and for the purposes of this study are quite distinguishable from one another. The inclusion of the word *family* as opposed to *parent* connotes an acknowledgement of others, beyond the parents, possessing some responsibility for the upbringing of students (Knight, Norton, Bentley & Dixon, 2004; Moles & Fege, 2011). In Latino culture, the *family* generally represents the core of society, which can include the immediate family, the extended family, and other adopted family members (Valencia, 2004). Furthermore, a lack of consideration of variance in the family constellation "may lead to the exclusion of persons who would be helpful resources in building effective home-school ties" (Voltz, 1994, p. 291). Adherence to this more inclusive view of families, specifically of Latino ELL students, is more culturally responsive and representative of the populations within the study schools.

Family Engagement Versus Parental Involvement

As previously stated, there is not much distinction in the literature between the terms *parental involvement* and *family engagement* (Christenson & Reschly, 2010). In fact, in most cases, when the term engagement is actually used (as in these sources, Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008; Auerbach, 2007; Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005; Finn, 1998; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012; Mapp, 2002; Marschall, 2006; Seitsinger, Felner, Brand & Burns, 2008; Zarate, 2007), *engagement* is used interchangeably with involvement. Specifically in consideration of the population

of interest for this study, the majority population at both of the study schools, the term *family engagement* was deemed more appropriate. The use of this term "denote(s) a more proactive, holistic approach" (Auerbach, 2007, p. 712) to the collaborative activities of the families and the school. "When schools *involve* (families) they are leading with their institutional self-interest and wants… When schools *engage* (families) they are leading with the (families') self-interests (their wants and dreams) in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009, p. 4). Henceforth, the term *family engagement* will be used solely.

Family Engagement and Student Success

Family engagement has been a focal concern of American schools for decades (Herman & Yeh, 1983; Moles & Fege, 2011). A quick database search for 'home-school relations' produces academic literature from as early as the 40s and 50s. While the more recent term, 'parent involvement' begins to appear heavily in the 1970s. This is not surprising since numerous researchers have suggested the positive impacts of family engagement on student success (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Burns, 1993; Domina, 2005; Dorfman & Fisher, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Tolan & Woo, 2010), some specifically in reference to students in urban areas (Jeynes, 2007) and Latino students (Marschall, 2006). Student success has been defined in various ways throughout the literature and can include academic, social/emotional, and behavioral components.

Impact on Student Success: From the General to the Specific

This section will highlight the literature focusing on the impact of family engagement on student success. Research and theoretical work will be described first from a general standpoint (i.e. effects for students in general) and then will move into more specific populations, including urban and Latino students. Terms used in the each piece of literature (i.e. parental involvement) will remain consistent and will be used in the description of the work.

Effects for students in general. In their report that synthesized the latest research on the impacts of family and community connections with schools on student success, Henderson and Mapp (2002) reviewed a total of 51 studies, both qualitative and quantitative. The studies

> cover children and youth of all ages, from birth through high school and into the postsecondary years. These studies also cover a wide range of perspectives and approaches. Some studies evaluate programs that are designed to engage families in improving achievement, while others look at high-performing schools or students to study how parent involvement may have contributed. Several studies analyze long-term databases drawn from large-scale surveys of families, students, and educators, while others focus closely on how families and educators interact in a single setting. (p. 21)

This report organized the studies into three categories: (1) studies on the impact of family and community involvement on student achievement, (2) studies on effective strategies to connect schools, families, and community, and (3) studies on parent and community organizing efforts to improve schools. In regard to the impact of family engagement on

student achievement, Henderson and Mapp found that, overall, institutions "that engage families in supporting their children's learning at home are linked to higher student achievement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 25). Achievement in this case was defined as including grades, teacher ratings, performance of skills, attendance, promotion, behavior, and healthy development. In consideration of effective strategies utilized to connect schools and families, key findings stated that programs that were successful at connecting with families were welcoming, invited involvement from families, and addressed specific family needs in addition to embracing a philosophy of partnership. Furthermore, programs that are successful in engaging diverse families "recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences" (p. 53).

Fan and Chen (2001) provided a meta-analysis of twenty-five studies that reported empirical evidence regarding the relationship between parent involvement and students' academic achievement. Findings uncover a moderate, but meaningful, relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement. Their findings also indicate that specific indicators of parental involvement, such as parents' aspirations and expectations for their children's achievement, have a stronger relationship with students' academic success than others.

An article from Domina (2005), which examined data from the mother-child sample of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79), looked at the effects of various types of parental involvement on elementary school achievement test scores and the Behavioral Problems Index. Beginning in 1979, NLSY79 collected data on "family background, labor market experience, and educational history of 12,686 American children and young adults aged 14-22. Annual follow-up surveys tracked the

cohort, and in 1986, the NLSY79 initiated a mother-child sample, focusing on the children of the NSLY79 respondents" (p. 237). Domina (2005) focused on 1, 445 children of NLSY79 respondents, who were enrolled in elementary school in 1996 and completed a number of assessments for comparison purposes. These children were followed for three years (three survey rounds) where Domina studied the effects of parents' involvement in various school activities in 1996 on scores of two assessments (Peabody Individual Achievement Test and Behavioral Problems Index) in later years. By using ordinary least-squares regression models, the effects of six parental involvement activities on the two tests were assessed. Although Domina's study produced results that found the relationship between parental involvement and student achievement to be tenuous in his study, he did find a clear causal link between parental involvement and children's behavior.

Houtenville and Conway (2008) conducted an empirical analysis using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) to discover whether parental effort improved student achievement. Data from the NELS consisted of surveys from 24,599 eighth grade students from 1,052 schools, their parents, teachers, and school administrators, as well as standardized test scores for these students. Surveys are re-administered every two years. Houtenville and Conway focused on the eighth and tenth grade years and looked at specific parent involvement activities to examine their impact on student outcomes. The researchers estimated a value-added student-achievement production function that overwhelming implied that parental effort is consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, with variability in the effects of specific parental efforts.

Effects for urban students. Jeynes' (2005) "meta-analysis of 41 studies examine(d) the relationship between parent involvement and the academic achievement of urban elementary school children" (p. 237). Although all four research questions were relevant to my study, especially since both case study schools are considered to be in urban settings, research question number 1: "To what degree is parental involvement associated with higher levels of school achievement among urban students?" was of particular interest due to the direct nature of the relationship between parental involvement and student success within the question (p. 238). Database searches were performed to obtain quantitative studies "examining the relationship between parental involvement and the academic achievement of children from Grades K-6" in urban settings (p. 242). The results from the meta-analysis "indicate a considerable and consistent relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement among urban students" regardless of gender and racial minority status (p. 258). In consideration of the research question mentioned before, "(o)verall, parental involvement's relationship to urban student academic outcomes was about seven tenths to three fourths of a standard deviation" (p. 259). The findings indicated that parental involvement might have the benefit of an influence that goes beyond differences in SES, race, and other factors.

Effects for Latino students. Although there are not many empirical studies offering the effects of Latino parental involvement on student success (Durand, 2011), it is known that high-achieving Latino students report high levels of family involvement both at home and at school (Delgado-Gaitan as cited in Durand, 2011). Also, Marschall (2006) found in her research, focused on the determinants and effects of parent involvement in urban school districts with large Latino populations, that schools that

participated in culturally considerate outreach practices in regard to their family involvement initiatives had increased student performance. Using data from several sources, including membership on local school councils, local school data, and survey data from teachers and students, her empirical analyses found that the more parents of Latino students are invited to be involved in their child's school, the greater the effect on student achievement.

Jeynes (2003) conducted a meta-analysis of 21 studies to determine the effects of parental involvement on the academic achievement of minority students. Four different measures of academic achievement were looked at and statistical analyses were used to determine the impact of parents' involvement overall and with specific components. Latino students were one of the groups examined and clearly the results indicated that this group of students tends to benefit from parental involvement in their schooling.

Barriers to Engagement of Parents and Families (In General and of Latino ELL Students)

Numerous barriers to the engagement of families can be present within school settings. When considering the families of ELL and Latino students, the obstacles can at times be magnified. Arias and Morillo-Campbell in their 2008 policy brief, which focused on analyzing the "factors related to the development of effective parental involvement for ELLs," detail some obstacles that can be found for this population of students and families (p. 3). For Arias and Morillo-Campbell, these obstacles have been identified as originating from three areas: school, families, and a combination of the two. For the purpose of this study, the obstacles from their report and other sources within the

literature will be organized into cultural and linguistic, economic, and institutional barriers.

Cultural and linguistic barriers. Although the importance of family engagement is clear, many family members of Latino ELL students do not engage with the school environment, as noted by Gandara (2010) in her article, *The Latino Education Crisis*. In different cultures, education and schooling have very different meanings; for example, in much of Latin America, school is left to the teachers and families take responsibility for the education of life skills (Restrepo & Dubasik, 2008; Zarate, 2007). Valdes (1996) observed this clearly in her ethnographic study of ten Mexican-origin families that drawn from a larger descriptive study that stretched over a span of three years. Her expansion ethnography was intended to "provide information about the circumstances in which newly arrived Mexican immigrants live their lives" (p. xvi). She found that the descriptions and expectations of parental involvement that many educators in the US have as opposed to the Mexican immigrant families she interviewed and observed is starkly different, due mainly to cultural variations. For example, the mothers in her study expressed the importance of the family teaching children 'consejos' or "spontaneous homilies designed to influence behaviors and attitudes" (p. 125). In addition, she found that upon entry into the U.S., many immigrant families often discover that previous codes of conduct and former survival strategies are not successful in their new environment.

Zarate (2007) conducted a qualitative study examining various stakeholder perspectives concerning parent involvement, including Latino families, teachers, counselors, school administrators, students and coordinators of parent involvement

organizations in three large metropolitan areas with significant Latino populations, through interviews and focus groups. A key finding from her study was that Latino families mentioned life participation more often in connection to parental involvement than academic involvement factors, especially since they see focusing on their children's life skills as complementing the education taught in the classroom.

Unfortunately, many educators mistakenly assume that if parents are not participating in the school's activities, they have a lack of interest in their child's education (Ascher, 1988). In actuality, this could result from a disjuncture between school and home culture and the responsibilities that each presumes the other should meet (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008). Failing to acknowledge the "funds of knowledge" of all families and viewing them instead through a deficit lens can cause schools to miss out on a tremendously valuable resource (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti's (2005) framework for engaging diverse families will be described in a later section.

A lack of communication can further compound this issue. Where one of the most basic of parent involvement practices, homework, is involved, "without knowing the language and, therefore, the demands of the task sent home, (non-English speaking) Latino parents face an additional obstacle in their effort to get involved in their child's learning at home" (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000, p. 117). Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000) surveyed parents from three inner-city elementary schools, one of which had a student population of 96% Latino and 96% low-income. Overall, the study looked at the relationships between parents' perceptions of teacher outreach and self-reported parent involvement in both the home and school settings. The findings indicate that home-

school communications can be most effective when communications occur in the methods that work for all parties. Connecting to both cultural and linguistic barriers, Patrikakou and Weissberg (2000) found that the most significant predictor of parent involvement was parent perception of teacher (and, therefore, school) outreach.

Economic and educational barriers. "The quality and nature of parents' existing resources… influence the extent to which their time and resources are consumed by daily hassles" (Lawson & Alameda-Lawson, 2012, p. 654). The descriptions and effects of these resources, or lack thereof, may vary. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) employed an ethnographic, embedded case study design to collect data from 32 Latino parents regarding their "understanding of the practices and conditions that fostered their collective parent engagement" (p. 657). Data from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents were examined. One finding from their research suggests that when families struggle to meet their children's basic needs, their engagement with the school could be negatively impacted.

A volume edited by Christenson and Sheridan (2001) outlines a change process in which educational professionals can engage in order to improve home-school relationships. The editors suggest that a caregiver's own success, or lack thereof, in school may predispose them to feel confident and competent, or not, to interact with school personnel. Therefore, in some cases, due to their own low academic achievement or English language proficiency, Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) suggest that Latino parents feel as though they have nothing to offer in the American school environment and therefore do not engage.

Institutional barriers. "School-based barriers for ELL parental engagement include a deficit perspective, a unidirectional approach to parental involvement, and a negative (or unwelcoming) school climate" (Arias & Morillo-Campbell, 2008, p. 8). They further state that schools that only seek to gain support from families without reciprocating or ones that present an unwelcoming and unfamiliar environment for Latino families may discourage the very involvement that is integral to student success. Finally, Arias and Morillo-Campbell (2008) found that logistics can severely limit the engagement of families of ELL Latino students, as oftentimes, they have exhaustive schedules that conflict with school events or parent conferences.

Additionally, some theorists believe that holding this deficit perspective in regard to ELL families can cause schools to view this population as a hindrance rather than evaluating their own institutional actions towards improved engagement of these family members (Gibson, 2002). In her chapter from the book *Education in the New Latino Diaspora: Policy and the Politics of Identity* which highlights nine ethnographic case studies focusing on the increase of Latino individuals in non-traditional areas of the U.S., Gibson (2002) notes that few schools place value on Latino families' home cultures or encourage students to develop their skills in Spanish. Instead, she stated that quite the opposite is found to be true as all too often "Latino children are made to feel that at school they must hide their Latino identity and refrain from using Spanish" (p. 245).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that "the ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3), with the developing individual situated at the centermost location (Figure 1.2). These layered

structures consist of relationships within and among the multiple levels or systems and the context of each must be considered when analyzing the child's development. Bronfenbrenner's theory fits well for this study due to its focus both on the individual child as well as on the complex and dynamic relationships that surround the child (Leonard, 2011). Additionally, Bronfenbrenner considers the cultural context of the developing individual and notes its important impact on the child's growth.

Microsystem

Situated within the centermost niche, or microsystem, of these structures is the developing individual. In the case of this study, the students at the site schools hold this position. Each individual's microsystem comprises "the immediate relationships in settings within which (the child) live(s), grow(s), and function(s)" (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010, p. 63). These settings could include, but are not limited to, the child's home, classroom, peer groups, and religious or cultural affiliations. These settings are where the child lives and, therefore, develops. Numerous studies have shown the importance of caring and nurturing relationships that exist between the developing individual and others within these settings (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1972; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Thompson, 2002).

Mesosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) goes on to describe the next systemic level, the mesosystem. This level is comprised of the numerous relationships among the child's various microsystems. He states that "such interconnections can be as decisive for development as events taking place within a given setting" (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner believed that these inevitable relationships are just as valuable to the learning and growth

of the child as the quality of instruction they receive. "At their best, mesosystems represent close relationships established among key individuals in these immediate settings that are characterized by constructive dialogue and communication, trust, and shared commitment to maintaining the relationship in support of the child " (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010, p. 63). Although mention is made of each of Bronfenbrenner's levels herein, this study is focused primarily on the family-school mesosystem and how it is established and maintained.

Exosystem

The third level of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system, the exosystem, consists of settings with which the child does not directly come into contact but which can affect both his micro- and mesosystems in profound ways. These are influences from other contexts that encroach upon the inner systems, whether positively or negatively, and can include things such as family work environments or school culture and policies. The school system can be viewed as one of the settings within the child's exosystem and may not necessarily directly involve the child's family. However, at the case study schools, there are opportunities and encouragement for family involvement with this larger school system. Additionally, as will be discussed further in Chapter 4, the schools have become a central location for the various exosystem influences to come together to provide easier access for families.

Macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the macrosystem as "consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems… that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such

consistencies" (p. 26). In other words, all settings within which a child functions exist within a cultural context. Federal policy or cultural beliefs and values are examples of macrosystemic influences that could impact the child and the other levels of systems. Of note for this study, the case study schools have both made an effort to understand the macrosystems of their students that may not intersect with their own (i.e. cultural and economic systems).

Cultural Considerations

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) acknowledgement of the importance of context is a foundational basis for understanding his Ecological Model. Additionally as previously noted, he specifically recognized the importance of and differences in the cultural contexts of, and therefore influences on, the developing individual. Although cultural influences from the larger macrosystems may seem more difficult to connect, they must be identified due to their impact on the microsystem and at times the relationships within the mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner understood that recognition and acknowledgement of these larger systemic cultural influences was equally important to understanding the development of the individual as the more direct connections found in the micro- and mesosystems.

For the purposes of this study, specifically in consideration of parents of Latino ELL students, numerous underlying cultural variables impacting the family-school relationship could be present and thus were considered during data collection and analysis. Equally worth noting, the presence of the culture of the dominant society should be recognized and is significant, as this group currently governs the structure of the educational system (Boykin, 1994; Spring, 2007). I discuss in Chapter 4 how the case

study schools consider and, when necessary, find a way to leverage, or combat, these conflicting influences in their family engagement practices.

Frameworks for Family Engagement

Many frameworks for understanding and implementing family engagement operate, to some degree, under the premise of connected systems as presented by Bronfenbrenner. The forms and definitions of family engagement can vary greatly (Domina, 2005; Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, M. G., & Simon, B. S., 1997; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Jeynes, 2007) and thus the frameworks suggested for family engagement can vary just as much.

Traditional Frameworks

One highly recognized and implemented model of parental involvement is Epstein's (1995) model of overlapping spheres of influence, which include the school and the family but also includes the influence of the community, on a student's learning. Through this model, Epstein contends that partnerships can be formed thus resulting in family-like schools and school-like families, which intermingle the contexts of these settings to better serve the learning of the child. Epstein's framework describes six types of parental involvement, including: parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision making, and collaborating with community. Although her framework is widely used and places focus on one important component in the success of students, Epstein's model has been criticized for being uni-directional, both in terms of communications from the school to the families and of support from the families to the school (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) presented another theoretical framework for implementing parental involvement. The three main foci of their framework include looking at: why parents become involved in their children's education, how parents choose specific types of involvement, and why parental involvement has a positive influence on students' educational outcomes. In contrast to Epstein's typology, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler attempt to clarify why parents become involved and how that manifests into positive outcomes for students. Fan and Chen (2001) admire the promising nature of the model but critique the lack of clarity around how the elements should be defined and ultimately measured empirically.

Relational Focus

Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) concept of *funds of knowledge* drives the framework that they present in their text of the same title. The idea that "(p)eople are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" is the major premise of their concept (pp. ix-x) and displays the asset perspective that is necessary when utilizing this approach. The authors propose that to gain records about families' *funds of knowledge,* educators must first engage in first-hand research experiences with families to unearth this information. The authors propose that the use of this theoretical approach not only utilizes a strengths-based approach to examine families but also provides educators with invaluable teaching tools to improve pedagogical decisions.

Christenson and Reschley (2010) suggest a theoretical orientation for viewing family engagement from a more relational view. Using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory as a basis and a defense for the foci on both *relationships* and *congruence* across the

contexts of home and school, the editors present a *Handbook of School-Family Partnerships* (2010). Within the compilation, "state-of-the art coverage of theoretical and empirical research on school-family partnerships" is presented, one of which will be discussed in detail here; others were discussed in previous sections (p. xv).

Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2010) presented a Framework for Healthy Family-school Relationships based on several underlying principles that "guide the actions and decisions of individuals who are responsible for the relationship" (p. 64). The eight Core Principles Underlying Healthy Relationships are grouped into three fundamental tenets: beliefs, commitment, and continuity. The principles identify assumptions that are essential, according to this framework, to create healthy family-school relationships. The framework also includes the identification of three Elements of Healthy Relationships: trust, sensitivity, and equality. These affective and dynamic elements are connected to the core principles as well as drive the Actions Supporting Healthy Relationships: communicating, building trust, showing respect, sharing experiences, and resolving conflict. Through the presentation of their framework, Clarke and her colleagues provide a "rationale for the importance of healthy family-school relationships as a necessary condition for partnerships" (p. 62).

Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) presented their data-driven Ecologies of Parental Engagement (EPE) framework that is focused on understanding parental engagement in urban elementary schools. This framework, like others, looked at *what* parents do to engage with their children's schools but also the *how* and *why* of parent engagement. In their framework, parental engagement is situated as "a relational phenomenon that relies on activity networks" (p. 3); and, the authors contend that

"parental engagement is the mediation between space and capital by parents in relation to others in school settings" (p. 6).

Finally, Olivos (2009) in his article proposes a guide for educators to foster collaboration with Latino families. He argues that this collaboration can only be attained when school personnel understand how they interact with the culture of the community and accept the knowledge and power within that community. Olivos (2009) also contends that consideration of the alignment of values and beliefs about expectations must also be addressed in order to make steps towards true collaboration, especially considering that all forms of parental involvement are not the same.

The Inevitable Family-School Relationship

Quite simply, relationship is defined as "the way in which two or more people (or) groups…talk to, behave toward and deal with each other, (and/or) the way in which two or more people…are connected" (Merriam-Webster, 2013). Relationship involves "sustained contact, equality, fluidity, increased depth of shared meaning, values, goals and affinity" (Lasky, 2000, p. 849). Clarke and her colleagues (2010) take the concept further by adding that relationship is "both a personal and interpersonal experience that brings individuals and entities together" (p. 61). For the purposes of this study, all of these descriptions are included here to fully define the dynamic nature of the parent-school relationships being explored.

Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model as described earlier, family-school relationships are inevitable. As each student brings her individual ecological system with her to school, the intermingling that takes place within the mesosystem between the various settings of each child's microsystems provides the basis

for the argument of this inevitability. This idea is strongly supported throughout the literature (Christenson & Reschly, 2010; Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010; Pianta & Walsh, 1996). Ultimately, when humans interact in groups over time, relationships are formed based on those interactions. Bronfenbrenner's model (1979) implies the important role of these relationships in the development of individuals and, consequently, their various settings.

Meaningful Family-School Relationships

As described previously, relationship is inevitable with any family-school connection. This relationship can fall at any position along a spectrum measuring its effectiveness from healthy, where participants are trusting, have open lines of communication, and are respectful of others' needs and opinions, to unhealthy, where there is trouble with communications and a lack of trust and respect are more prevalent. This study focuses specifically on the components that create a healthy and meaningful relationship between the family and the school rather than looking at all possible relationship descriptions and outcomes. Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2010), Epstein (2001), Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009), Jeynes (2007) and Swick (1979) all view the establishment of a meaningful and healthy family-school relationship as a necessary prerequisite to a functional family-school partnership, which ultimately positively influences student success. In fact, Patrikakou & Weissberg (1999) stated that the quality of family-school relationships has a greater impact on student achievement than merely the number of times that families make contact with the school. Pianta and Walsh (1996) take this a step further by identifying the quality of this relationship as a primary contributing factor to reducing children's risk of school failure. In fact, a strained or

adversarial relationship between schools and families can lead to tremendous limitations in a student's abilities to reach developmental goals (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). Furthermore, Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated that when schools "focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are effective in creating and sustaining family and community connections with schools" (p. 43).

Quality Relationships and Family Engagement

With the notion of the inevitability of the family-school relationship explained, I further suggest that effective family engagement cannot occur without this relationship firmly established. "The development of quality… relationships is critical to school success" for all involved (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009, p. 5). In fact, family perceptions of the quality of the home-school relationship affect their overall involvement with the school (Nzinga-Johnson, Baker, & Aupperlee, 2009). Some scholars view "supportive, interpersonal relationships between families and teachers as the (necessary) groundwork for intentional, collaborative partnerships to occur" (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010, p. 61). This contention is further supported by the suggestion that quality relationships between individuals within the school (i.e. parents and teachers) "comprise the heart of effective involvement" (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). In fact, the more parents in urban settings perceived individual teachers as valuing their contributions, keeping them informed of their child's strengths and weaknesses, and providing them with suggestions, the higher their parental engagement in the their children's learning (Patrikakou & Weissberg, 2000). Overall, the literature suggests that the quality of the home-school

relationship is a significant variable in a family's active engagement in their child's education (Adams & Christenson, 2000).

Family Engagement as Relationship

The relational aspect of family engagement is the focus for this study, rather than structural intervention as is the case with a majority of the literature within the field (Moorman Kim, Coutts, Holmes, Sheridan, Ransom, Sjuts, & Rispoli, 2012). In other words, for the purpose of this study, the family-school relationship is the inevitable lens through which to examine family engagement. Wong and Hughes (2006) found that there is a high correlation between the family-school relationship, indicating that the stronger the connection between the two, the more support there is for the child's education. Further research suggested "parents' involvement in their children's education was influenced by a school culture that values and works aggressively to form *relationships* with families that are respectful and reciprocal…. Many school programs, however, place emphasis on the programming portion of their family involvement initiatives and not the process of building relationships between families and school staff" (Mapp, 2002, p. 13, emphasis added). Mapp's (2002) study attempted to identify factors that lead to successful partnerships between school personnel and families through interviews with parents of students in a Boston, Massachusetts K-5 school. In relation to the idea of programming versus relationship building, her study indicated that parents were more connected to the school based on the deeply felt commitment of the staff, led by dedicated administration, to build relationships with families. She further contends that in regard to programming, "(t)oo often schools pay lip service to the importance of family involvement and make half-hearted attempts to involve families" (p. 14), which

tends to result in the disintegration family involvement programs due to lack of support and involvement from staff.

Sheridan and her colleagues (2012) meta-analysis delineated between the terms and functions of *parent/family involvement* versus *family-school partnerships* within the current literature. "*Parent involvement* is defined as the participation of significant caregivers in activities promoting the educational process of their children in order to promote their academic and social well-being" (p. 3). Within this definition, the structures and practices of activities within the home and school are highlighted. Whereas, "*family-school partnership* is defined as a child-focused approach wherein families and professionals cooperate, coordinate, and collaborate to enhance opportunities and success for children and adolescents across social, emotional, behavioral, and academic domains" (Sheridan, Kim, Coutts, Sjuts, Holmes, Ransom, & Garbacz, 2012, p. 3). The *relationship* between the family and the school is emphasized with this definition. However, partnership is "an amorphous term that does not always make explicit the unresolved terrain or the precise nature of (school-family) relationships" (Lasky, 2000, p. 847) and the word does not accurately capture the dynamics that are present in effective family-school relationships (Lareau, 1989). Therefore, the term *family-school relationship* is preferred for this study. The structural, or programmatic, interventions can be implemented more successfully if the relational aspects of this connection are attended to first with thoughtful effort. Because there is little in the field as far as guidelines for engaging families of Latino ELL students (Olivos, 2009), this study highlights the specific relational components, both beliefs and practices, within the

family-school partnerships at the site schools, which are leveraged to both establish and maintain effective family engagement.

Establishing Trust

According to Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette and Hamby (1992), both parents and professionals identify trust as a vital component of effective family–school relationships. Adams and Christenson (2000) conducted a study, including 1,234 parents and 209 teachers from a suburban school district. Participants were surveyed about issues of trust in the family-school relationship. They found that the perceived quality of family-school interactions was a better predictor of trust than actual contact hours and overall trust could be enhanced through improvement of home-school communications. They also contend that trust between families and school is implicit for effective collaboration. When an atmosphere of mistrust is present, "it is difficult for educators and family members to create effective school-family partnerships to support student learning" (Ferguson, 2008, p. 11). Mapp's (2002) study, described earlier, found that the parents in her study emphasized trust as an important contributor to their school engagement. Schools successful at engaging families from diverse backgrounds "focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 7).

Communicating Effectively

In their framework presented previously, Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2010) contend that effective communication practices allow both families and schools to recognize and acknowledge the goals and needs of the other party, as well as to relay important information. As mentioned earlier, families and school personnel have both

expressed the importance of the presence of a few components related to the communication practices between them, including "listening carefully, avoiding the use of jargon, being nonjudgmental, sensitive and non-blaming" (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010, p. 70). The regularity and forms of communications has also been shown to affect the quality of the family-school relationship. Christenson, Palan and Scullin (2009) found that positive, on-going, personalized communication with families about their children's performance and progress, rather than just when there is a student issue (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), show the school has a vested interest in the relationship. Christenson and Sheridan (2001), in their volume described earlier, stated that educators tend to do poorly at providing particular information, such as specifics regarding how families can help children learn at home, available community resources, school-led workshops or classes and opportunities where parents can actively be involved as decision makers.

Effective and meaningful communication with families of limited English proficiency includes personalized, timely and direct contact (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). Zarate (2007) found in her qualitative study described earlier that when communication with families is general in nature, infrequent, and without adequate notice, Latino families find the effort feels impersonal and lacking genuine interest. This is not uncommon since "lack of communication, misunderstandings, and miscommunication between schools and linguistically diverse families are very common because of stereotypes, assumptions, and generalizations" (Araujo, 2009, p. 120). In his article focused on relations with Latino families, Olivos (2009) stated that consciously avoiding the use of jargon or references to legal or state mandates without explanation supports

stronger connections with these families. Finally, Zarate (2007) contends that providing all information, especially essential information, in Spanish strengthens the relationship between home and school.

Culturally Responsive Schooling

"If educational institutions are serious about improving parental and family involvement, then they must change their approaches to them…. School personnel must make it their business to learn about the ethnic groups they teach, and find out what customs and values they have" (Floyd, 1998, p. 134). Especially since in stark contrast, the teaching population continues to be dominated by White, middle class, monolingual individuals (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). In their funds of knowledge framework, Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) highlight the importance of understanding these varying contexts that impact the households of students as critical in understanding both teaching and learning, as well as relating to those who are important in the child's life. In her article focused on parent tutoring programs to improve literacy development in children, Neuman (1995) contends that successful organizations are those that recognize and thoughtfully utilize the contextual factors mentioned above.

Cooper and Christie (2005), whose study focused on the phenomenon of parent empowerment, stated that creating family-school partnerships requires practitioners to show sensitivity to culturally relevant values that influence how parents participate in their children's schooling. Henderson and Mapp (2002) note that schools successful at engaging families from diverse backgrounds "recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences" (p. 48), including the cultural variations in the definitions of school involvement (Lopez, 2001).

There are numerous actions in which schools can engage to express awareness of cultural differences and accompanying responsiveness as detailed in several studies throughout the literature, some of which have previously been discussed. Viewing diversity as an asset for schools (Chamberlain, 2005), appreciating family dynamics and showing respect for cultural values and beliefs (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Valdes, 1996), utilizing cultural brokers for school families (Terriquez, 2013), and showing a willingness to transform the current curriculum and school environment to one that addresses all of the students' and families' needs (Brown, 2007) are a few behavioral expressions that schools can put forth. Ferguson (2008), Villegas and Lucas (2002), and Voltz (1994) all suggest exploring school personnel's own biases and how those perceptions may impact their relationships with families as another action in which culturally responsive schools can engage. Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005), through their framework directed at connecting with culturally diverse families, also suggest that schools can exhibit cultural responsiveness by finding spaces for and encouraging the use of families' funds of knowledge. As previously mentioned, Zarate (2007) contends that providing all communications in families' native language is another culturally responsive behavior schools can exhibit. Lastly, in their Ecologies of Parental Engagement framework, Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) state that understanding how the differences in culture can impact the interactions families have with schools and accommodating for those differences within family engagement practices shows a school's cultural responsiveness.

What is Missing from the Literature

The most well known researcher in the parent involvement field, Epstein (1995), described six types of parental involvement, emphasizing that involvement can occur in many ways. Numerous others have contributed to this work, both prior to and following her work. However, specific attention to the relational aspects of this phenomenon is limited in the research findings, which generally focus more on the structural components of family-school interactions (Sheridan, et al., 2012). Due to this, individual, and sometimes discrete, ideas and findings from various researchers and academics were utilized to construct the conceptual framework used to guide this study. Although there are strategies in existence to target diverse populations (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and a framework that focuses on the family-school relationship (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010), there is no specific family engagement framework that is relational in focus, purposely targeted towards the Latino population and geared towards schools and school personnel as the prescribed change agents. The framework proposed in this study addresses all of those aspects.

In reference to specific components within the conceptual framework presented, there were several aspects that had sparse coverage in the literature in connection to family engagement and/or family-school relationships. The sub-codes of *creating community spaces, nurturing children, and transparency of practices and policies* were all mentioned in the literature but not in great detail and the connections made to school/family partnerships and family engagement were weak. There were no connections in the literature to family engagement and *addressing basic needs*.

With these gaps present, I believe that my research provides analysis of two provocative exemplars of successful family-school relationships, the analysis of which can contribute to an emergent and more comprehensive framework to guide schools towards the establishment and maintenance of healthy and meaningful family-school relationships that lead to high levels of family engagement. My analysis of the two cases can also suggest possible connections for the less-mentioned components of establishing and maintaining those relationships.

Need for This Study

It is imperative for schools to forge healthy and meaningful family-school relationships. Highlighting beliefs and practices that are present in successful elementary environments serving high levels of Latino ELL students can identify foci for further investigation and possibly inform replication of the practices in schools with similar populations.

This study also focuses on effectively leveraging an already existing relationship for the benefit of student, and consequently school, success. A few studies have mentioned the importance of both the establishment and maintenance of the school-family relationship (Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002) and a majority of the relational components highlighted in this study can be found in the literature, even if not in reference specifically to family engagement. Also, as previously stated, frameworks and strategies focused on family-school relationships (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010) and this specific population of study (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) do exist; however, a comprehensive family engagement framework that is relational in focus, purposely targeted towards the Latino ELL population – a rapidly

growing population in our public schools – and geared towards schools and school personnel as the prescribed change agents does not. Through this study, insights into the relational components present in the literature and how they are related were gleaned.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

Introduction

Numerous studies have suggested the positive impacts of parental engagement on student success. Whether that student success is focused primarily on achievement (Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2007), improved social development and outcomes (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Domina, 2005; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), or overall student competence (Tolan & Woo, 2010) depends greatly on the intention of the researcher and the aspects of the family-school relationship that are being highlighted. Despite the individual foci of the assorted research studies conducted, as was posited in Chapter 2, clearly an increase in parental engagement in a child's schooling can positively impact their overall success, in its various forms and definitions.

According to many in the field, the forms of parental involvement can vary greatly (Domina, 2005; Epstein, J.L., Coates, L., Salinas, M. G., & Simon, B. S., 1997; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Jeynes, 2007) and the way that schools encourage and support that engagement can vary just as significantly. For the purposes of this study, where I investigated the relational beliefs and practices at two elementary schools that specifically elicit that engagement of families of ELL Latino students, I chose to focus on parental and family engagement as defined by Ferlazzo and Hammond (2009). "When schools *engage* parents, they are leading with the parents' self-interests in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (p. 4). This is in contrast to parent

involvement wherein parents are asked to participate or be involved in the self-interests of the institution. Ferlazzo and Hammond detail a clear distinction between parent engagement and involvement and, as previously mentioned, their description of parent engagement was used to help guide the creation of my conceptual framework and, ultimately, inform the data analysis process for this qualitative study. The framework was also derived from further readings of the literature and from my own conceptual understandings of the construction and maintenance of relationships. Through the use of the conceptual framework presented in Figure 3.1, I was able to finalize my research question and develop my data analysis processes.

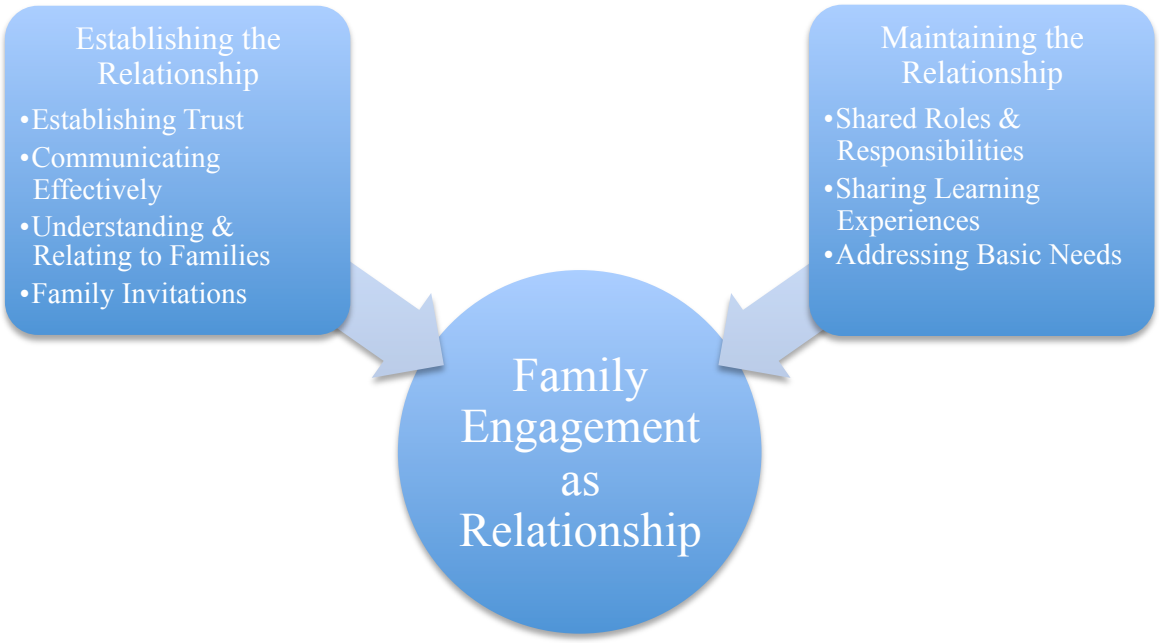

Figure 3.1. Conceptual Framework of Study.

Research Design and Rationale

Methodology involves "the analysis of the intersection (and interaction) between theory and research methods and data" (Sjoberg, Williams, Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991, p.

29). With this understanding in mind, I chose to use the comparative case study model, a qualitative approach to research. In consideration of the ecological model and its recognition of complexity, a qualitative approach facilitated in gaining a more holistic understanding of the numerous components that support engagement of Latino parents in these particular school settings.

As I was not seeking a cause and effect answer but was rather searching for an understanding of the phenomena at these particular sites, an instrumental case study model seemed most appropriate (Stake, 1995). Due to the identification of these schools in the Exemplary Schools Case Study (Nocon et al, 2010), these particular sites did a better job of providing information in regard to my research question than other schools. Case study was also deemed appropriate since the views of all stakeholders were important within the framework of my study (Tellis, 1997). Additionally, Stake (1995) contends that case study design is not about "optimizing the production of generalizations" but rather is a study of particularization (p. 8). Finally, the use of a comparative case study model allowed me to uncover areas of agreement and difference (Abu-Lughod, 2007) in beliefs and practices of the two schools. Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary are both highly successful with their Latino ELL populations but embrace different theoretical stances in regard to parent engagement (H. Nocon, personal communication, June 7, 2011). This comparison allowed me to investigate two disparate philosophies that produce similar results.

Methodology

Research Questions

The following research question guided my study:

What relational beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of parents and families of ELL Latino students are present in elementary schools, which have demonstrated unusual success with ELL students?

Sampling

Site sample. Purposeful sampling techniques (Sharp, Mobley, Hammond, Withington, Drew, Stringfield, & Stipanovic, 2012) were used to identify the sites for the study. A research collaborative between Metropolis School District and Western University looked at identifying practices of schools that successfully serve large numbers of ELLs. Among eight identified schools, two, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary, were chosen for this extension study. The two school sites were selected based on the following factors: both serve a large number of Latino students, the organizations hold different theoretical perspectives on parent engagement; and both serve an ECE population at their institutions, an area of specialization and continued interest for the researcher. The schools themselves served as the subjects for this study; therefore, observations of classrooms and school events, interviews with participants, including faculty, staff, and parents, and analysis of documents took place at both schools from December 2011 through May 2012.

Due to their success with high numbers of ELL students, in general, and more specifically Latino students, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary have much to offer as exemplary cases. As the Latino population in our country continues to grow, the number of Latino children in the classrooms continues to rise concurrently. Observations of such exemplary schools yielded particular examples of best practices in the engagement of the families of ELLs. This information can be used by others in the field

of education in addressing the needs and strengths of this growing population in their particular contexts.

Western Metropolis, USA. Western Metropolis is a large city in the western portion of the United States. In 2000, the population of the city ranked among the top twenty-five in the country. Based on numbers from the latest U.S. Census (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2010), Western Metropolis's standing remains about the same; the population consists of 52.2% of "White persons not Hispanic," 31.8% of "persons of Hispanic or Latino origin," 10.2% "Black persons," 3.4% Asian, 1.4% American Indian and Alaska Native persons. Of the persons 25 years of age and older, 84.7% of the population has at least a high school diploma. From that same group, 41.3% of persons have a bachelor's degree or higher. Although data are not provided as to the specific languages or proportions of which they are spoken, 27.6% of Western Metropolis's population speaks a language other than English in their home.

Metropolis School District. In 2010-2011, Metropolis School District listed 162 schools in its district. Seventy-three of those were elementary schools and 16 were K-8 schools. Student membership data for the district in 2011-2012 showed an enrollment of 81, 870 students of which 58% were registered as Hispanic, 20.3% as White, 14.5 % Black, 3.3% Asian, 0.8% American Indian, and 2.9% as other. The district reported 72.51% of the students as qualifying for free/reduced lunch and 12.79% of the students were reported as gifted and talented. As of October 2011, 34% of the students in the district were identified as ELLs and 38% of the student population, including non-ELLs, were identified as Spanish speakers.

Northwest K-8. Northwest K-8 is one of 16 schools in Metropolis School District serving students from ECE through 8th grade. The school has been in the same location since 1931. Northwest K-8's mission states that culture, language, and tradition are of high value. Students are treated with great respect and high expectations are placed upon them (Nocon, et al, 2010). Being a magnet dual language school, Northwest K-8 provides services for all students under the Spanish/English immersion model with the goal of all students becoming bi-literate in both English and Spanish. "Because (Northwest K-8) is not a neighborhood school, students have to apply to participate in the magnet program and all students need an attendance reason as to why they are not attending their neighborhood school. ELL status is an acceptable attendance reason" (p. 5).

In 2011-2012, enrollment for the school was 441 students. Of those, 94.8% qualified for free/reduced lunch and 59.6% were classified as ELA students. Latino students make up the largest ethnicity group with 421 students identified as Hispanic. Figure 3.2 displays all ethnicities of the students from the 2011-2012 enrollment year. All students for the past three years (2010-2012) have come from outside of the school's boundaries. The counts from October 2012 even show 48 students at the school coming from out of district to attend this program.

Northwest K-8 is an older two-story school with a prominent entrance preceded by two sets of stairs. Upon entering the school, all are greeted via an intercom system and by a large banner identifying the school as an Epic award-winning school. The Mexican heritage of the majority of students is clearly celebrated at Northwest K-8 as various signs showing Mexican and Mexican-American images are proudly displayed

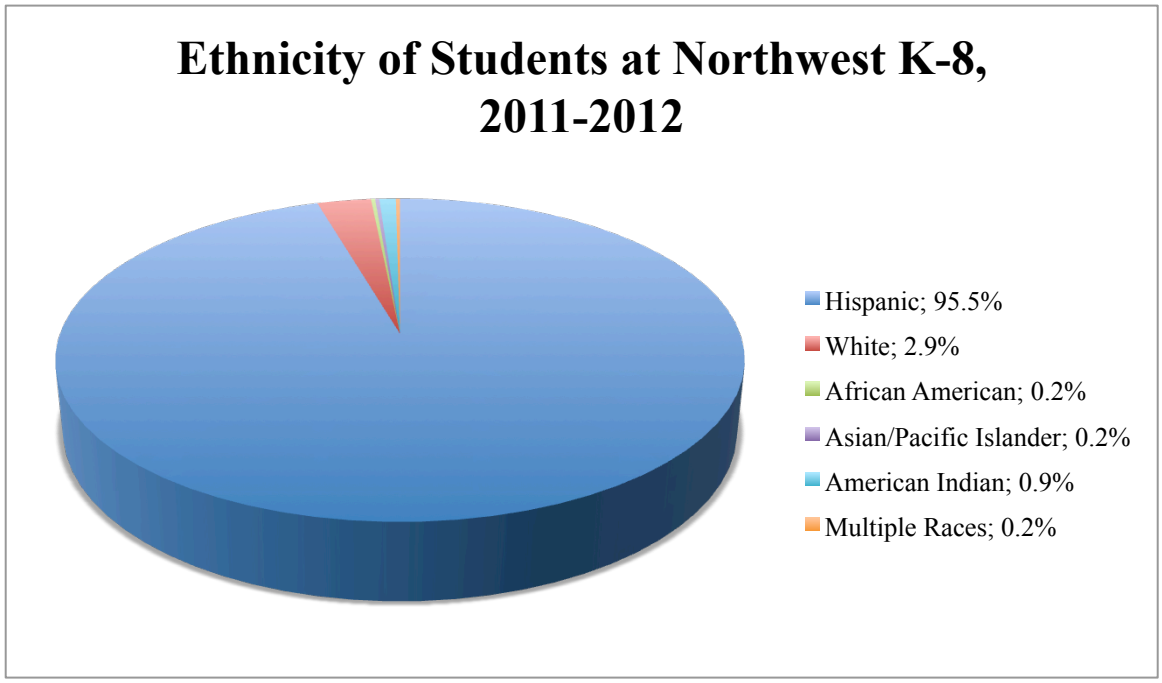

Figure 3.2. Ethnicities of Students at Northwest K-8.

and easily visible upon entry. An information board of upcoming events is front and center with announcements written both in English and Spanish. Up one final set of stairs, a gathering area with a few easy chairs and a loveseat are at the end of the entry. To the immediate right is the recently remodeled library and new media center and to the left is a long hallway leading first to the office and then to several classrooms. Outside the office doors, an information table for visitors is filled with a plethora of information in the form of signage and pamphlets about the school. The hallways and office are busy but the environment and people are welcoming. Children's work in both English and Spanish is prominently displayed outside every room.

Southwest Elementary. Southwest Elementary is one of 73 elementary schools within Metropolis School District. This neighborhood school serves students from ECE through 5th grade. The mission and vision at Southwest Elementary is to ensure a safe, trusting, and culturally sensitive community to support the education of the whole child

so as to develop competitive 21st century learners. Being designated as a Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) school, Southwest Elementary provides native language instruction in Spanish to certain students with supported English content instruction and English language development. Students progress over three or more years to English-only instruction.

In 2011-2012, enrollment for the school was 557 students. Of those, 94.3% qualified for free/reduced lunch and 51.7% were classified as ELA students. Latino students make up the largest ethnicity group with 504 students identified as Hispanic. Figure 3.3 displays all ethnicities of students from the 2011-2012 enrollment year. For the past three years (2010-2012), between 23-29% of the students have used their choice-in option to attend Southwest; but, the majority of the students consistently come from within the boundaries of the school.

This older two-story school almost takes up an entire city block but seems nestled back into its neighborhood. The entrance to the school is regulated with an intercom system and the double doors open to a wide entryway with a sofa and some chairs to one side and information lining the walls of the other. Pamphlets about the school and the district are on tables in between the furniture. The auditorium is straight ahead with displays on the walls between the sets of doors. An upcoming school event is colorfully advertised in both English and Spanish. The office is to the left and a long hallway to the right leads to a set of classrooms. Children's work in both English and Spanish is prominently displayed along every wall. Outside of the office, the attendance goals and actual numbers for each grade are largely displayed for all who enter to easily view.

The principal of Southwest Elementary proclaims it to be a "community school."

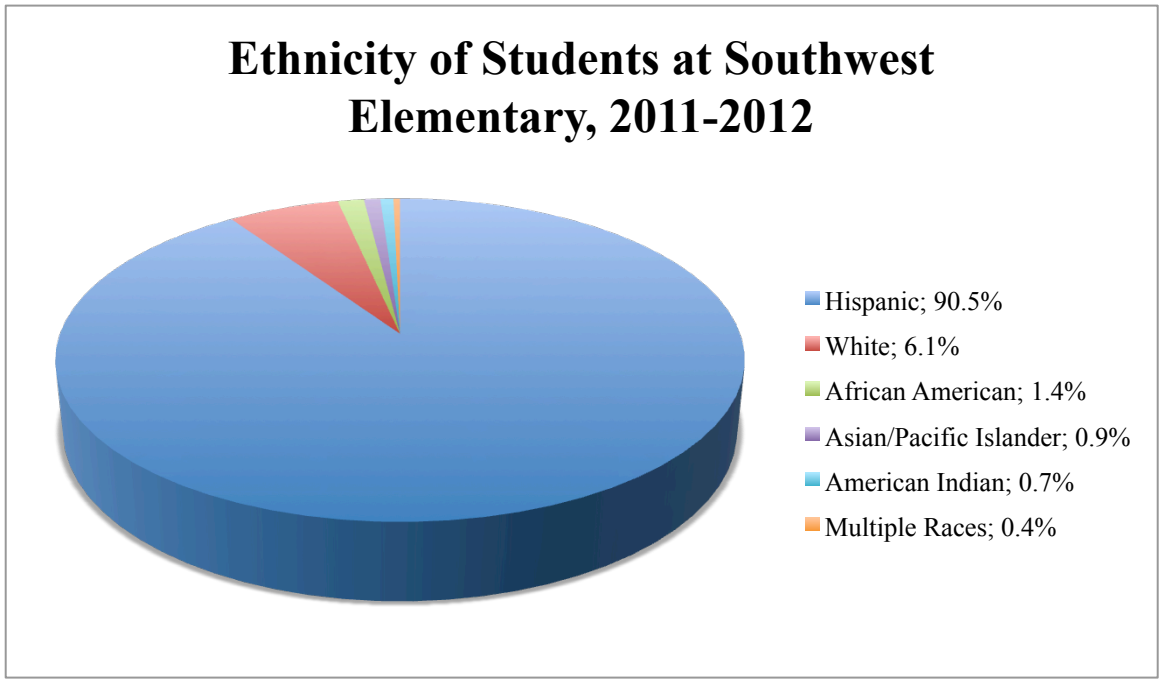

Figure 3.3. Ethnicities of Students at Southwest Elementary.

Following the community school model (Seay, 1947), Southwest works with many local partners and provides expanded services such as daily and holiday meals, after-school care and activities, and physical health exams to their students.

Participant Sample

The participant sample (N=27) included administrators and other staff members, faculty, and parents from both case study schools. A breakdown of the participants at each school and within each category is listed in Table 3.1 below. Administration and staff members from Northwest K-8 who participated included the principal, assistant principal, social worker, and a school secretary. One Special Education teacher, who serves as an administrative stand-in and was interviewed while serving that role, also participated. Northwest K-8 faculty participants included an ECE teacher, two 1st grade teachers and two 2nd grade teachers. Parents at Northwest who participated in the study had children in 2nd - 5th grade. All of them had multiple children, some of whom had

Table 3.1. Number of Participants by Group at Each Case Study School.

	Northwest K-8	Southwest Elementary	Total
Administration	2	1	3
Staff	3	6	9
Faculty	5	3	8
Parents	4	3	7
Total Number of Participants			27

graduated from Northwest K-8. One parent also served as the Parent Liaison for Northwest K-8 and the district.

At Southwest Elementary, the administration and staff participants included the principal, two secretaries, two after-school activity coordinators, and a school counselor. Faculty members who participated from Southwest included three ECE teachers and a Kindergarten teacher. Parents who participated had children in ECE - 5th grade. One parent was brand-new to the school and had only one child while the other two had multiple children, some of who had graduated from Southwest Elementary.

Purposive sampling (Teddlie & Yu, 2007) was utilized for the initial interviews in the study as principals and assistant principals seemed both a logical place to begin regarding knowledge about school practices and were necessary allies to gain entry into the schools. Similar reasoning was employed when the secretaries were sought out as informants; at both of the case study schools, and I would suggest at the majority of schools, the secretaries provide the oil that keeps the machine and all its parts running smoothly. Almost anyone who passes through the doors of the school and the principal's office must first come in contact with the secretary. In addition, a recruitment email was

sent out to all teachers at one school per the principal's approval. At the other school, the principal assisted with obtaining teacher and staff participants.

Snowball sampling (Cohen & Arieli, 2011) was utilized from that point forward. During interviews with the principals, assistant principal, secretaries, and some teachers, inquiries were made as to who else might provide information regarding the parent engagement practices at the school. Specifically, recommendations for teachers and parents were elicited. Surprisingly, I was additionally led to speak to support staff at both schools, all of whom had direct connections to parents. During subsequent interviews with some of these individuals, names of other participants were offered.

Data Collection

To fully gain a variety of perspectives on the phenomena, appreciate the problem, and push for informed change, it is imperative to have an "understanding of the worlds from which these individuals come" (Valdes, 1996, p. 5). Therefore, multiple types of data were collected from many sources to gain a more holistic view of the phenomena being researched and to assist with triangulation (Stake, 1995) and help establish construct validity (Yin, 2009) through the development of "converging lines of inquiry" (p. 115). Data were collected from the two case study schools over a seven-month period. Documents were collected from early October 2011 to late February 2012. Interviews and observations were conducted from early November 2011 through early April 2012. This section will provide a description of the data collection methods used and an explanation for the steps taken.

Documents. Documents served a critical role in the data collection process of this study, as both a means of collecting easily reviewable information and also serving

as "substitutes for records of activity" that I could not observe directly (Stake, 1995, p. 68). As both schools were in the same district, documents that impacted all schools district-wide were obtained, such as the parent guide, the district-wide plan of action (The Western City Plan), district notification of parents' and students' rights, the conceptual framework presented by the Office of Community Engagement, a yearly calendar, and informational brochures for families highlighting school, district, and community resources, which were collected from a district event conducted by the Office of Community Engagement. To gain an understanding of each school site individually, the following documents were reviewed, some based on recommendations by school employees: parent informational brochures, notes and agendas from parent meetings, school site calendar of events, parent newsletters and personal parent letters, sign up sheets for informational and all-school events, parent surveys following a parent education event, informational signage on Parent Bulletin Boards, and a parent compact from one school. Some of these were obtained through research on the district website or direct walk-throughs in the schools, while some documents were provided to me directly by school personnel.

In addition the documents listed above, I had access to data that had been collected from the umbrella study mentioned previously (Nocon, et al, 2010). The documents that I determined relevant to my study and therefore utilized included photos of the school environment, such as hallways, display boards, classrooms, grounds, and areas of the school that I was not able to visit myself, and the report itself with school and district descriptions. Some of the photographs helped me determine specific areas where I conducted initial observations. Documents collected early on in the study, both from

the original umbrella study and through my data collection at the school sites, aided with conceptualization, design, and implementation of the study and assisted with completion of the descriptions of the district and case study sites.

Interviews. I used focused, individual interviews (Yin, 2009) to gather data for this case study. These integral interactions allowed me to gather self-report data and participants' varying perceptions of the parent engagement practices elicited at the site schools, as the "interview is the main road to multiple realities" (Stake, 1995, p. 64). I interviewed multiple participants at the two case study schools to broaden my perspective of the phenomena. Table 3.2 outlines the individuals who participated in interviews.

Each was invited to participate with the appropriate email script (Appendix B) when necessary and participant consent was obtained with the school personnel consent form (Appendix C) or parent consent form (Appendix D).

School administrators. As noted above, initial interviews were conducted with administration at both schools, as principals and assistant principals seemed both a logical place to begin regarding knowledge about school practices and were necessary allies to gain entry into the schools. The Assistant Principal at Southwest Elementary was also recruited to participate in the interview process but was unavailable for reasons unknown. The school administrators chose the time and location of the interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes to an hour.

I used the same guiding questions for each of these interviews. Those questions are outlined in Table 3.3. However, since the interviews were conducted using an open-ended ethnographic technique (Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996), I did ask additional or clarifying questions when appropriate to follow up on points raised by the interviewees.

Table 3.2. Interviews Conducted.

	Who	Where
3 Interviews with School Administrators	1) Assistant Principal 2) Principal 3) Principal	Northwest Southwest Northwest
9 Interviews with School Staff	4) School Secretary 5) School Secretary 6) Assistant for Enrichment 7) Social Worker 8) Afterschool Director 9) Guidance Counselor 10) Administrator in Training 11) School Secretary 12) Family Service Worker	Southwest Southwest Southwest Northwest Southwest Southwest Northwest Northwest Southwest
8 Interviews with Faculty Members	13) ECE Teacher 14) Kindergarten teacher 15) 1st grade teacher 16) 1st grade teacher 17) 2nd grade teacher 18) 2nd grade teacher 19) ECE teacher 20) ECE teacher	Southwest Southwest Northwest Northwest Northwest Northwest Northwest Southwest
7 Interviews with Parents	21) Parent of ECE, 5th, alumni 22) Parent of 3rd, 5th, alumni 23) Parent of ECE 24) Parent Liaison, alumni 25) Parent of 4th, alumni 26) Parent of 3rd, alumni 27) Parent of 1st, 4th	Southwest Northwest Southwest Northwest Southwest Northwest Northwest

School staff and faculty. Initially, I intended to interview only faculty members at the ECE level. However, I quickly discovered that the engagement of families at both sites is part of a school-wide culture and thus expanded the participant group to include teachers at all levels and other staff members as well (as previously noted in Table 3.2). All participants in these groups were recruited either through the recruitment email, via administrator request, or through face-to-face invitations. Participants set the time and location of each interview.

Each of these interviews was conducted using an open-ended ethnographic technique with the guiding questions listed in Table 3.4. Follow-up or clarifying questions were asked based on the points raised by each interviewee. The goal of these

Table 3.3. Guiding Questions for School Administrators.

1. What are three or four most important things about this school that you think are key to understanding its success in working with parents and families of ELLs?
2. Can you briefly follow up with each of these in detail to establish why they are important and how they are accomplished in this school?
3. What should I look at/for in terms of documents and materials to see the things you mentioned in practice?
4. Who should I definitely interview who can give me important insights into how the engagement of parents and families of ELLs is organized?
5. Who should I interview to learn about professional development in regards to family engagement efforts?
6. Who should I interview to understand the parent and family perspective of parental engagement?
7. What additional information would you like me to know about family engagement practices at your school?

interviews was to gain an understanding of how these site schools engaged the families of Latino ELL students. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes.

***Parents*.** One of the most important groups that I interviewed was the parent group. All of these participants were recruited through the snowball method (Cohen &

Arieli, 2011) either through recommendations from school administrators, staff, faculty, or other parents. These interviews were conducted in the same manner as all previous ones but the guiding questions were altered as outlined in Table 3.5. Participants in this group chose the time and location of the interview. Each interview lasted approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

Table 3.4. Guiding Questions for School Staff & Faculty.

1. What are three or four most important things about the school that you think are most important to understanding its success in working with parents and families of ELLs?
2. What are your roles in the school-wide practices for parental and family involvement?
3. Who is most knowledgeable about the parent and family involvement practices and programs?
4. May I come and observe your work in your classroom? What times work for you?

Table 3.5. Guiding Questions for Parents.

1. What are three or four most important things about the school that you think are important to understanding its success in working with families of ELLs?
2. How are you involved at the school?
3. Which staff members are you most likely to contact at the school?
4. What are some issues that you feel comfortable contacting the school about?

Observations. Numerous observations were conducted at both site schools. The purpose of the observations was to understand how the schools engaged families of Latino ELL students and to function as a means of gathering data that supported the claims of various participants. In the initial interviews with principals and in subsequent interviews with other staff and faculty members, I inquired as to specific classroom or school events in which I might observe parent and family engagement practices in action. Therefore, with these recommendations and with my prescribed interests in observing specific activities, such as drop-off and pick-up times at both schools, observations were conducted. Eight observations were conducted at Northwest K-8 and eight at Southwest Elementary. So as not to seem imposing to the members of the case schools, I did not take notes during the observations; instead, I entered notes into a field journal following each one. Due to this fact, observations were kept relatively short or, for longer events, breaks were taken to record notes in smaller chunks. A list of observation events and locations are outlined in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6. Observations Obtained at Both Schools.

	Northwest K-8	Southwest Elementary
Drop-off or Pick-up Time (school-wide and in individual classrooms)	5	4
All–School Event	1	1
Parent Meeting	2	1
After School Enrichment	0	2

The bulk of the observations at both schools were of drop-off and pick-up times. Some observations were focused on specific classrooms of participants while others were more school-wide. For specific classroom observations, I examined interactions between faculty and parents and looked for evidence of beliefs and practices that encouraged engagement of families. For the school-wide observations, I positioned myself to observe entry and exit into the school, the main office, and hallways and looked for similar interactions on a school-wide scale. These observations ran in length from ten to twenty minutes, depending on the amount of time parents and/or families were present.

In addition to the observations listed above, an all-school event was observed at each school. Although, all members of the community were invited to attend both events, one included a large majority of the school population while the other included a much smaller group. At Southwest, an evening tradition was observed. School staff, students and families participated in the school's annual Dr. Seuss Night where literacy, community, and fun are highlighted. At Northwest, I was able to observe a smaller after school event. Families, students and a few staff members sorted through an incredibly large number of textbooks. Each of these observations lasted approximately 35-40 minutes. Interactions between staff and parents and among parents were observed, as well as families' apparent comfort levels within the school environment.

At Southwest, after school enrichment activities were observed after numerous school staff members mentioned the importance of this program to the continued engagement and support of parents. The interactions between the families and staff during pick up and meal times were the focus of these observations and lasted approximately 15 minutes. Finally, school sponsored parent meetings at both schools

were observed. At Northwest, the meetings took place in the Media Center of the library in the morning after students were dropped off and lasted approximately one hour. At Southwest, the meeting took place in a classroom in the afternoon following the end of school and the observation lasted approximately 30 minutes.

Organization of Data

After conducting interviews and observations, I transcribed the data into basic text documents. I then used the "Convert Text-to-Table" function and organized each into a tabular format utilizing Microsoft Word. The organizational and coding system for qualitative research as described by LaPelle (2004) was an excellent fit for my research; therefore, the system I used is an adaptation of her work.

Organizing interview data tables. I created one data table for each interview conducted. Each table had columns with the following titles: (1) *group identification*, to which group did the informant belong (e.g. administration, staff, faculty, or parent); (2) case study *school* (Northwest or Southwest), for identification and later comparison purposes; (3) *role*, the number assigned to each informant within each group; (4) *theme code*, for identifying how each response was coded; (5) *moderator question/participant response*; and, (6) *sequence number,* for each separate response or utterance. This system enabled me to keep track of all responses, including sequence, and note who provided each response and the perspective that each informant offered. These columns were particularly useful once I merged data tables and sorted according to themes, schools and group identification.

Prior to entering the data into the tables, I first had to take a few steps. I assigned letters, group identification (group ID), and numbers, roles, to each informant in a "face

sheet" data table (La Pelle, 2004, p. 90). Group ID letters were assigned based on a participant's affiliation in a particular group. Roles codes were assigned to delineate each participant from others within their group ID classification. All initials in the table below (Table 3.7) were changed per confidentiality agreements but represent all of the

Table 3.7. Example of Face Sheet Data Table.

Interview Groups	Group ID	School	Role	Individual
Administration	A	Northwest	1	J. F. (AP)
	A	Southwest	2	P. W. (P)
	A	Northwest	3	F. A. (P)
Staff	B	Southwest	1	L. L.
	B	Southwest	2	Q. T.
	B	Southwest	3	A. S.
	B	Northwest	4	E. H.
	B	Southwest	5	L. G.
	B	Southwest	6	J, W.
	B	Northwest	7	F. O.
	B	Northwest	8	A. L.
	B	Southwest	9	R. U.
Faculty	C	Southwest	1	L. P.
	C	Southwest	2	P. M.
	C	Northwest	3	E. S.
	C	Northwest	4	A. D.
	C	Northwest	5	B. Y.
	C	Northwest	6	C. O.
	C	Northwest	7	B. W.
	C	Southwest	8	S. W.
Parents	D	Southwest	1	P. K.
	D	Northwest	2	K. A.
	D	Southwest	3	L. D.
	D	Southwest	4	N. E.
	D	Northwest	5	L. R.
	D	Northwest	6	T. O.
	D	Northwest	7	D. J.

participants. In each interview data table, the same *group identification* and *role codes* were assigned to both the informant and the interviewer (myself) (Table 3.8). My

questions or comments were bolded in order to make them more noticeable and distinguishable from informant responses.

Table 3.8. Example of Group Identification and Role Coding for Interviews.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
A	NW	1		**Moderator question**	1
A	NW	1		Participant response	2
A	NW	1		**Moderator question**	3
A	NW	1		Participant response	4

Then, after assigning *group identification* and *role* codes to the data, I cut and pasted each informant's response into a new cell in the *moderator question/participant response* column. Each utterance was placed within a separate cell. There were no hard returns within the text of each response, meaning each utterance was included as one paragraph in one cell and each separate exchange between the informant and the moderator are easily identifiable. Therefore, some responses took only a few lines within a cell while other lengthy responses may have spanned a page or longer. Pasting each response into just one cell enabled me to keep track of an entire response. Each response was also assigned its own *sequence number*. This allowed me to return to the original sequence of responses after I sorted the table based on theme codes or group identification. This will be discussed more within the data analysis section.

Organizing observation data tables. I created one data table for each observation conducted. Each observation data table had columns with the following titles: (1) case study *school* (Northwest or Southwest); (2) *date* that the observation took place; (3) *event*, a short description of the setting for the observation; (4) *theme code*, for identifying how each observation note was coded; (5) *observation note,* entries taken

directly from my field journal, which were recorded into individual data table cells according to recognized themes or seemingly unrelated occurrences during an observation; and, (6) *sequence number* for each separate observation note (Table 3.9). This system enabled me to keep track of all observation notes, including sequence of occurrences within single events, and to be aware of the situations surrounding each observation. These columns were particularly useful once I merged data tables and sorted according to codes, event, and/or schools.

Table 3.9. Structure of Observation Data Table.

School	Date	Event	Theme Code	Observation Note	Sequence #
NW	2/17/12	Drop Off – All School		Observation Note	1
NW	2/17/12	Drop Off – All School		Observation Note	2
NW	2/17/12	Drop Off – All School		Observation Note	3
NW	2/17/12	Drop Off – All School		Observation Note	4

After entering the *school*, *date*, and *event* information into each data table, I transcribed notes from my field journal and placed each separate occurrence from an event into a cell. Placing each occurrence into just one cell enabled me to keep track of and appropriately code separate incidences within single events. Each observation note was also assigned its own *sequence number*. This allowed me to return to the original sequence of occurrences after I merged and sorted the data based on codes, events, and/or schools. This will be discussed more within the data analysis section.

Organizing document data. I organized the documents into categories, by district and each case study school. Within that system, I organized the documents

further into categories. These categories included: *direct communication to families*, including newsletters and letters to parents; *informational documents*, which includes the Parent Handbook, pamphlets, and bulletin board information; and, *interaction with families*, including feedback from parents, sign-ups for school events, and the Parent Compact.

Coding

Theme codebook. The construction of my codebook (Appendix D) and the system I used to code the data within my data tables were very key components to both organizing my data and later enabling me to analyze that data. First, I had 2 major, primary-level themes, *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship*. The primary-level themes (in bold, in the codebook) were a priori, resulting from the reading and research I conducted to aid me in the creation of my conceptual framework, which led to the initial development of my codebook. Definitions for each of these primary-level themes are included in the codebook.

The secondary-level codes (in italics, in my codebook) were also derived from the literature or emerged throughout the data collection process and are represented in my conceptual framework. As the codebook continued to evolve, tertiary sub-codes were added, which both came from the literature and emerged through the analysis. For example, *maintaining the relationship* was a primary-level theme. Secondary-level codes of *shared roles and responsibilities* and *sharing learning experiences* were identified to represent the sub-categories found in the literature to support the continuation of these family-school relationships. *Assisting with basic needs* was a secondary-level code that emerged during the analysis process. Examples of some tertiary sub-codes found under

the primary-level theme *maintaining the relationship* and secondary-level code *shared roles and responsibilities* include *academic partnership, utilizing funds of knowledge,* and *decision-making power*. *Nurturing children* was a sub-code that emerged during the analysis under the secondary-level code *shared roles and responsibilities*.

After populating the codebook with the various levels of themes, codes, and sub-codes, I then assigned numerical codes (La Pelle, 2004) to each. Table 3.10 includes an excerpt from my codebook. Decimal numeric codes were used for the actual coding. This enabled me to perform a numeric sort on the codes in the data tables during my analysis.

Table 3.10. Excerpt from Codebook, Illustrating Three Levels of Themes/Codes.

Level			
1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
	2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
		2.11	Academic partnership
		2.12	Utilizing Funds of Knowledge
		2.13	Decision-making Power
		2.14	Nurturing Children
	2.20		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
	2.30		*Addressing Basic Needs*

Coding interview data. Within this section, I discuss how I took the previously recorded and organized interview data tables and coded the text with the use of my

codebook. Table 3.11 illustrates my data table structure prior to the addition of codes (group ID A, role 1 denotes 1st administrator to be interviewed).

Table 3.11. Example of an Interview Data Table with All Information Except Codes.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
A	NW	1		Well I think one of them is that the people that represent our main office, that they are bilingual and they can speak with the parents. And if there's no communication to begin with, we already have a problem. Expectations – that parents understand what our expectations of us and them are so that the kids are in school everyday to learn. Cause I know like in ECE a lot of the times they don't wanna – it gets cold and 'ahhh I'm not bringing the babies in' and we say 'no, bring 'em on in!' So I think that's important. And at the ECE level, we have an awesome ECE teacher. We adore her.	4
A	**NW**	**1**		**I've heard that.**	**5**
A	NW	1		Yeah, she just became one of our teacher leaders. She is very good at what she does. So a lot of the times we don't, well I don't even have to – you know… she tells us what's going on, you know, she sends individual letters home to the parents. She knows what she needs to do to make sure that program is going at four-star quality – doing what it needs to be doing. So did I cover everything? So I got three. So front office making sure with communication, expectations… teachers what they're doing and then the parent classes.	6
A	**NW**	**1**		**Like parent education classes?**	**7**
A	NW	1		Yes and the some teachers and paras there actually are Spanish speakers so with the Spanish component, they are very helpful so that works very well there. They do those classes in ECE through 2nd I think.	8

Utilizing the previously organized data tables, I began the process of coding the text. Each response, or separate cell entry, was coded with one or more codes. First, I categorized the primary-level theme with which the response aligned, while considering the definitions of these themes. Then, as appropriate, I followed the same process when assigning secondary-level codes and tertiary-level sub-codes. All responses were specific enough to warrant a secondary-level code or a tertiary-level sub-code where provided.

Entire response as one code. If an entire response fit into one code category, then that entire response was assigned only one code. The moderator question or comment would also be given the same code as the participant response to identify that the two were in concert. Table 3.12 illustrates this coding procedure (group ID B, role 1 denotes 1st staff member to be interviewed; and, theme code 1.20 represents *communicating effectively*).

Table 3.12. Example of an Entire Response Fitting into One Code Category.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
B	**SW**	**1**	**1.20**	**And what else besides, well beyond translation cause I am sure there are other things that you do for the parents specifically? I know the other day you handed some paperwork to me…are you part of the organization of that?**	**13**
B	SW	1	1.20	I am, um, we collect stuff from the teachers or anything that's going on and we make sure it's copied and that each child receives one. There are two other ladies in the office that we sit and collate every Thursday morning. If you come in, we're collating and stapling and making sure every child's family gets notices for the week.	14

One response being split into multiple codes. If a single response contained replies that fit into different code categories, then the response was split into different cells and each cell was assigned the appropriate code. In this case, the sequence number was modified to signify that the response had been split (La Pelle, 2004). Decimals of .01, .02, .03, etc. were added to reflect each section of the response and for easier reorganization of the information after I sorted it according to groups, schools, or code categories during analysis. In addition, brackets were added at the end and beginning of the split cells so that I might recall the content within the adjacent portion of the response. Table 3.13 illustrates the example of one response being split into multiple codes and the use of additional sequence markings and brackets (group ID D, role 3 denotes 3rd parent

Table 3.13. Example of One Response Being Split into Multiple Code Categories.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
D	**SW**	**3**	**1.11**	**What staff members are you most likely to call or contact at the school for anything?**	**11**
D	SW	3	1.11	Maybe just their teachers. Cause they're who I'm most comfortable with and they are always there and easy to talk to. [She's my first daughter]	12.01
D	SW	3	1.13	[are easy to talk to.] She's my first daughter and I'm new here. So probably just the teachers and other parents of course. There's always places to do that. [It seems like I could]	12.02
D	SW	3	1.14	[places for that.] It seems like I could talk to anyone if I needed to, like the principal or anyone.	12.03

to be interviewed; theme code 1.11 represents *welcoming attitude/environment*; theme code 1.13 represents *creating community spaces*; theme code 1.14 represents

transparency with practices and policies). The code for the moderator question or comment always received the same code as the successive participant response code. This method ensured that the moderator question or comment remained with and preceded the relevant responses after sorting (LaPelle, 2004).

Duplication of an entire response. In some instances during the coding process, duplication of an entire response was necessary when the entire response could be placed into two or more coding categories. When this occurred, I added an additional row, or rows, to the data table. Each added row was identical to the appropriate original row except for the *theme code*. In this column, each appropriate code category was represented within its own row. The text in the *moderator question/participant response* column within these duplicated rows were also italicized to identify them as repeated responses during analysis (LaPelle, 2004). The *sequence number* was also modified to reflect the number of duplications of the text. The appropriate third and fourth decimal place were added following the assigned *sequence number* to each impacted row of responses. For example, in Table 3.14, response number 6.00 was coded in two different ways and therefore the *sequence number* was 6.0002 (group ID D, role 4 denotes 4th family member to be interviewed; theme code 1.12 represents *shared expectations*; and, theme code 2.14 represents *nurturing children*). Although highly unlikely, I chose to use four decimal places from the beginning of the coding process just in case a single response required coding in more than nine categories and the added zero allowed for visual separation from the remainder of the sequence number.

Duplication of an excerpt within one response. A similar system was utilized here as with duplication of an entire response. If a single response was split and one of

Table 3.14. Example of Coding an Entire Duplicated Response and the Sequence Numbers.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
D	**SW**	**4**	**1.12**	**Which staff members are you most likely to contact at the school?**	**5**
D	*SW*	*4*	*1.12*	*First the teacher always and then (principal) if needed. Everybody wants the same things for the children and does what is best for them so I am not worried about things when they come up.*	*6.0002*
D	*SW*	*4*	*2.14*	*First the teacher always and then (principal) if needed. Everybody wants the same things for the children and does what is best for them so I am not worried about things when they come up.*	*6.0002*

the excerpts within that response was duplicated, the sequence number would appropriately reflect that. Table 3.15 shows an example of an excerpt from response number 4 being duplicated (group ID B, role 1 denotes 1st staff member to be interviewed; theme code 1.20 represents *communicating effectively*; theme code 1.14 represents *transparency with practices and policies*; theme code 1.32 represents *acknowledging individual family needs*; and, theme code 1.31 represents *culturally responsive schooling*). The sequence number 4.0103 is assigned to the appropriate excerpt to show that it was duplicated three times and coded into three categories. The second excerpt from that response was only coded once and therefore was assigned the sequence number 4.02. The third excerpt was coded twice and therefore was assigned the sequence number 4.0302. As previously mentioned, when splitting a single response into

Table 3.15. Example of Coding Duplicated Excerpts within One Response and Sequence Numbers.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
B	**SW**	**1**	**1.20**	**Is there anything else?**	**3**
B	*SW*	*1*	*1.20*	*I think the teachers too have the same policy pretty much throughout the day you know or they can set appointments as needed with the teachers. [You know and I help do that.]*	*4.0103*
B	*SW*	*1*	*1.14*	*I think the teachers too have the same policy pretty much throughout the day you know or they can set appointments as needed with the teachers. [You know and I help do that.]*	*4.0103*
B	*SW*	*1*	*1.32*	*I think the teachers too have the same policy pretty much throughout the day you know or they can set appointments as needed with the teachers. [You know and I help do that.]*	*4.0103*
B	SW	1	1.31	[appointments with the teachers.] You know and I help do that. You know I translate a lot of calls for the teachers [and you know, I'm]	4.02
B	*SW*	*1*	*1.14*	*[calls for the teachers] and you know, I'm just like "she can't do that now but if you leave your name and number" you know stuff like that. And I think it's just always that openness that they will be able to talk to either the principal or the vice-principal or the teacher or someone about what is going on in the school…*	*4.0302*
B	*SW*	*1*	*1.20*	*[calls for the teachers] and you know, I'm just like "she can't do that now but if you leave your name and number" you know stuff like that. And I think it's just always that openness that they will be able to talk to either the principal or the vice-principal or the teacher or someone about what is going on in the school…*	*4.0302*

multiple rows, brackets are used in the moderator question/participant response column to show the content from the adjacent rows.

Coding observation data. Within this section, I discuss how I took the previously recorded and organized observation data tables and coded the text with the use of my codebook. Table 3.16 illustrates my observation data table structure without the codes added.

Table 3.16. Example of an Excerpt from an Observation Data Table with All Information Except Codes.

School	Date	Event	Theme Code	Observation Note	Sequence #
NW	1/20/12	Book Sort – Main Hallway (end of day)		Parents/family adults are present (12 women and 5 men) and several students helping principal unpack and stack brand new books near front entry	1
NW	1/20/12	Book Sort – Main Hallway (end of day)		Books are being sorted in highly visible location – other parents/visitors can view this as they enter to pick up students	2
NW	1/20/12	Book Sort – Main Hallway (end of day)		Books are in Spanish – all appear to be textbooks	3
NW	1/20/12	Book Sort – Main Hallway (end of day)		All are giggling as they unpack and stack the books	4
NW	1/20/12	Book Sort – Main Hallway (end of day)		Adults and children are chatting with one another in Spanish and a little English (mostly between the children)	5

Utilizing the previously organized observation data tables, I began the process of coding the text. Each entry, within a single row in the observation note column, was

coded with one or more codes. As with the interview data, first, I categorized the primary-level theme with which the response aligned, while considering the definitions of these themes. Then, as appropriate, I followed the same process when assigning secondary-level codes and tertiary-level sub-codes. Not all entries were specific enough to warrant a secondary-level code or a tertiary-level sub-code.

Since I conducted all observations and the notes were in my own words and not the transcription of another's response, coding for the observation data was much less complicated. While recording, I tended to separate out notes in my field journal into individual entries to highlight various components. If an entire entry fit into one code category, then that entire entry was assigned only one code, as in Table 3.17 (theme code 1.13 represents *creating community spaces*). This was the general case for the observation data. On the rare occasion that an entry needed to be split or duplicated to include two coding categories, I utilized the same codification system as previously described in the "coding interview data" section.

Table 3.17. Example of an Entire Entry Fitting into One Code Category.

School	Date	Event	Theme Code	Observation Note	Sequence #
SW	2/14/12	Pick Up Time – Main Hallway & Main Office	1.13	Parents in front lobby sitting and chatting in lounge chairs and on couches waiting for students to get out of class (Spanish and English being spoken)	1

Coding document data. Although I did not create data tables for my document data, I used my codebook to analyze that data for use in triangulation with interview and

observation data. I made coding notes in the documents to use as reference when I organized the findings and conducted my analysis.

Data Analysis

For this study, I had one primary research question: What relational school beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of families of ELL Latino students are present in elementary schools that have demonstrated unusual success with ELL students? Constant comparative analysis (Seidman, 2006) was employed as the method for analyzing the data gathered as well as comparing the data between the two case schools. This process of studying, reducing, and analyzing the data was ongoing as a new code and sub-codes emerged. Qualitative researchers are encouraged to follow up with surprises (Taines, 2010), therefore it was hopeful that the analysis would lead to unexpected but relevant places of discovery. Whenever possible, each stage of analysis was integrated with the next stage of collection to continually inform the process as described in detail below.

Preliminary analysis. After I conducted a few interviews and observations at both of the site schools and prior to creating any codes or data tables, I read through the data that had been collected. My intention here was to look for evidence of the themes that I expected from the initial literature review and to be open to any unexpected patterns or findings. I utilized direct interpretation (Stake, 1995) through use of the comments feature of track changes within Microsoft Word. Specifically, I made general notes about entries in regard to the expected themes from the literature review. Additionally, I added comments of significant note that may not have related to information obtained from the literature review but was of particular interest to me.

Table 3.18 shows an example of the notes that were assigned using track changes during this preliminary phase of analysis.

Table 3.18. Example of Preliminary Analysis Notes Using Track Changes.

				their knee probably not the biggest issue but if a kid is gonna go home with a big lump on his arm, um, you didn't send him to us that way so we need to make sure that we are sending them home with the knowledge that something happened…so, just communication. Making sure there's communication.	
A	**NW**	**3**		**What should I look for or look at in terms of documents and materials to see any of these things that you mentioned in practice? Are there documents that you pass on to parents on a regular basis?**	**30**
A	NW	3		We send notices out on a regular basis about things that are happening at the school, um things that are going to be happening for example, third grade is having TCAP next week so those notices are in teacher's boxes now and those go home to parents. Now do the parents always get the notices? No because there are a lot of older kids in our building who all of a sudden just…the messages evaporate. They just don't make it home all the time so we always put a board up in the front so as parents are coming in they know what's happening in case they don't get some of the information…yes the messages tend to disappear rapidly.	31
A	**NW**	**3**		**Are the notices written in more than one language?**	**32**
A	NW	3		Yes, they're written in English and Spanish. Everything that comes out of this office is in English and in Spanish.	33
A	**NW**	**3**		**I assumed but I wanted to ask. How**	**34**

Comment: Communication

Comment: Printed communication

Comment: Posted communication on bulletin boards

Comment: Bi-lingual communication always

Although I had originally employed the ideas of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model within my research proposal, early literature review, and preliminary theoretical framework for understanding the connections between the home and school, I had not focused specifically on the relational aspects of the family engagement phenomena. This concept of *relationship* emerged as a central tenet for the study during

this preliminary stage of analysis. After the first few observations and interviews, the terms 'transparency,' open-door policy 'and 'partnership' emerged from several data sources. As I considered these terms in relation to family engagement and reviewed my notes from the literature review, especially in regard to Bronfenbrenner, the concept of relationship appeared as if from out of nowhere, making me question why I did not see the pattern in the first place (Stake, 1995). This concept led me to further investigate the literature specifically relating to the concepts of family-school relationships and partnerships. The work by Clarke and her colleagues (2010) inspired the more defined focus on the relational aspects of family engagement and the inclusion of the two main themes within the framework: *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship*. Codes and sub-codes within each of these two main themes were gathered from the subsequent secondary literature review, or emerged later from further data analysis, and were used to create, or expand, the codebook (Appendix A). The eventual addition of the *relationship* lens to the overall conceptual framework assisted in solidifying the foundational understandings that guided the study.

Finally, of particular note within this stage of analysis was the clear evidence that drove my decision to examine the school-wide practices rather than focus primarily at the ECE level. It was apparent at this point that the culture regarding the beliefs and practices of family engagement was school-wide and not limited primarily to the ECE classrooms. Therefore, I shifted the focus to a more general exploration of school practices as a whole.

Primary analysis. Within this phase, with the new relational focus in mind, coding of the data took place. At this point, approximately three-fourths of the data had

been collected. A few more observations and a couple of interviews were conducted following this phase of analysis. Utilizing the definitions and/or descriptions of the various components within the conceptual framework as a guide, I read through the data and assigned a theme code number to each response or observation record with the method described earlier within the coding section. For example, with the code designation *communicating effectively* (theme code 1.20), descriptions of this component within the literature include reciprocity, timeliness, frequency, personalization, consideration of differences, multiple methods, positive in nature, and nonjudgmental. Specifically in consideration of the Latino population, communications that avoid the use of jargon, are in the families' home language, and include direct contact are also descriptors of this component of the framework. With this classification in mind, I coded responses or observation notes fitting that description with the theme code 1.20. Table 3.19 shows an example of the use of this theme code. According to the description in the conceptual framework, the response below includes a description of timeliness, frequency, and multiple methods. Further in this interview, the administrator also stated "everything that comes out of this office is in English and in Spanish" (Participant Interview, Role Code A3).

Within this phase of analysis, one code and three sub-codes emerged from the data. These emergent codes and sub-codes described additional components that were not identified in the literature review to date but become apparent as integral parts of the research. *Addressing basic needs* was the emergent code within this phase of analysis. This component became clear early on through both observations, as both buildings had secure entries and the means for providing food, clothing and housing assistance, as well

Table 3.19. Example of One Code Assignment in Primary Analysis.

Group ID	School	Role	Theme Code	**Moderator Question**/Participant Response	Sequence #
A	**NW**	**3**	**1.20**	**What should I look for or look at in terms of documents and materials to see any of these things that you mentioned in practice? Are there documents that you pass on to parents on a regular basis?**	**30**
A	NW	3	1.20	We send notices out on a regular basis about things that are happening at the school, um things that are going to be happening for example, third grade is having TCAP next week so those notices are in teacher's boxes now and those go home to parents. Now do the parents always get the notices? No because there are a lot of older kids in our building who all of a sudden just…the messages evaporate. They just don't make it home all the time so we always put a board up in the front so as parents are coming in they know what's happening in case they don't get some of the information…yes the messages tend to disappear rapidly.	31

as in interviews, when a few parents mentioned safety as a benefit of the school relationship and school staff confirmed the securing of items of necessity for families. The three emergent sub-codes include: *creating community spaces* and *transparency with practices and policies*, which both fall under the *establishing trust* code, and *nurturing children*, which is included under the code of *shared roles and responsibilities*. All three of these sub-codes came about in the same manner as observations and interviews both established and then confirmed the inclusion of these components.

Secondary Analysis Utilizing Codebook Additions: Emergent Codes and Sub-codes. Once all of the data were collected, an additional analysis of the data was needed to both complete an analysis of all data and to ensure that all previously coded data were considered according to these newly added codes and sub-codes. This process was relatively quick in comparison to the earlier phases of analysis as the majority of the data were previously coded. This phase was also integral to assuring that the proper coding was assigned to all interview, observation, and document data by providing one final alignment with the codebook.

Data management and synthesis. In order to conduct a full analysis, I first had to organize and combine my coded data tables. I merged the data from interviews and observations separately. With observation data, I merged the tables based on the separate schools. With the interview data, I merged the data tables in two different ways. First, I created two sets of data, one from each case study school. I utilized these two case study school data sets for comparison between the two sites. Additionally, within each of those primary sets, I then separated each group response set for comparison while maintaining individual participant responses from interviews by utilizing the assigned *role code* designations. I also merged interviews from both study schools and created four sets of data based on the group designation alone. With the data sorted in this fashion, I was able to look for patterns they may be present within specified groups, regardless of study school location. After merging the data, I went through a final process of editing by inspecting formatting of merged tables and accurate delineation of assigned codes and sequence numbers (i.e. italics and bold). Corrections were made as necessary. Data were then sorted within each new table as described above according to theme code.

Final analysis. Both categorical aggregation and direct interpretation (Stake, 1995) were used within this phase of analysis in the study. With the data merged and sorted, categorical aggregation of instances was conducted. The codebook (Appendix A) format, which was based directly off of the conceptual framework for this study, was used to record tallies of instances. Table 3.20 illustrates this process, specifically in reference to the interviews conducted at the two study schools. Similar tables were created to record the instances based on group designations (by site school and combined) within interviews. Frequency tables were also created to record the observation and document data comparing instances at the two study schools; these tables were created with the same format. I performed an analysis of these tables to determine the most salient themes between schools and group designations based on frequency counts.

Reliability and Internal Validity

Yin (2009) describes the goal of reliability in case study research as "minimiz(ing) the errors or biases in (the) study" (p.45). To accomplish this, I documented my procedures and organized my data with notes of time, place, and setting. Additionally, I de-identified all observation and interview data and created a database to make the data accessible for a reliability check.

Since there was a significant amount of self-report data gathered through interviews, it was imperative to take steps to ensure validity of those data. With the interviews, self-report data were used to gather subjective interpretations by informants with semi-structured questions that were open-ended yet specific in intent (Creswell, 2009). All questions were short, relevant and clear; and, I employed language understood

Table 3.20. Codebook with Frequency Tallies from Interview Data for Both Case Study Schools

Study School Tallies		Level			
NW	SW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
		1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
98	*141*		*1.10*		*Establishing Trust*
28	48			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
20	23			1.12	Shared expectations
25	37			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
25	33			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
74	*64*		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
121	*158*		*1.30*		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
56	69			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
44	50			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
21	39			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
12	*15*		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
		2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
105	*132*		*2.10*		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
49	54			2.11	Academic partnership
12	17			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
11	15			2.13	Decision-making power
33	46			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
19	*23*		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
23	*45*		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

by participants (i.e. no jargon or biased language). Since the majority of interviews were audio taped and then transcribed, a primary account of the data was used to follow the data analysis procedures described previously. Triangulation of data was established through collection from multiple types (interviews, observations and documents) and sources (administrators, staff, faculty, and families).

Potential Threats to Validity

There were potential threats to the validity of both my data collection and analysis. During collection, one potential threat could have been the selection of the informants. Since the snowball method of sampling was utilized, interviews with some of the informants were obtained through a direct connection with another informant. This prior connection could result in similar perspectives being portrayed in the data. Additionally, my mere presence during some of the observations could have impacted the interactions between school personnel and families and threatened the validity of the data collection process. Another threat to validity in the data collection process involves the recorded observation data. Even though steps were taken to consciously avoid this, some of my own assumptions and/or expectations for the observations could have distorted my memories of the event and impacted the later recordings. Finally, as a result of being recorded following the observation rather than during, the data are not as rich within this set and therefore may not accurately reflect all of the components of study.

A potential threat to the validity of my analysis procedures was the lack of including a member check (Stake, 1995). Timing between data collection and analysis posed a problem in including this step. Finally, due to the very detailed characteristics of the case schools and the population within those schools and the inability to generalize the results, a threat to external validity is present (Creswell, 2009).

Assurances and Confidentiality

Participation in my study was completely voluntary. I strove to do participants no harm and to maximize benefit and minimize risk of participation. There were no anticipated risks of participation. Results of this study may be made available to

educators and educational leaders locally, and perhaps nationally. This study holds promise for better understanding how to engage the parents and families of Latina/o ELLs in an elementary setting.

School administrators and other personnel may be known based on their position. Even so, I did not link any particular data to any specific person. Participants' information was kept confidential and anonymous through the assignment of face sheet data information and assigned codes. I maintained code lists and data files in separate secure places in my home. The data were stored on my private home computer and electronic files were protected with passwords and accessible only to me. Information was backed up electronically and all back-up files were kept in a safe in my home.

Participants were audio taped during interviews. No individual names were recorded in the transcriptions. If a specific name was used during an interview, the name was altered, either with the participant's previously established code or, if it was a non-participant, by using a relevant description of the individual's connection at the site (i.e. 3rd grade teacher, parent of 1st grader and alumni). Any document related to the audio taping of interviews was stored in a locked cabinet and made only accessible to me. These data will be kept for three years from initiation of the study, then destroyed.

All participants were required to provide documentation of informed consent and were free to leave the study at any point. I obtained consent from the district, the two site schools, and my sponsoring university to do this research. There was no cost to the district or schools as a result of my work. This research project was self-funded.

Limitations

There were several limitations to my study that I will briefly outline here. There were a few logistical matters that presented limitations to my research. Due to delayed approval, I spent only a few months at each site and this limited time did not allow for as in-depth an exploration as I had originally hoped. Because of the delay, I was not able to observe any beginning of the year events that I believe would have informed the research further.

Another limitation was the small number of parent participants. Due to my inability to speak Spanish and, again, the duration of data collection, the number of parent participants that I was able to interview was limited. I also discovered early on that the questioning in the parent survey was a bit confusing; again, I attribute this limitation to my inability to speak Spanish. Additionally, I believe that I missed out on some valuable interactions during observations because I could not translate what was being said.

Because I used snowball sampling for many of my interviews, it was sometimes difficult to compare results between the two schools based solely on participant roles. For example, staff I interviewed from one school was not even in existence at the other and the teachers interviewed at one site were primarily from the lower grades (i.e. ECE – Kindergarten). Because events were school specific, observations of school events were not always congruent for comparison.

Additionally, there were a few components discussed in the literature that, although were present, were not as prevalent in my findings. Some of these incongruent results were undoubtedly due to my adaptation of the components to fit into my

conceptual framework and specifically the relational focus. Originally, some of these components were not mentioned specifically in regard to a relationship context, such as *multiple avenues for engagement.* However, through my interpretation of the necessary relational components, they were included in the original framework to gather a well-rounded view of family engagement, especially in consideration of the population at the case study schools.

Finally, my lack of experience as a researcher caused me to miss out on some data collection opportunities that I realized during the full analysis would have benefitted the study. These included obtaining a more comprehensive sampling of families, utilizing a more tactical method for gaining participants, such as impromptu presence at events where allies or previous participants were present and being persistent to gain contact with specific participants, and having a better understanding of the research process prior to conducting the research.

Conclusion

Again, as I was not seeking a cause and effect answer but was searching for an understanding of the phenomena at these particular sites, an instrumental case study model was deemed most appropriate (Stake, 1995). And, due to the identification of these schools in the Exemplary Schools Case Study (Nocon et al, 2010), these particular sites did a better job of providing information in regard to my research question than other schools. Therefore, collection of data at these two sites took place over a seven-month span. The data types consisted of documents, observations and interviews. Four interview groups were designated as administration, staff, faculty and parents. During and after collection, the data were coded and organized into themes, some emerging

throughout the study. Following initial analyses phases and data collection was completed, a final analysis of the data was performed according to the conceptual framework (Figure 1.1). The findings of this final analysis particularize several of the components that seemed relevant, as they appeared most often in the data and were present in all three data sources. These findings are presented in detail in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this introduction, I will review my conceptual framework and how it guided the analysis, briefly review the methodology for coding and analysis of the data, and outline the organization of the remainder of the chapter.

Review of Conceptual Framework

Through this comparative case study, I am seeking to answer the following research question: What relational beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of families are present in elementary schools with primarily Latino and ELL student populations that have demonstrated unusual success? Through my conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) as presented in Chapter 1, I have highlighted the relational aspects of family engagement as found in the literature, as well as included themes that emerged from my data. There are indications that the components found in the literature and highlighted in this study can provide a successful framework when viewing parent engagement through a relational lens.

My conceptual framework organizes those relational beliefs and behaviors that promote and strengthen parent engagement into two primary themes: *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship*. Both the rationale for the framework, the themes, and the specific components found within these two themes are described in Chapter 1 and, in most cases, supported by the literature within the context of family/school relationships. Additionally, a rationale for selection of the term family engagement versus, the more common, parent involvement is provided in Chapter 1,

along with a brief description of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Model as it pertains to this study. A more detailed description of both can be found within the literature review in Chapter 2. The specific components of the conceptual framework, delineated by themes, codes and sub-codes as outlined in the codebook (Appendix A) and described in detail in earlier chapters, guided the analysis of the data.

Review of Coding and Data Analysis

I will provide a brief review of the data used to answer my research question as well as the analysis of said data. My primary methods for data collection included documents, interviews, and observations. My document data included photographs from a previous study, school and district booklets and informational text for families (both paper and online documents), and school newsletters, calendars, and event notifications. Interviews were conducted with individuals from four different groups: administrators, staff, faculty, and parents at two schools. Observations of various school and classroom events took place at both study schools.

To analyze these data I used my codebook, which coincided with the organization of my conceptual framework. The explanation of the development of my codebook is in Chapter 3 along with a description of the structure of the themes, codes, and sub-codes. Following coding, a comparative analysis of the data according to the components of the framework within and between the two case study schools was conducted. Both direct interpretation and categorical aggregation of instances (Stake, 1995) were utilized to identify the most salient themes, which will be highlighted within this chapter. Additionally, the interview data were analyzed from the four group perspectives as mentioned above: administrators, faculty, staff, and parents. This group analysis was

conducted within each of the case study schools and with the four groups combined between the two case study schools.

Organization of the Chapter

This is a comparative case study looking at the relational beliefs and practices that promote family engagement at two elementary schools with majority populations of Latino ELL students. Being that there is not a significant amount of information in the literature focused on the relational aspects of family engagement (Moorman Kim, Coutts, Holmes, Sheridan, Ransom, Sjuts, & Rispoli, 2012), a comprehensive framework for the family engagement of Latino ELL students is not currently in existence. Since constant comparative analysis was employed during this study, my conceptual framework was shaped for relevance as the study took form, as described in Chapter 3, and is used here to help guide the discussion of the findings. Since the data support the inclusion of most of the components with the framework, the majority of them will be described to some degree. However, only the most salient themes will be discussed in detail.

The findings for each case study school will be described separately, including an examination of the group designation findings from interviews conducted within each school. Components that were prominent within at least one of the data sources will also be discussed. Then, a comparison of the findings between the two schools will be discussed, from a whole school standpoint from all data sources and based on rankings within each data type.

Findings for Northwest K-8

Northwest K-8 is one of 16 schools in Metropolis School District serving students from ECE through 8th grade. The school has been in the same location since 1931.

Northwest K-8's mission states that culture, language, and tradition are of high value. Students are treated with great respect and high expectations are placed upon them (Nocon, et al, 2010). Being a magnet dual language school, Northwest K-8 provides services for all students under the Spanish/English immersion model with the goal of all students becoming bi-literate in both English and Spanish. In 2011-2012, the year of the study, enrollment for the school was 441 students. Of those, 94.8% qualified for free/reduced lunch and 59.6% were classified as ELA students. Latino students made up the largest ethnicity group with 421 students identified as Hispanic. Both the Principal and Assistant Principal are Latina and approximately 70% of the staff are bi-lingual, speaking both English and Spanish. Interestingly, the majority of school employees that were interviewed stated that it was their groups' responsibility to be most knowledgeable about family engagement practices. This implies that all take an equal share of the responsibility for making the family/school relationships at Northwest successful.

Themes Revealed from Combined Data Sources

Interviews, observations and document data from Northwest K-8, as illustrated in Chapter 3, were collected and analyzed for each of the codes and sub-codes found within the major themes of *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship*, as described in the codebook (Appendix A).

Table 4.1 shows the occurrence of each component at Northwest K-8 with all of the data sources (document, interview, and observation) combined. Specific components are highlighted when the data is viewed from this holistic perspective. For analysis of this portion, and all, of the data, if a code was broken further into sub-codes (i.e. *establishing trust* or *shared roles and responsibilities*), then the sub-codes numbers were

analyzed (i.e. shared expectations or decision making power). If a code stood alone, with no sub-codes, then the codes themselves were considered in the analysis (i.e. *communicating effectively* or *sharing learning experiences*). In addition to the tallies that

Table 4.1. Theme Tallies from All Data Sources Combined (NW)

Tallies	Level			
NW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
48			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
27			1.12	Shared expectations
36			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
33			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
90		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
80			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
50			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
25			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
16		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
60			2.11	Academic partnership
14			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
16			2.13	Decision-making power
41			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
22		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
32		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

were taken, direct interpretation (Stake, 1995) of the data were also considered in the analysis and will be included and discussed as appropriate within each highlighted theme.

Communicating effectively. As a reminder from Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, *communicating effectively* is defined as school personnel utilizing successful

and valuable means for communicating with families. These communications, whether written or verbal, should include reciprocity, timeliness, frequency, personalization, consideration of differences in families, multiple means of communications, positive and nonjudgmental language, and availability on the part of school personnel. Specifically in consideration of the Latino population, communications that avoid the use of jargon, are in the families' home language, and include direct contact are also descriptors of this component of the framework.

Communicating effectively was near the top of the frequency list with document (Table 4.2) and observation data (Table 4.3) and was either the top component (administrators and school staff) or at least one of the top three components (faculty and parents) of each group designation within the interview data (Table 4.4) for Northwest K-8 as well. Clearly, this component is both acknowledged and considered valuable by all members of the community. The importance of *effective communication* is visible to anyone who comes to the school, as families, staff and visitors alike are immediately greeted upon entry by a large display board at the front door with a list of upcoming events and activities, both school and district-wide, written in both Spanish and English.

Forms of communication. Communication at Northwest K-8 is utilized in many forms as illustrated by the observations of class and school information boards and newsletters, as well as planned family meetings and impromptu check-ins, which tend to be reciprocal in nature, meaning either party can equally initiate and/or contribute to the exchange. Continual and timely communication in these formats is evident at Northwest K-8, as described by one staff member, "Whenever we have events coming up, we send reminder notices…often. When you come in, there's a board. I do those every month

and the informational posters every month for the parents. This is what's going on for this month kind of all the major things that won't cause it to drag the floor cause then that's too much information." Northwest K-8 sponsors a family information

Table 4.2. Theme Tallies from Document Data (NW)

Tallies	Level			
NW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
1			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
3			1.12	Shared expectations
3			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
3			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
5		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
4			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
3			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
1			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
0		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
6			2.11	Academic partnership
0			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
1			2.13	Decision-making power
3			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
1		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
2		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

meeting once a month, called Parent Café. During these meetings, family members receive relevant information and openly discuss issues regarding the school community, as well as the larger community. Parent Café will be described more throughout this chapter as it specifically relates to the various components. In relation to effective

communication, one parent commented, "I come as often as I can to Parent Café because I get good information about the school and other topic and can ask questions if I need."

Table 4.3. Theme Tallies from Observation Data (NW)

Tallies	Level			
NW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
19			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
4			1.12	Shared expectations
8			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
5			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
11		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
20			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
3			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
3			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
4		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
5			2.11	Academic partnership
2			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
4			2.13	Decision-making power
5			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
2		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
7		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

Individualized communications. Communication practices occur in all-school formats as described above but also through personal and reciprocal communications. An administrator stated, "When I see parents in the hallway, I always try to acknowledge or say good morning or good afternoon. Just to let them know that they have been

acknowledged and that they are noticed in our building and give them an opportunity to connect with me for a brief chat or anything." This practice was observed during an

Table 4.4. Theme Tallies from Interview Data Based on Group Designation (NW)

Group Designation Tallies				Level			
A	B	C	D	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
				1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
					1.10		*Establishing Trust*
6	6	10	6			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
7	3	5	5			1.12	Shared expectations
7	3	10	5			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
4	12	4	5			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
25	*21*	*14*	*14*		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
					1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
17	19	18	2			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
12	8	14	10			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
4	7	8	2			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
2	*5*	*3*	*2*		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
				2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
					2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
7	15	13	14			2.11	Academic partnership
2	2	3	5			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
4	4	1	2			2.13	Decision-making power
6	9	4	14			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
8	*4*	*6*	*1*		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
7	*8*	*4*	*4*		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

observation of student drop off time in the morning. An administrator was standing in the hallway greeting students and their families as they entered. She engaged in a conversation with what appeared to be a concerned parent. The administrator put her arm

around the parent's shoulder and stated, "I want to hear more." She then led the parent into her office right on the spot and sat with her in the office, not in a chair across the desk but in the seat right next to her. A staff member stated this philosophy best when she noted, "It's all about creating relationships here so when we do have a meeting it's not… 'I told you and you didn't do this with your child.' It's more of a dialogue where we figure things out together and we really try to let parents do just that – talk during it and talk about what's working and what's not and have an equal say." Family members concur regarding this feeling of reciprocity as well, where ideas are equally exchanged between both parties. While I interviewed a parent for this study, a teacher approached to check-in about an on-going issue with the parent's daughter. After the mother and teacher brainstormed some possible next steps, the teacher left. The parent then turned back to me and remarked, "So there was a perfect example, just like that, teachers communicate and listen to parents and help come up with real solutions."

Philosophy of communication. However, it is not merely the multiple means of communication that are employed or the personal nature of the communication that create the effectiveness of the communication at Northwest K-8. The overall philosophy of families as equal partners and justifiable recipients of information supports the commonly observed practices. One administrator at Northwest K-8 stated, "It's just that we know that these parents deserve information and the more information you give them, the more knowledgeable they are. And you can only do as much as you know, right? I like to empower the parents to let them know that they are *supposed* to get that information." Information *from* families is regularly sought out as well. One parent noted to me, "They always do surveys within the school asking about times parents have to meet or what

information needs we have or things we want to know, etcetera." While discussing the principal of the school, another parent remarked, "She always asks the parents for ideas to make the school better." When talking about teachers, families appear to have a similar opinion. One parent described her interactions with her child's teacher, "She is understanding, she listens, she is very easy to talk to and asks our opinions."

With this philosophy of effective communication in mind, the teachers and staff at Northwest K-8 acknowledge and honor the culture and language of the majority Latino population within the school in all communications. By having a largely bi-lingual staff, including teachers, administrators, secretaries, and support staff, families can converse with teachers or staff regarding a plethora of topics. For written communications that are sent out school-wide, an administrator, who is fully fluent in both English and Spanish commented, "Well, they (the school secretaries) create it and then I look to make sure it's correct. You know that the vocabulary and spelling is correct. We don't want to send out anything that isn't correct for our Spanish speakers. So yeah, we make a big deal about that here." During all-school, or even classroom, meetings, Spanish is spoken if the majority of the attendees are Spanish-speakers. Translators are available in either case. A support staff member described this process simply, "When we do parent meetings, we honor the language and we'll do parent meetings in Spanish and parent meetings in English so everyone knows what's going on."

Culturally responsive schooling. As stated in Chapter 1, for this study, *culturally responsive schooling* is defined as schools that respect, recognize and thoughtfully utilize the varying cultural contexts of members of the school community. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, being a cultural broker, acknowledging

culture and diversity as an asset, using language that best supports connections with families, and advocating for best practices in relation to ELLs.

Culturally responsive schooling was at the top of the frequency list with observation data (Table 4.3) and near the top with document data (Table 4.2). This was also either the top component (faculty) or at least the second most mentioned component (administrators and staff) of three group designations within the interview data (Table 4.4) for Northwest K-8 as well. Clearly, this component is both acknowledged and considered valuable by all employed members of the community. Using an asset lens, faculty members often alluded to the concept of culturally responsive schooling, as defined in this study, in reference to best practices for their students who are ELLs. The importance of *culturally responsive schooling* is immediately visible to anyone who comes to the school, as banners are hanging in the hallways with figures portraying the Mexican heritage of the student population and books of all genres can be found in the library and classrooms available both in English and Spanish. Additionally, all-school events are planned as often as possible where students and their families are able to hear from and interact with Latina/o role models in the community, from athletes to politicians to individuals in the business community.

Possessing an asset lens. There is a general sense from the faculty and staff at Northwest K-8 that the culture of the students, and by extension the families, is not only an integral component of their students' lives but also a valuable asset in the learning process and the success of the overall school community. One of the teachers interviewed commented, "I think for the Latin people here, they feel like their culture is valued. Their language is valued. So they feel like they're included. They can use their

first language and it's OK because there are people here to listen." A mother, who served as the parent liaison to the District, concurred when she stated in a separate interview, "Culture is valued here. It is part of everything that's embedded here."

In Northwest K-8 classrooms, culture is used on a regular basis to enhance student learning. One faculty member provided an example of this practice. "We were talking about communities and problems and solutions in those communities. The kids brought in lots of examples that we could use from their lives and so we used a lot of those problems as examples and we come up with possible solutions. It's using info that is relevant to them and from their own lives." Families are encouraged to provide relevant information to aid in this process as well. "The kids and families know that we really want to know and use information about their lives. We ask them all the time. (She laughs.) They are probably sick of it. But we care and they know that" (teacher).

All components of families' cultures are acknowledged, from the language used in communications to the inclusion of activities that represent the lives of the students and their families. One staff member at Northwest relayed a common story that she has come across in her time there, "I think the main thing is that so many parents have come back to me (after their children have left) and said, 'Ooo, at that new school, no one speaks Spanish. Can you talk to someone over there?' Or 'Can you help me with this?' They get so frustrated because they don't feel as comfortable because they don't think that anyone there understands who they are." Where all-school activities are concerned, simple actions, such as showing the Spanish version of a Scooby Doo episode for students in the morning after an early drop-off for breakfast, elicit smiles from both children and their parents. Then, there are larger undertakings, such as the facilitation of

a school-sponsored mariachi program, that families find equally appealing at Northwest. El Mariachi Juvenil was established in 2004 to honor the musical culture of the students and their families. In keeping with the same mode of utilizing family assets, El Mariachi Juvenil is co-directed by a parent.

Cultural brokerage for families. Being knowledgeable about the school population and their specific needs, school administrators and staff often engage in support services specifically focused on cultural brokerage. Navigation of the systems in this country can be confusing for a native English speaker, much less a second language learner. Advocating for the families, one school secretary was observed on a phone call requesting that new paperwork be sent over for the school. She explained that the majority population of the school was Spanish-speaking and the documentation needed to be re-sent in Spanish for these families. Through Parent Cafés and more individualized efforts, Northwest has provided information on and assistance with immigration issues, sometimes at the request of parents. The principal noted, "We have some families who half of the family has been deported to try to get support for the other half that's here. So yeah, we have a school staff member specifically assigned to help families with immigration issues."

Language to support connections. Language is constantly a consideration for the faculty and staff at Northwest in terms of supporting connections with families. As stated previously in the *communicating effectively* section, written and verbal communications generally are delivered in two languages. As I observed in the main hallway and office area during pick-up time at the end of the day, a message was announced over the intercom system. The school secretary first made the announcement in Spanish and then

repeated it the second time in English. The principal reported about 70% of the staff as being bilingual and confirmed the importance of common language to strengthen the connections at the school. "If anyone has an issue, I want them to be able to say what they need to, on their terms. I would rather them not have to struggle with the English part." The consideration of other's language was also evident in the parent community as three separate attendees at a Parent Café meeting offered to translate the Spanish-spoken discussions for me.

Best practices for ELLs. The faculty and staff at Northwest K-8 are highly knowledgeable in regard to best practices for their ELL students. "Our theory is the idea of transfer. Knowing what you know in your native language and then learning the other language and using that transfer information" (school administrator). Learning is encouraged first in students' native language and then is supplemented with English instruction. Being a dual language school supports the inclusion and knowledge of these best practices but teachers, especially, regularly stressed how integral these practices were. "I'm saying to families, 'read to your kids in Spanish and keep up that language.' We don't want to take away their native language literacy. That's just too important."

Academic partnership. As a reminder from Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, *academic partnership* is defined as both families and the school being recognized as equal partners in the academic development of students. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, meetings to discuss goals for students, reciprocal communication regarding academic progress, and regular conversations to maintain alignment between the home and school contexts. *Academic partnership* was at the top of the frequency list with document data (Table 4.2) and was either the top component (parents) or at least one

of the top three components (faculty and staff) of three group designations within the interview data (Table 4.4) for Northwest K-8. This component fell lower on the frequency list in both the observation data (Table 4.3) and the administrator group designation (Table 4.4); however, there was still evidence of this component found within both of these data sets.

The importance of families as *academic partners* is evident before even stepping foot inside the school. As one explores the district website, the word 'partnership' is utilized often in relation to the connection between home and school and several suggestions are offered to keep that connection healthy. Inside the walls of Northwest K-8, this is evident in regular conferences or impromptu parent meetings regarding student performance and the utilization of parents' individual skills throughout the school, for example in the classroom helping with math groups, as reported by one mother.

Philosophy of partnership. Like so many components of family engagement that are found to be present at Northwest K-8, the concept of parents as *academic partners* is engrained into the belief system of so many members. While discussing the role of families within the school, one support staff member commented, "Everything that we are doing in the school, they know that they are partners within our community as well." This sentiment was confirmed by one of the teachers, when she stated, "I think that they (families) are as much an integral piece of the school as well as the teachers and the staff, if not more, so we need their support in order to continue to help our kids the best we can." This pervasive attitude does not go unnoticed by families. One afternoon, immediately before pick-up time, a message came over the loud speaker announcing "DEAR time." This familiar educational acronym stands for "drop everything and read" and is a practice

used quite often at Northwest K-8. The twelve family members that were present in the main hallway during this time participated in the practice as well, as each one grabbed something to read that was close by and sat to engage with the text. Even a mother with a small toddler opened a children's book and began reading to her daughter. During an interview, one mother, who has alumni and current students, stated, "Families stay here for a long time and that says something. I think because the school makes us feel like a partner in this."

Communications around academics. Communications, as discussed earlier in this chapter, are a high priority for the members of the Northwest K-8 community. At times, those communications are focused specifically around academic content and behaviors, whether school-wide or individually focused. These conversations are reciprocal in nature and equally involve family members, as evidenced by this parent comment, "The teachers work **with** the parents and include them in the solutions around schoolwork. We have a say here."

Some Parent Café meetings agendas include discussions of academic issues. "At those meetings, the principal talks to the families about academically where we are and what we're trying to achieve at school and how they are a part of it," as reported by a staff member. Two parents confirmed this by adding, "The principal explains the school ratings so we know where the kids are performing and what we can do to help," and "They tell us how the kids are doing as a whole and what we should be focusing on."

Scheduled parent-teacher conferences and ad hoc meetings are a common practice as well at Northwest K-8. Parents have a real sense of partnership here, as one shared this comment, "In conferences, we always talk about our kids and how they're doing and

how we can help out. They really listen to what is important to us and give good ideas to help our kids learn." Outside of these scheduled times, if an opportunity for communication about a student's progress exists, the chance is quickly snatched up. I experienced this, as a teacher interrupted one of my family interviews to check in with the mother about a current student issue. Teachers and staff members also were observed speaking with several family members at drop off and pick up times about academic, as well as social, topics. One teacher supported this observation, "Parents are often here in the morning to drop their kids off. If we have a question about something, we'll talk to the parents immediately so we can work on it together." Another faculty member explained her desires for effective communication around academic issues, "We can make such a great impact if the parents know what we're doing and where we're going with their students and know the next steps for them. It's one thing if we know them. It's a whole different thing if the parents know that and they know that we are working together for their children."

Family education to support academic partnership. Education opportunities focused on academics abound at Northwest K-8, for families in addition to the students. In classrooms, content-focused workshops are held, sometimes at the request of the parents. One administrator explained, "The teachers give like a mini-class where they give ideas on how to work with their kids on what is happening in class." In an interview, an ECE teacher reported how her class para-educator recently sat with family members, some parents and grandparents, during the morning class to guide them through some literacy activities that were a recent focus for students in class.

During an observed Parent Café meeting, the state standardized tests were a topic of conversation. Administrators, teachers and staff members were present to answer parents' questions regarding both logistics as well as content. Written communications about these exams were also available for families to view. In preparation for the testing, bulletin boards and flyers both listed information about the exams and helpful tips that parents could provide for students. Since Northwest K-8 views the education of students in a holistic manner, some family education events center around other domains of development rather than just the cognitive. One staff member relayed, "As part of some of our Parent Cafés, we talk to parents about the kinds of social, emotional and behavior programs we have here at school, so that they can be a part of those programs. Sometimes it reinforces how they're dealing with behaviors at home."

Acknowledging individual family needs. In this study, *acknowledging individual family needs* is defined as school personnel recognizing and respecting the varying situations that their families bring to the relationship. This recognition can be displayed when families are given opportunities to express their specific needs to school personnel. *Acknowledging individual family needs* ranked in the top three most frequently mentioned components by both administrators and faculty members and the fourth most by family members in the group designations (Table 4.4). Although it did not rank as high in the document (Table 4.2) or observation data (Table 4.3), the evidence that was present overall was significant enough to be highlighted here. As a daily example of this practice in action, during an observation of a drop off time, at least sixteen different family members entered the main office in a span of about twenty minutes. One administrative assistant calmly and pleasantly assisted each one, in their

native language of either Spanish or English. No one was turned away without assistance. When discussing the faculty and staff of Northwest K-8 in this regard, one parent confirmed, "Anyone can be called on here to help. It is a real team effort and it's always about what each of the kids and each of the families need."

Creating space for families to express needs. Family input is sought out both at a school-wide level in the way of surveys and questionnaires and individually through conversations. A parent reported that "they do parent surveys within the school asking about times that we have to meet or what information needs we have or just anything that we need that they may not be providing." At Parent Café meetings, families are asked in person in a casual format about their interests. An administrator explained simply, "We regularly ask parents what they are interested in learning about or gaining information about and then we try to provide it for them." In classrooms, the teachers follow the same practice. "We know exactly what the needs are of all the families, what is it they need. Cause we talk with them about it all the time. We say, 'use us as a resource – we are here to support you.'"

Parents and other family members are encouraged to request information in relation to individual academic needs as well as non-school related needs. One faculty member relayed, "If parents want to know something about…whatever, whether it's math, science whatever… they just ask and we have little classes." In many Parent Café meetings, the focus is often on things that parents have requested. One parent described this process. "With the Parent Cafés, we get to hear about the school and other important topics that we have asked about, like immigration or immunization." Together a staff member's and a parent's words describe the philosophy of Northwest in regard to this

component. "I think we listen to parents, we ask them what they need or want in terms of different things in their lives." "Families have very different lives and (the school staff) know that so they ask and find out what each of us needs to make it."

Actions taken in recognition of needs. With the community in mind, some actions at Northwest K-8 in response to individual needs are geared to the entire school. As numerous individuals request similar types of support or information or one individual requests something that could benefit the larger group, school staff combine forces as needed to provide information or services more effectively and efficiently. Several examples of this in action follow. The principal explained some of the information sessions in relation to this. "We're gonna do something with Medicaid for those parents who don't have or who are struggling through the system. We're gonna have somebody come out for that. We had somebody with financial services – how do I manage a checkbook? How do I get financial literacy when my background is this or my husband controls everything? These are things that many parents have asked for, things that are meaningful to them." In response to another request by a few families at the school, the Assistant Principal worked to connect with the local recreation center to help transition half-day kindergartners from one location to another to help support some working parents. A faculty member explained one final example of an individual request turning into a school-wide focus. "One parent told me how she can't come to parent ed meetings because of her smaller ones. I'd like to ultimately write a grant to get some daycare put into our parent education events as well. This would bring it up another level to get more families here."

Some situations at the school begin and end with the involvement of only one family but are handled with the same type of care and concern. A parent opened up and described her families' unique situation to me. "I'm recently unemployed and I know they care about that here and try to support us. Because of the unemployment, things come up and they are all always here for the students in times like that. Like if my daughter needs to leave class to talk to the counselor about things, the teachers are OK with that. They really listen to what the kids, and we, need and help however they can."

Welcoming attitude/environment. As stated in Chapter 1, in this study, a *welcoming attitude/environment* is defined as containing characteristics of individuals within the school and the physical setting of the school that elicit a feeling of belonging and connection in all who enter. Examples may include, but are not limited to, personal greetings upon entry, welcome signs, children's work on display, a welcoming committee, and connecting in regard to families' personal lives.

Although not found at the top of any group designation tally list (Table 4.4) or with document data (Table 4.2), this vital component was near the top of the observation list (Table 4.3) and was found frequently enough in all of the data sources combined to be of note here. Not all members of the community outwardly acknowledge the existence of a *welcoming attitude/environment* at Northwest K-8, but it was clearly evident from the moment one stepped up to the front doors, as a friendly voice greets all through the intercom to gain entry into the school. Welcome signs, in both Spanish and English greet everyone as they ascend the first set of stairs. Also, it was not uncommon to find family members seated in the comfortable chairs and couches directly below this sign, chatting and smiling with both one another and to all who enter as they wait for a meeting to begin

or for school to let out. Hallway walls between the classrooms are adorned with student work that is displayed prominently with colorful backgrounds and verbiage explaining the work, written in both English and Spanish. The main office is equally as welcoming with open doors to all adjoining offices and secretaries who greet all who enter with a smile. One staff member aptly described the goal at Northwest K-8, "We try to make the school and the office a welcoming place so they (families and visitors) can come in and get whatever they need. We want people to feel comfortable here, like they belong."

Welcoming new families. As new or prospective families explore the school and the district, they might first discover the welcoming information on the Metropolis School District website. Upon entry into the school, the same welcoming signs and salutations as mentioned before greet each visitor, along with information brochures about the school and activities placed on a table outside the main office. However, special attention is provided to new families from the office staff, including the administration. The Assistant Principal reported, "We greet the parents when they come you know to fill out the applications. We try to talk with them from the very beginning to start the relationship." A school secretary confirmed this by stating, "When new families come in, we make the effort to make their first visit nice. We want them to leave with the feeling that we want them to return. We want them to know that." In fact, prospective parents receive top-notch treatment, as described here by a staff member, "We don't hold open houses per se… (the principal) tends to want to do small groups, two or three parents, however many she can fit in her office, do just these small intimate groups and take them all on very detailed tours of the school."

Continuing the welcoming philosophy. Although new and prospective families receive special considerations, families of current students feel this same sense of welcome. One parent beautifully and simply remarked, "I work a lot so I can't come to everything but when I'm here, it feels nice…like home." This is evident as signs adorn some classroom entrances inviting parents inside or calendars are hanging with numerous time slots for families to sign up to volunteer in the classroom or chat with the teacher. At drop off or pick up time, it is not uncommon to see both the Principal and the Assistant Principal roaming the hallways smiling at, chatting with, and hugging students, parents, grandparents, siblings, and anyone else accompanying students. This is clearly an intentional act, as the Principal reported, "I make an effort to talk with parents when I see them, 'Good Morning! Welcome. How are you doing today?'."

This welcoming attitude is a key component of the school, according to many community members of Northwest K-8. A staff member relayed a simple but integral practice at the school in relation to being welcoming, "Just greeting families when they come in is important. We try to do that for everyone." A teacher described how this practice has impacted her classroom, "I think the families know that they are welcome here and so many regularly come in to do whatever with the kids, reading, math, cooking, or whatever they want to contribute. There have been so many families that come in!" Another staff member described the philosophy in a more general sense, "I think that we give the families the ability to feel that they can come to the school and always feel comfortable here." A teacher added support to the existence of this concept at the school, "We try to let the families know that they are just as much a part of this school as all of

us." Confirmed here by a parent, this ongoing welcoming philosophy is clearly present, "The staff here are all friendly and invite us in and really want to talk with us."

Families also readily display the welcoming attitude, as family members were witnessed smiling and warmly greeting any who entered the doors of the school. Additionally, several parents, whom I had not met, offered to have me sit at their table during a Parent Café meeting I attended for observation purposes. A parent aptly described the welcoming philosophy held by all members of Northwest K-8's community, "The school culture is welcoming to all, positive and one of learning."

Nurturing children. As described in Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, *nurturing children* is defined as school personnel exhibiting compassion and care for students. Examples can include, but are not limited to, showing concern about situations in a student's life outside of school, greeting students with smiles and hugs, and taking the time to get to know students as individuals. The *nurturing children* component ranked near the middle of the pack for all data sources (Table 4.2; Table 4.3; Table 4.4) except the parent designation group (Table 4.4), where it ranked as one of the most important aspects of the family/school relationship at Northwest K-8. Simply stated, one parent said, "This is a wonderfully nurturing place for my children to be."

Care at a school-wide level. Although it would seem a natural component to address students on an individual level, Northwest K-8 has found ways to show their nurturance and compassion for all students through school sponsored events, some for students and others for families. One administrator described one such program focused towards the family audience, "We had a gang awareness meeting where we talked about what to look for when you see changes in kiddos." Still other school events of this nature

involve students and families together. A school support staff member described one of these programs, "We provided a bullying program for students and families cause it's a real issue these days and now we have parents letting us know when they think their child is being bullied so steps can be taken." In reference to actions such as these, one parent reflected, "It's hard to be a parent these days but it's the most important thing. The school makes it easier. They really care about the kids."

School faculty and staff have much knowledge about their students and can therefore provide less conventional assistance for students as well. This is illustrated in the partnerships set up with surrounding organizations. As described earlier in the *acknowledging individual family needs* section, the school helps transition a few children to the local recreation center from the half-day kindergarten program and hopes to increase this service in the future. Through intentional practices of seeking out personal information about students' lives, a student interest in learning more about local business was discovered. A staff member described how this was accommodated, "We now have partnerships outside of the school. La Prina Foods is one partner and they work with our sixth graders around business concepts." In another scenario, a natural interest of young children can be sports, with this in mind a connection with a local sports conglomerate was formed. One of the school secretaries explained the connection a bit more, "Lots of our kids love sports so we partnered up with Metropolis Sports to get tickets to games sometimes or have professional players come talk to the kids." In essence, the school staff expresses care and nurturance through the actions available to all students of Northwest K-8.

General care for students individually. As expected, even though there is care shown at a school-wide level, the individual care is more prevalent as administrators, teachers and staff members show great interest in each of the individual students, their lives, and their families. One teacher expressed, "The kids and parents know that we really want to know information about their lives. We care about them. All of them." Families notice these actions, as one parent noted, "My kids are happy here and I know that the staff really cares about my kids. I can see it every day."

Again, there appears to be a philosophy, this time one of care, surrounding those who work at Northwest K-8. One parent described part of this philosophy, "They get to know kids here and help them achieve their goals. They make sure the kids have the right tools. They really care about each of them." This belief begins in the administrators' offices. The Assistant Principal keenly stated, "I think the most important thing is just letting parents know that you care about their kids." Being mindful of this, as the leader of the school, the Principal remarked, "I think for the most part the families know that I have the best interest of their kids at hand." One parent confirmed the Principal's hopes, "(She) is really into her job about caring for the kids and keeping them safe."

This same mindset is present in staff members. One secretary explained, "We make sure we give a phone call if something happens. You know anything that parents should know." The other secretary described her actions regarding students who are unaccounted for, "I make phone calls to parents when kids aren't here - checking in to see if everything is OK and if their child is fine. Just letting them know that we notice their child isn't here and that we care about them." For the school social worker, the

tasks are sometimes different. One parent described her daughter's recent needs and how the school staff has supported her, "They help with all parts of the kids' growth here. If there are family issues, like ours, of course it's gonna impact the kids. If they are being bullied, same thing. They understand that this is all part of our kids' growth."

Finally, teachers complete this cycle of care at the Northwest K-8. It is common to see teachers stopping to chat and hug a child or give a high five in the hallway as students arrive or leave for the day. One parent aptly noted, "It's about the education of your child here… but all parts of your child." During an observation at pick up time, one teacher approached a parent in the hallway and inquired as to the status of her daughter. The two engaged in a conversation for at least five minutes until it ended with a mutual solution, where the parent stated, "I appreciate that you took the time to help her out with that."

Themes That Stand Out Within at Least One Data Source

The occurrence of a few of the components, not mentioned previously, was significant within at least one, often two, of the data sources, or, more specifically, a group designation within the interview data. Three of those components, *creating community spaces*, *transparency with practices and policies*, and *addressing basic needs*, will be briefly discussed here. Interestingly, all three are emergent themes within this study.

Creating community spaces. As a reminder from Chapter 1, for this study, *creating community spaces* is defined as physical locations or events in the school that are created for and designated as spaces for community members to socialize. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, comfortable seating areas for multiple people to

congregate and school events where school community members have time and space to socialize. For Northwest K-8, both the observation data (Table 4.3) and reports from faculty members (Table 4.4) provided evidence of the existence of this component. Upon entering the front doors, a comfortable and substantial seating area is front and center and frequently filled with chatting parents and other family members. Regular events are held at the school, Parent Cafés, classroom meetings, Mariachi concerts, family education nights, etcetera, to allow for a sense of community and inclusion for all members. From reports of teaching staff, the creation of these community spaces is very intentional. "We also do some things where they're (the parents) all together so they get to know each other, because they're going to be going through the school all together." In addition to the opportunities for families to connect with one another, at Northwest there are also plenty of chances for families to connect with faculty and staff as well. One teacher described the effects of an after-school event attended by students, families, and school staff. "Our last (family education night) was a PE-focused one, like a… I forget what we called it. We called it something so much more fun than that… Stay Fit or something. Oh my gosh, seeing parents jumping rope with their kids, right next to us too, doing yoga, it was a lot of fun and then it brings them in and we get to connect with them and I think it just makes them feel that much more comfortable."

Transparency with practices and policies. In this study, *transparency with practices and policies* is defined as behaviors from school personnel that create an overall sense of visibility with procedures to other members of the community, particularly family members. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, school personnel being available to answer questions about school practices and policies and classrooms, and the

school in general, being accessible and open to families for visits or questions. At Northwest, staff members (Table 4.4) were most likely to highlight the existence of this component. For the office staff, providing information regularly and being open to family questions appeared to be the norm as described by one staff member. "Also, parents come into the office all the time and it's an open place for them and we try to make it a welcoming place so they can come into the office and say this is what's going on and ask for help and get answers and people feel comfortable asking for what they need." The support staff at the school has a specialized focus, proactively making sure that families are aware of procedures and policies that impact them. One staff member described how this takes place. "So TCAP, for example, because it's such an integral part to what goes on at the school or at the state level and it's important that parents understand it too, so we have to have people that are pretty organized and understand it. And then we wanted to make sure that there's a presentation for the parents so we put one together for the Parent Café."

Addressing basic needs. For the purposes of this study, *addressing basic needs* is defined as school personnel, or the school in general, providing or helping to obtain resources to support families' physiological or safety needs. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, supplying food or clothing, obtaining donations of school supplies, providing a safe environment, and connecting families with local services to provide shelter or counseling. At Northwest K-8, the staff members (Table 4.4) noted the importance of this component and a few occurrences were found within the observation data (Table 4.3) as well. Although the presence of safety and food seem to be the majority of observations made in connection to this component, school staff members

report assisting families with many more basic needs than just those two. One staff member stated, "I link parents to resources, so as a school social worker there is, like we have clothing programs… in the beginning of the year, we have programs to help with school supplies. So helping the kids get ready or prepared for school, if they don't have those resources. And also, if the lights are gonna be cut off for a family, we help with that… or if the husband or father was deported or is in detention. Or any of these many issues that come up including domestic violence or if they have issues with mental health or issues with whatever. I'm a link for them to all those resources."

Findings for Southwest Elementary

Southwest Elementary is one of 73 elementary schools within Metropolis School District. This neighborhood school serves students from ECE through 5th grade. The mission and vision at Southwest Elementary is to ensure a safe, trusting, and culturally sensitive community to support the education of the whole child so as to develop competitive 21st century learners. Being designated as a Transitional Native Language Instruction (TNLI) school, Southwest Elementary provides native language instruction in Spanish to certain students with supported English content instruction and English language development. Students progress over three or more years to English-only instruction. In 2011-2012, the year of this study, enrollment for the school was 557 students. Of those, 94.3% qualified for free/reduced lunch and 51.7% were classified as ELA students. Latino students made up the largest ethnicity group, with 504 students identified as Hispanic. At Southwest Elementary, the majority of school employees who were interviewed stated that there was equal responsibility of all faculty and staff members to be engaged with and knowledgeable about family engagement practices, depending on the specific situation.

One staff member described this philosophy best, "Everybody here at school has a key role that they do very well and without that part, I cannot function or make my part function, you know, even the parents, we need them and what they bring. So it's kind of part of the collaboration that we do."

Themes Revealed from Combined Data Sources

Interviews, observations and document data from Southwest Elementary, as illustrated in Chapter 3, were collected and analyzed for each of the codes and sub-codes found within the major themes of *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship*, as described in the codebook (Appendix A).

Table 4.5 shows the occurrence of each component at Southwest Elementary with all of the data sources (document, interview, and observation) combined. Again, particular components are highlighted when the data is viewed from this holistic perspective. As a reminder, for analysis of the data, if a code was broken further into sub-codes, then the sub-codes numbers were analyzed. If a code stood alone, with no sub-codes, then the codes themselves were considered in the analysis.

Culturally responsive schooling. Again, as stated in Chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, *culturally responsive schooling* is defined as schools that respect, recognize and thoughtfully utilize the varying cultural contexts of members of the school community. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, being a cultural broker, acknowledging culture and diversity as an asset, using language that best supports connections with families, and advocating for best practices in relation to ELLs. At Southwest Elementary, *culturally responsive schooling* was the highest-ranking component from all of the data sources combined. It was the second highest component in both the document (Table

Table 4.5. Theme Tallies from All Data Sources Combined (SW)

Tallies	Level			
SW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
74			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
30			1.12	Shared expectations
50			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
40			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
82		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
92			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
56			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
44			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
20		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
67			2.11	Academic partnership
19			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
19			2.13	Decision-making power
58			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
25		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
53		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

4.6) and observation data (Table 4.7) and the most mentioned component by both administrators and faculty at Southwest (Table 4.8).

Relationship building begins at Southwest by acknowledging and honoring the cultural aspects of the population of the school community. The principal described the school's philosophy in regard to this, "One important aspect of a school community is recognizing what are the cultures within your building so that everyone feels

acknowledged. And I think that that comes not only from our own awareness of the families that we work with but the families and how they work with each other and how

Table 4.6. Theme Tallies from Document Data (SW)

Tallies	Level			
SW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
1			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
1			1.12	Shared expectations
1			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
3			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
5		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
4			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
1			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
2			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
2		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
2			2.11	Academic partnership
0			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
1			2.13	Decision-making power
3			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
0		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
3		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

they represent themselves and how do we make room for them to do that." This acknowledgement is evident in the hallways of the school as posters depict figures of Mexican heritage and Spanish signs are as prominently placed as their English counterparts and it can be seen in the library, where a Spanish section is amply filled with

reference, fiction, and non-fiction texts. A teacher explained further as she highlighted the connection between relationship and culture, "I think that building relationships here

Table 4.7. Theme Tallies from Observation Data (SW)

Tallies	Level			
SW	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
	1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
		1.10		*Establishing Trust*
25			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
6			1.12	Shared expectations
12			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
4			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
13		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
		1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
19			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
5			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
3			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
3		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
	2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
		2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
11			2.11	Academic partnership
2			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
3			2.13	Decision-making power
9			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
2		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
5		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

because at least from what I know of the Latin culture it's very relational, relationship-based, and so before you can talk to somebody about something new, you gotta kind of build that relationship with 'em first and then they're more willing to listen to what you have to say about literacy or math or whatever it is you want to talk about. But if they don't *know* you, it's not gonna happen."

Table 4.8. Theme Tallies from Interview Data Based on Group Designation (SW)

Group Designation Tallies				Level			
A	B	C	D	1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
				1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
					1.10		*Establishing Trust*
10	17	13	8			1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
6	6	6	5			1.12	Shared expectations
3	16	12	6			1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
4	14	12	3			1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
9	*25*	*19*	*11*		*1.20*		*Communicating Effectively*
					1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
17	23	26	3			1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
10	25	8	7			1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
7	13	17	2			1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
1	*5*	*6*	*3*		*1.40*		*Invitations for Families*
				2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
					2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
9	17	17	11			2.11	Academic partnership
3	5	8	1			2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
7	4	4	0			2.13	Decision-making power
11	19	9	7			2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
4	*12*	*5*	*2*		*2.20*		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
7	*29*	*4*	*5*		*2.30*		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

Possessing an asset lens. This connection is supported through the faculty and staff members' asset perspective regarding students' families. The principal of Southwest Elementary explained the importance of solidarity surrounding this belief, as well as the importance of continuing to spread this positive message, "I am fortunate that many of the teachers in my building have the same values and beliefs that I have about families so I think that having that out there people naturally come to you and say I agree

with you. And then you work with those people who agree with you to then be the voice so you are no longer always the voice." Families notice school members' initiative to acknowledge and utilize the important aspects of students' lives. One parent expressed, "They take time to know about our kids, who they are, and where they are from. Those are all important things here."

Families are provided opportunities to share their skills, talents, and interests at Southwest whenever possible. The annual Dr. Seuss Night, an all-school evening event focused on literacy development and community, is preceded by a volunteer recruitment time, including asking bi-lingual parents to serve as translators at the event for participants. The Spring Celebration occurs every year and school members are encouraged to share their cultural traditions. One staff member described the event, "They have people dancing and all kind of festivities and the families really get into it. So that's something really special that they can do that brings everyone together and they also have dances from different places so it brings about cultural awareness and learning and things that are important to so many of our families here that are from different cultures." During the year of this study, in preparation for this event, the afterschool coordinator explained about a mother's recent involvement, "I have a parent that is really into teaching Mexican dance for the girls who like wear the beautiful dresses and stomp around. So she had told her child's teacher about that and that teacher referred her to me. So now I work closely with that mother preparing the students for that and they'll dance at this Spring Celebration coming up."

Cultural brokerage for families. Helping families navigate the school and larger political systems is important at Southwest Elementary. This is evident by the

employment of a Parent Liaison, who remains on staff to answer and assist with a plethora of family questions and concerns. Here, he described his interactions with parents. "Many parents come to me for assistance with general school problems but some come about much larger issues. They know that I am a good resource here at the school to help them because it's been set up that way." Within the classrooms, teachers help specifically with navigation of the school system. In reference to supplying this type of information, one ECE teacher reported, "I think it's a good way to get them into the US system because, even though we're giving them Spanish-language materials, the culture of the school and what they are expected to do as parents is a little bit different from what I know from most of the countries that they come from and so… but since it's in their language and we are there to answer questions, I think they're more willing and able to kind of go with the flow and then they kind of by 2nd grade they kind of are more comfortable and secure and know it."

On a more personal level, the school secretary, nurse or other support staff are often seen helping family members fill out district and school forms, providing directions to resource locations, and helping to translate and fulfill individual requests from teachers or other school personnel. One secretary explained, "So a lot of times parents will come to me with that application and I try to explain the best I can. You know cause there's a lot…there's a lot in that process to registering. I try to help them out as much as I can so that they understand the process and what's going on." The principal stated the school's philosophy quite simply, "We have to advocate because often times our families don't know how to advocate or who to talk to. So we have to help them know how to advocate

for themselves... We have to know that we are their advocates and they have to sense that."

Language to support connections. "Bienvenido! Welcome!" are the words written across a large sign that greets visitors when they walk through the door towards the main office at Southwest Elementary. Children's school products are prominently displayed on the hallway walls with descriptions in both English and Spanish. Signage directing visitors around the school also has both languages. The entrance to one classroom is adorned with a sign that reads: Celebrating our cultures… we all smile in the same language. This simple message is also written in English as well as Spanish. In all instances, neither language appears more prominent than the other.

With a large Spanish-speaking ELL population at Southwest, it is not uncommon to overhear conversations in the hallways or classrooms in Spanish or to see written communications in Spanish as well as English. With a considerable bilingual staff, translators are available at the drop of a hat. One secretary reported, "You know I help do that a lot. You know translate calls from the parents for teachers and others all the time." This intentional act, as reported by one staff member, supports the connections with families of Southwest. "I think number one we look for staff that are bilingual and I think that's critical. And I think they're really valued." A teacher confirmed this as well and noted the multiple methods used where language supports this connection. "I feel like communication is huge. Being able to talk with parents during conferences and a lot of the notes and notices that get sent home are translated and we let parents know that if there are any questions later, they can be directed to a bilingual secretary that can explain

further if there's any questions. So I think that's kind of cool that we have somebody to be able to provide that."

Best practices for ELLs. As with Northwest K-8, the faculty of Southwest spoke most about best practices in regard to their ELL students. The training of the teaching staff was mentioned often by those interviewed. Two teacher reports here illustrate the professional development at Southwest. "I think that everyone here, every single teacher is ELA trained, and so I think that has a big part of it cause we're all kind of on the same page as far as that." "We also do a lot of just professional development around that and having so many positions here being ELA positions, we have lots of ELA requirements and lots of things like that so lots of professional training that are used to help support teachers in their strategies and things like that to work with ELLs."

A few years prior to the study, the school partnered with a local university to introduce a new program. One teacher described the initiative and its lasting effect at the school. "We also had a program that was called Literacy Squared and so it was basically native language instruction all the way up. We start early…it was basically the premise was English earlier and Spanish longer and I think that had a huge part of our success. We aren't a part anymore but it impacted the way we teach. It was a really good program." Large initiatives, like the Literacy Squared program, to small efforts, like sending home book bags every week with themed books written in Spanish and English, are common practice at Southwest. The leadership also helps faculty to support these efforts. A teacher described this simply, "I think also that our principal is very supportive of English language learners and their families so I think that's a big part too."

Uncovering biases. An action that employees of Southwest specifically engaged in regarding *culturally responsive schooling* was the exploration of their own biases. This practice was led by the principal, as described here, "I think I stress all of those things because I know exactly where I stand on all of my values and beliefs and it trickles down nicely. But I think that some school leaders struggle maybe with what their own values, beliefs and biases are. I have been fortunate that when I got my Masters' and went through a program, I had to address all of these things so I know exactly where I stand. I know what my own struggles are. I know how I have to interact." This was confirmed, as a teacher stated, "The school spends a significant time engaging in PD (professional development) time and just discussion time learning how best to support our diverse population and how we can interact best with families." At the district-level, this topic does not go unacknowledged. In reference to this, a staff member reported, "It's actually interesting because (Metro School District) just had a training last week about cultural awareness and biases and they brought some folks in from NYU. This is something that as a district of course we talk a lot about."

Communicating effectively. Again, for the purposes of this study, *communicating effectively* is defined as school personnel utilizing successful and valuable means for corresponding with families. These communications, whether written or verbal, should include reciprocity, timeliness, frequency, personalization, consideration of differences in families, multiple methodologies, positive and nonjudgmental language, and availability on the part of school personnel. Specifically in consideration of the Latino population, communications that avoid the use of jargon, are in the families' home

language, and include direct contact are also descriptors of this component of the framework.

Communicating effectively was at the top of the frequency list for both document data (Table 4.6) and the parent group designation (Table 4.8) and at least one of the top three components with observation data (Table 4.7) and both staff and faculty groups (Table 4.8). This component is both acknowledged and considered valuable by all members of the community. The significance of *effective communication* is recognizable to anyone who enters the school, as families, staff and visitors alike are immediately greeted upon entry by an entire wall of information about the school, district, and local community. Flyers and notices written in both English and Spanish provide details of upcoming events, local groups and organizations, and numerous resources. In addition, a marquee containing a school calendar is visible to all prior to entry into the main office.

Forms of communication. Both written and verbal communications abound at Southwest Elementary. The main office has information posters and sign-ups displayed about various school events and happenings. A sign on one wall highlights the schools' Teacher Parent Action Committee (TPAC) and provides details as to the next meeting date, time, and place. All-school newsletters are sent out every Thursday from the main office, with follow-up notices as needed. A school secretary described the process, "We collect stuff from the teachers or anything that's going on and we make sure it's copied and that each family receives one... every Thursday. Other than that we just try to put out a lot of notices to the parents to let 'em know what's going on and when things start and we give 'em plenty of head start to let them know what's going on here at the school… so they're not surprised." A parent confirmed that, "the school gives lots of information for

parents about the school and about their children. Information comes out every week." In addition to the all-school communications, classrooms also send out weekly or bi-weekly newsletters, and emails as appropriate. The principal clearly states a further practice in this process, "I think another thing is that everything goes home in Spanish and English…always."

Families are also reminded of school events and informed about student issues verbally. The principal and assistant principal are often in the hallways chatting with families in the morning and afternoon. Teachers are also at the doors greeting families and chatting with them as they exchange responsibilities for the children. "I see them every morning at drop off and at pick up time so we can always chat briefly." Teachers and administrators also make phone calls when appropriate, as it is "still the best way to reach many of our families," as described by a long-time teacher at Southwest. School staff are also regularly conversing with parents, particularly in support situations, as described by one bilingual secretary, "they know me by name, so usually they'll come in and they'll tell me that they need to see this person or this is what's going on with my child. So, where do I start?" Another support staff member described her intentional connections with parents as an enrichment assistant, "Our parents have to sign our kids out each day so we physically could be in contact with parents every day, you know, check in like, 'they had a really good day' or like 'today was a little rough.' I really like that one-on-one communication whenever needed and then they know we really know and care about the kids."

Families are encouraged to express their opinions often in the Southwest community as well and are provided opportunities to do so. A teacher explained one

venue for parents to communicate in a school-wide fashion. "We have lots of parents of second language learners so we host the TPAC meetings with translators so we're accommodating lots of parents' needs and they know what's happening at the school and then they have a chance for their voices to be heard at those meetings. So I think that is a definite advantage at this school." The principal explained the actions taken after a parent suggestion earlier in the year, "So this parent came to me before Christmas break and said my sister went to this Love & Logic workshop, you know can we get that? OK great, let's bring it into TPAC and make a decision." On the agenda of a different observed TPAC meeting, there was a discussion around the possibility of school uniforms. This discussion topic was first broached by several parents and, following the TPAC discussion, was later put to a school-wide vote. Even outside of TPAC, parents know that the communication is reciprocal at Southwest, as expressed by one mother. "I come to every meeting or conference. There is always something happening to find out about the school. And I can always say what I think about it too."

Individualized communications. In addition to school-wide practices around communications, more personal connections also take place at Southwest as needed. During an observation of a classroom drop-off time, the classroom teacher connected with every single family member present, switching back and forth from Spanish to English as needed. This same practice was observed during the after school enrichment program, as members of the staff spoke with individual parents as they picked up students in the evening. For some teachers, the individualized communication is based on student performance, as described by one faculty member, "A lot of us are just in contact a lot with the parents. You know any questions that kids are struggling with, any

concerns they're having. I know a lot of parents and teachers have that connection other than just parent/teacher conferences." One parent confirmed this individualized communication from her child's teacher. "Like with my daughter's teachers, they are always asking how she's doing at home and how I think she's doing."

It is not uncommon for the administration or staff members to have personal connections to families either. As the principal walked past a parent one afternoon, she comfortably said, "Ask TJ what he decided to do at lunch today." The mother immediately asked, "Is he in trouble?" The principal responded, "Well, just ask him." The mother immediately turned to her child and he detailed the account to her. The principal remained there to listen but did not interject as the student narrated. The mother then said, "And whatever happens here at school, you're also grounded for one week." After which, she turned to the principal to thank her and then they changed the topic of discussion. For staff members, the exchanges are generally not behavior related, but equally important. One support staff member described her process of connecting with individual families regarding attendance, "It's really just calling families trying to connect with them and trying to find out what's going on and if they're having some barriers that are making it hard for them to get here and things like that."

Philosophy of communication. The importance of effective communication is widely understood by all Southwest employees, as expressed by this staff member, "Our communication here is key to our success… definitely." Thus, the strong communication present is not accidental but, in fact, very intentional. The principal described the school's overall belief about communication. "You show through your communication with families how you view them as partners. How you interact with your families is the

same way that you should be acting with your children. In terms of understanding, you know, you meet the parents where they are too." This means that all information is made accessible on the families' terms. One teacher confirmed, "There's nothing that's not translated here so that families have full access to everything that way." In preparation for communication with families, sometimes professional development is initiated for the teachers. A teacher explained one such event, "Our instructional literacy specialist, she's very much involved just with giving us support on ways to facilitate conversations with parents around our data and getting it all organized so we can present it to parents in a more appropriate and understandable way." In another example of accessibility of information, a staff member explained how often times information evenings are run multiple times to accommodate the work schedules of the majority of their families. Finally, in response to many families' misunderstandings surrounding registration for Kindergarten and their children's language needs, the ECE and Kindergarten faculty facilitated an information session to explain the system and help parents navigate through the process.

In addition to information being accessible, the school's staff and faculty make themselves quite accessible as well. The principal explained, "I think our teachers work with the families in terms of really constant communication and willingness to make the phone calls, to talk with the families, ask them what they are seeing, set up times, meet with the families, have regular conversations with our families to understand how we can help." Of course, the administrative staff models this practice regularly. In regard to the principal, one secretary explained, "when she can, parents are able to come in and talk to her about anything they wish…about their students… the school…anything that happens

in the school…whatever." For teachers, this accessibility may come at different times. One teacher reported, "I call parents at home. (laughs) I call them… you know it's not a 9 to 5 job. If you want to talk to the families, and I do, you have to call when they can talk and sometimes that is at night." A parent confirmed this feeling of accessibility. "I don't know about other teachers but my daughter's teachers are great. They give you their phone number in case you have a question. You can call them anytime. I haven't had to do that but just knowing, I like that."

Welcoming attitude/environment. Once again, in this study, a *welcoming attitude/environment* is defined as containing characteristics of individuals within the school and the physical setting of the school that elicit a feeling of belonging and connection in all who enter. Examples may include, but are not limited to, personal greetings upon entry, welcome signs, children's work on display, a welcoming committee, and connecting in regard to families' personal lives. This component was at the top of the observation data tally list (Table 4.7) and one of the top three components from both the administration and parent group designations (Table 4.8).

The existence of a *welcoming attitude/environment* at Southwest Elementary was clearly evident from the moment one stepped up to the front doors, as a friendly voice greeted all through the intercom to gain entry into the school. Welcome signs, in both Spanish and English, greet everyone as they make their way through the entry. It was common to observe family members seated in the comfortable chairs and couches in this entryway, talking and smiling with others as they waited for a meeting to begin or for school to let out. Hugs and smiles were doled out to family members as staff and faculty greeted all in the mornings and afternoons. Hallway walls between the classrooms are

adorned with student work that is displayed prominently with colorful backgrounds and verbiage explaining the work, written in both English and Spanish. The main office is equally as welcoming with open doors to all adjoining offices and secretaries who greet all who enter with a smile. The principal explained her philosophy in regard to this component. "I think that if families don't feel welcomed in the front office then everything sort of falls downhill from there."

Welcoming new families. When new or prospective families are interested in the school or the district, they might first discover the welcoming information on the Metropolis School District website. When coming to the school, the same welcoming signs and salutations mentioned earlier greet all who enter, in addition to informational brochures about the school and local area on a table by the seating area in the entryway. From the very first contact, the administrators and school staff want families to find a sense of inclusion at the Southwest. The principal described the message that she hopes they send out, "I have always stressed to my office staff – it's a constant reminder – we are providing a service and we are selling ourselves. So when a parent comes in, we want them to feel welcome, we want them to come back. Because if you go to a restaurant and you don't like how you're treated, you're not going to go back. You'll go elsewhere. Here, you'll go to another school. We want to ensure that every child and their families always feel welcome." A relatively new parent recalled her early experiences at the school, "I met many people here on registration day. There were so many people greeting us and making sure we were good and had what we needed." This welcoming attitude is apparent in all members of Southwest. During an observation, a visitor, who appeared to be a prospective parent, was wandering around clearly looking

lost. A staff member, who was walking past, immediately stopped, greeted the visitor and warmly asked if she could help. She first asked in English and when a response did not come, she asked again in Spanish. The adult answered her and the staff member then escorted the visitor to the next destination.

Faculty members at Southwest do their part to greet new families and make them feel welcome. One parent described her initial exposure to her child's classroom teacher. "Right from the start, the teachers were really nice and they helped me a lot to figure things out here." The teachers make an intentional effort to invite new families into the school and make them feel included. "I do welcome all of them into my life and my world. Why not? They're part of my community." This welcoming attitude does not go unnoticed by families. One parent commented, "Yeah, it feels good here. They are welcoming and wanting to know you." As an outsider, I witnessed this welcoming attitude regularly as staff, faculty, and parents warmly greeted me on a regular basis and invited me to observe in classrooms, at events, and in meetings.

Continuing the welcoming philosophy. The welcoming attitude at Southwest does not fade as the new families transition into returning families. The principal described this common practice at the school, "We are often told that everybody in the school says hi to each other, which is a natural thing. But in other schools, I guess that doesn't always happen. Everyone saying 'Hi how are you?' 'Hi how are you?' 'Good morning' 'Como esta?' So it's more of that sense of within our own community, we're nice to each other. Everybody says hi. A teacher is just not going to walk down a hallway and not say hi to a parent. So I think it's a sense of you know a community as a whole being a community. I think it's an important part. We really want all of our

families to feel welcomed here and a part of the community." This was evident in numerous observations at pick up and drop off times, as several teachers and staff members joined the administrators in the front entry and hallways to greet and converse with numerous children and families. In addition to the verbal check-ins, these greetings often included huge smiles, high fives, and hugs. One staff member described her feelings about engaging families, "All we want is that (families) are comfortable being in the building and families want to be here and do things for their kids and for the school." Families feel this continued environment of welcoming. One parent described her reason for choosing Southwest for her child, "I was asking other parents. They said it was real good over here…welcoming to everyone. They really care about the kids and the families."

In the classrooms, teachers make a concerted effort to reach out to families to create an environment that is always welcoming. "I tell them that this is an open door classroom. Please come in anytime. You know I don't make appointments just come in whenever to ask me questions or to see what is happening in here. I want them here." Faculty also follow up with families to ensure they feel welcomed, "I've asked and gotten really good feedback from parents about that they feel comfortable in here and, you know, they don't feel like they're afraid to talk to me about anything they need to. You know, it's important for them to know that they are all welcome any time." One parent confirmed this attitude is present, "My child's teachers are very nice. They always greet me with a smile and know how to help me. And they are always happy to help."

Even as families move on from Southwest Elementary, they are welcomed with opened arms upon return. For the school's annual Dr. Seuss Night, all are welcomed

with lavish decorations and banners hanging at the entrance. Many alumni students and families return to partake in these festivities and catch up with friends from their former community. As one family entered through the front doors, a teacher at the greeting table leapt up and exclaimed, "Lupe! I'm glad you came! I haven't seen you in ages!" She ran around the table smiling and hugged the mother for an extended time. They chatted for about five minutes before moving on. A bit later, another family started to pass by the table, when a staff member stopped the teenager to ask, "Is that your new brother? Let me see him!" She hugged all of the family members, ogled at the baby for a bit and then talked with the adults in Spanish for about ten minutes. The environment is intentionally welcoming for all and one staff member stated the philosophy quite simply, "We just try to include everyone here."

Academic partnership. Once more, for the purposes of this study, *academic partnership* is defined as both families and the school being recognized as equal partners in the academic development of students. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, meetings to discuss goals for students, reciprocal communication regarding academic progress, and regular conversations to maintain alignment between the home and school contexts. *Academic partnership* was in the top four of the frequency list for faculty members (Table 4.8) and was in the top five with both observation data (Table 4.7) and the administration group designation (Table 4.8). This component fell lower on the frequency list in the staff group designation (Table 4.8); however, there was still considerable evidence of this component found within this data set.

The importance of families as *academic partners* is evident before even stepping foot inside the school. As one explores the district website, the word 'partnership' is

utilized often in relation to the connection between home and school and several suggestions are offered to keep that connection healthy. Inside Southwest Elementary, this is evident in the general philosophy of partnership, the communication in regard to academics, like regular conferences and spur-of-the-moment parent meetings, and parent education to support the academic partnership.

Philosophy of partnership. Before exploring how partnerships are established and maintained at Southwest, one must examine the philosophy towards partnership that is present amongst the faculty and staff. Parents definitely feel this presence as one stated, "Relationships here are about the school and the families working together for the children." This philosophy begins at the top with the administration. The principal relayed, "It's always about the kids here but then… what about their parents? Do they feel welcome and a full partner in the process? I think if you have that mindset, most of this just then comes naturally." Staff members also maintain this attitude, as one support staff member described her role, "With behavior and academics, there's tons of meetings and I attend a lot of those and try to help out and work with the parents and staff as equal partners." The Parent Liaison at the school stated the importance of this philosophy, "The only thing we have with some of these families is trust. We care about the kids and want to work with all of the families and our actions to work together let them know this."

In the classrooms, teachers have the same attitude towards the families as academic partners. "There is no sugar coating it in the classrooms. With the parents, we are always very straight forward with them about what we need them to help us with and it's that same thing where I say to them tell me what I can do to help you so we can have similar expectations and be real partners in this." When family members are willing and

able, teachers also utilize them to work with students in the classroom. "I've had quite a few parents just drop in and hang out and I put 'em to work. You know I tell 'em this is what we're doing, this is our objective for the day, this is how you can help a kid. You know you can sit down and read with a student if you would rather… just sit down and read you know there's our library, you're more than welcome to do that…however they can help." One parent described her experience helping, "I enjoy spending time in the classroom. I feel like I am giving back and doing my part."

Communications around academics. Included in the regular individual check-ins with families, teachers also communicate students' progress, provide ways to support students' learning and elicit pertinent information from parents, as reported by a few teachers at Southwest. One teacher concisely described how she communicates the important academics to her group of families, "It's just really breaking it all down into something that the parents can see and understand and just working through all of that together with the parents, always as partners." This was confirmed by several parents with comments that included, "The teachers keep track of grades and progress of the students and let parents know" and "Parents know how their student is doing and how to help here" and "My daughter's teachers are always asking how she's doing at home and how I think she's doing." The principal noted the time spent by the faculty on family communication, "I think that teachers work with the families in terms of really constant communication and willingness to make the phone calls, to talk with the families, ask them what they are seeing with their child, set up times, meet with the families, have regular conversations with our families to understand how we can help them with

schoolwork." A parent confirmed the integral role this consistent communication plays, "The school keeps parents aware of what kids are learning so we can help too."

At a school-wide level, there are communications regarding academics from staff and administration in reference to parent education and especially in terms of the importance of attendance. A large poster constantly hung outside of the main office area denoting the attendance per month by grade and specific class. The School Counselor also reported calling families on a daily basis when children were absent to "find out if everything was okay or if there was anything that we could help them with to help get their child to school. Sometimes there are barriers that we don't even think about."

Family education to support academic partnership. In the classrooms, teachers are constantly providing family education opportunities. One parent stated it quite simply, "They always give ideas for ways to help with schoolwork." Whether these opportunities are planned small group classes or impromptu sessions, teachers know they provide important connections between the home and school environments. One teacher explained the planned education sessions and how some of those come about, "So we have monthly trainings or classes for parents or monthly meetings depending on what families need and have asked for in relation to their child's learning. It's a time to learn together and to all get on the same page." In relation to a more impromptu occurrence, one parent described her recent experience, "The other day I was at a conference with a teacher and she told me she was gonna focus on the math skills with my daughter and grabbed some toys to show me this is what I can do at home." Another parent reported that her experiences occur on almost a weekly basis, "Oh yeah! I just ask and they give me things to help her with."

School-wide, these events are generally always planned but definitely have the influence of family voice. Often times the TPAC meetings will focus on academic concepts as reported by the school principal. "Generally, the ideas are based on the needs of the families. You know, things they have specifically asked for." The English language classes offered to families at Southwest serve an additional purpose focused specifically on the academic partnership that exists. The after school director explained, "I get a lot of parents coming to me wanting to take the class specifically because they want to be there to help their children, help them with their homework when it comes home in English they cannot help them, just like I can't help the students whose homework is in Spanish. So parents come three nights a week, Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, and they do all year long. We have those ESL classes for them so that's really great." Parents take advantage of these opportunities, as they see the benefits provided. "I just come to every meeting, conference and all that. I always ask what I can do to help and they give me things to practice at home. It all helps my daughter."

Nurturing children. As described earlier, for the purposes of this study, *nurturing children* is defined as school personnel exhibiting compassion and care for students. Examples can include, but are not limited to, showing concern about situations in a student's life outside of school, greeting students with smiles and hugs, and taking the time to get to know students as individuals. The *nurturing children* component ranked as the second-highest ranking component for the administration designation group (Table 4.8), in the top four for the staff group, and the top five for the parent group. Nurturing the children at Southwest almost seems second nature to the employees as

teachers and staff were often seen smiling at, laughing with, or hugging the children upon arrival and departure.

Care at a school-wide level. The attitude that the employees of Southwest Elementary have towards the nurturance of the students is individually focused but practiced at a school-wide level. One staff member simply stated the perceived general belief of all, "We are on this journey of caring for their children together." This is not surprising as the principal explained the expectations that she holds for all of the teachers and staff at the school, "I told the teachers and staff you will treat these children as your own. So when they come into your classroom, if you are gonna treat a child differently than you would treat your own child, then that's not OK." Parents recognize this general attention given towards the care of the students as well. "I like how they teach and take care of all the kids here."

In addition to the school-wide attitude towards caring for children, decisions that impact the whole school have been made in consideration of caring for the students. The principal described the process in deciding to hire a fulltime school counselor, "The needs of the school came through and it came out that it would be a positive thing… it started out as a half time counselor position and we moved her to a full time counselor. And so again the families know not only will we try to meet the academic needs of your child; but, we will try to meet with you on the social/emotional needs. And it's been a great decision." Programs have also been established school-wide to specifically nurture the children. A staff member explained one such program, "We have a special program that is only in our school. It focuses on the social and emotional development of the students… like, self-awareness and it gives the students more strategies on how to cope

with problems and cope with outside/external influences and how to be able to… I guess self-assess and self-monitor their behavior and their own feelings."

General care for students individually. This care and concern for the well being of students is also seen quite often at the individual level and noticed by families. One parent noted about her child's teacher, "She focuses on each student, not as a class but what each student needs. So I like that she *really* knows about my child." The principal feels a sense of pride surrounding the care that the staff of Southwest provides for the families. She recalled a recent conversation with one parent, "You know I have a child who this is his third school and that mom for the first time said somebody actually listened to and cared for her son." When discussing her daughter attending the school, another parent simply stated, "They just understand and care about her."

Administrators, staff and teachers can move seamlessly from one individual to the next. During a drop off time, as a teacher discussed some make-up homework with one student, another slipped under her arm to give a quick good-bye hug to which the teacher reciprocated with the addition of a smile and then returned to the original student. An after school staff member was chatting with a table of students when another arrived late and in an obvious upset state. She immediately moved away from the group of students, put her arm around the child and queried, "Hey, what's wrong?" The two went to sit together at an empty table and talked quietly for several minutes. After the discussion, a heartfelt hug was shared and the student moved over with the rest of the group. The staff member returned to the other table group and picked back up with the conversation. One parents shared her view on why this is normal behavior at Southwest, "Everyone at the school is aware of what each kid needs. They make the kids feel confident. The teachers

make the kids feel comfortable and are patient. They always do what is right for each kid." Another parent added, "Everything gets taken care of in a caring way so there are no more issues."

Acknowledging individual family needs. Once again, *acknowledging individual family needs* is defined as school personnel recognizing and respecting the varying situations that their families bring to the relationship. This recognition can be displayed when families are given opportunities to express their specific needs to school personnel. *Acknowledging individual family needs* ranked in the top three most frequently mentioned components by staff members, the fourth most by administration and in the top five for the parent group designation (Table 4.8). This component was not as present in the document (Table 4.6) or observation data (Table 4.7); however, the evidence that was present overall was significant enough to be mentioned here.

The principal described the general understanding of the employees at Southwest in regard to this family engagement component. "Some parents can't do what other parents can do because some parents are working two jobs. Some parents are single moms and have four kids. So you have to understand where the mom or the dad or the grandma's coming from and then meet them there and then support them from that point and acknowledging how they *are* involved." Families notice this philosophy, as described here by one parent, "I think the school is really involved in what each student and family needs."

Creating space for families to express needs. As will be discussed more in the next section, there are specific staff members at Southwest Elementary whose job responsibilities include assisting families with their individual needs. However, before

steps can be taken to accommodate families, they need to be allowed the opportunity to express those needs. The Parent Liaison position is in place to provide just such an opportunity. "I am there to advocate for individual families and to keep notes and talk to the principal as needed and listen to the families' points of view and what they need or think about our school." The school counselor is also available for families, in addition to students, as explained by the principal, "if a parent needs something instead of only having me to talk to, they can talk to the school counselor as well. If it's counseling they need, they need you know grief counseling, if they need help getting supplies… we have a psychologist and a fulltime counselor." The school counselor described how she assists families in this manner, "I try to support the families and provide real one-on-one interactions to hear what they need so people can walk away really feeling as though they are cared about and heard."

Faculty members also provide ample opportunities for families to voice concerns through the normal parent/teacher conferences and parent education meetings, but also through regular daily check-ins. Teachers were seen often checking in with families to see how things were progressing and to provide the chance to voice new concerns. More opportunity was recently created for parents to connect one on one with faculty as changes were implemented in regard to the parent/teacher conferences. One teacher explained the impetus, "the fact that we are changing hours to be able to accommodate certain schedules and stuff. I think that's really important to our families." The continued interest in individual family situations was evident as well when teachers were observed talking with and asking questions of returning families at Dr. Seuss Night about the current events in their lives.

Actions taken in recognition of needs. Sometimes the actions that have been taken at Southwest in recognition of individual needs actually impact all families, as school-wide practices have actually been shifted. For example, in response to a recently growing need, a new position had been added at the school. "There was not the Professional School Counselor position before I came here. There was the psychologist, who's been here, but that's it. I don't' know if they ever had a social worker or… but she's been around this is her fourth year and there hasn't been anybody else for mental health besides her. And she's been here two days a week. They try to get as many people in the school as possible to support the families." At times, families directly impact the happenings at the school. The principal described some events that took place because of parent opinion, "And then like there's an idea from TPAC. We just had a meeting and some of the families want to do a reading night. They want to do some physical or gym resources activities for the kids… one mom wants to do a computer night. Another mom thought it would be interesting to do a game night. So parents tell us what they want and then me and the teachers sort of say OK who wants to help facilitate this?" As a final example of school-wide practices shifting, Dr. Seuss Night is actually held at two different times, one early at 5:00pm and one at 7:30pm, to accommodate the various schedules of the families and allow more to attend.

On an individual basis, numerous actions are taken to assist family with their individual needs. Sometimes the actions are proactive, as one staff member explained, "The administration also pays attention to those families who need more help and they communicate that to the front office to keep an extra eye out." The after school director described a program that serves a small portion of the school population. "Through our

connection with the Boys and Girls Club, we received a lot of donations, so we were able to adopt a minimum of ten families this year and give them all Christmas presents for all the kids in the family." Other proactive steps taken by the school may seem small but they are quite impactful on the families. "I like the way they let my daughter borrow books cause at other schools I seen where they have to go to the public library to get books and they let her borrow books here. We all want her to learn to read but we don't have enough at home."

Other actions taken at the school have been in reaction to events or because a school employee received information about a family. The school principal described two recent tragedies within the community where immediate actions had to be taken, "We just had a family that their house caught on fire. And two weeks ago, we had a child who was in a car accident and we raised $1800 for the family. That's part of that strong community piece that we have." Less drastic events also garner the attention of school members. One staff member relayed a story she had recently heard, "One teacher told a parent, 'hey, if you're having a hard time cause I know sometimes your kid drives you crazy so if you need a break, let me know.' And the mom said, 'I need a break.' And so she took the two kids for the four-day weekend. So there's an example of what people willing to do here." These actions were evident during an observation. As staff members were made aware of the late arrival of several family members who intended on attending the school event but were held up due to work, the start time was postponed until the final family members arrived. The principal commented, "We know it is difficult for everyone to get here on time after work. It won't hurt to wait a bit."

Addressing basic needs. Again, as a reminder from Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, *addressing basic needs* is defined as school personnel, or the school in general, providing or helping to obtain resources to support families' physiological or safety needs. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, supplying food or clothing, obtaining donations of school supplies, providing a safe environment, and connecting families with local services to provide shelter or counseling.

Being the highest-ranking component according to the staff group designation (Table 4.8) and placing in the middle of the pack with most other data sources, *addressing basic needs* stood out as a component worthy of discussion. Classifying themselves as a community school, it is not surprising that this sub-theme was of significance at Southwest. There are staff members in place to help with just such services, undoubtedly one of the reasons this component ranked so high within that group designation. The after school coordinator, one of these such individuals, described the philosophy at the school. "Really the idea being that we're treating the student as a whole to help with their academic success. You know if a student's hungry, if they're cold, if they didn't sleep at all last night because they don't have a place to sleep, then they're not gonna come in ready to learn and ready to hear what the teacher has to say. Those are kind of all the things that we do." Continually bringing these resources into the physical space of the school can be a mighty task, which needs the support of strong leadership. One staff member described the process of getting approval for just such resources, "You know the leaders really can be the decider and be the one to turn it down but leaders are the exact opposite, they say, 'What? Physicals for our kids? Absolutely!' and 'Free teeth cleaning? Yes!' You know they're like, 'yes, yes, yes! If it's gonna

benefit the kids and that's what they need, yes." You know, that kind of an outlook gets things done."

Safety. Being that the concept of safety was largely discussed by the parent group and is thus clearly an important factor for them, it will be discussed separately here. It is of note that this concept was seen throughout the observation data as well. To obtain admittance to Southwest Elementary, anyone must proceed to the large front entrance that contains several sets of doors; however, only one is accessible for entry. This is via an intercom system linked into the office. All other outdoor access doors remain locked at all times. Parents appreciate this greatly as the following was a regular comment among them, "I like the security offered, like locking all the doors."

Safety does not only pertain to entry into the facility. Safety while children are present is imperative as well. While children are in school, teachers and staff members care for them and acknowledge the importance of student safety. One parent described her interactions with a faculty member around a concern she had in regard to her daughter's safety at school. "About bullying… you know how that's really big now and my daughter is really… well, she's really shy so she doesn't stand up for herself, right? So I'd come and talk to the teachers or other parents. That made me feel better about it." This continues in the after school program, as a staff member explained her impression of the impact of their program. "We do offer an after school program and it is open to all the students, second through fifth. It fills a need for families and they know their kids are safe here." Leaving the facility has a similar process, as administrators and/or staff members are often present in the hallway at pick up times and there are check out systems in place for after school activities. One parent especially appreciated this policy.

"Safety is not an issue here. I feel comfortable because they won't let anyone go if they don't know the person picking up." Thinking about safety for students at all times, a computer safety course was also offered for families and students through the after school program. "We're gonna do a six-week long parent/child computer tech class. So just like the basics of computer but one of those weeks will be like computer safety too like educating parents about the internet and safety for their kids."

Food, clothing, shelter. Families are also supported regularly with assistance in obtaining other basic resources. Although nutritional support is the primary service provided through the school, help with clothing and, sometimes, shelter is also needed by families. One staff member confirmed the assistance provided, "Our guidance counselor and our psychologist, they both help get lots of things for parents… clothes, food, sometimes helping in other ways." Family members also see this occurring in the school and appreciate the efforts. One parent relayed, "I also know that the school has helped families out if they need food or other things. I think that is really good."

During school hours, many children receive breakfast in the morning and, through the after school program, afternoon snack and dinner in the evening. The principal explained the simplicity of the process with the after school program, "Anybody can get fed through that program, so if you're here at 6:00 or rather 5:30, you get a dinner. So you know just those basic needs are being met and the families know that as well." In addition to the hours at school, staff members at Southwest consider the students and their families at other times as well. One staff member described the process prior to a school break, "Like over Christmas break there were families that were not going to receive those (food) services. So OK how many food boxes can we get? How many

organizations can we get to donate? OK we got twenty-five food boxes from there we got another fifteen coming here and so on and so forth." At times, the donations have come from within the community, "Yeah, like let's say somebody needs food baskets. We just put it out there and somebody will find what we need whether somebody finds it through an organization or we just do it ourselves. We certainly know these families are gonna need food."

For assistance with obtaining clothing or, at times, shelter, families can also rely on the school regularly. The School Counselor described the process she employs to assist, "Families know to come here for clothing or whatever and for some of them I think maybe they get sent here from the office or from other people…maybe other families. Also there were a couple of teachers that donated some clothing as well. They know to come here and then when I get a windfall and we just happened to have all these things that we weren't expecting, then I put out messages to the staff and say let me know if you have some people in your classes that need these and I just put together a list that way and then at one point you know we still had extras and so I actually just went by hey I know these people at these locations or these neighborhoods or these housing developments, there were a bunch that needed them so I would see who else lives in that same neighborhood and I would just send home letters saying do you want some of this stuff, let me know." The school's Parent Liaison also takes responsibility in regard to obtaining basic needs for families. "Our main goal is to get families what they need… I mean most everything from getting them into shelter, food, anything."

Other resources. In addition to the basic needs listed previously, Southwest also puts forth effort to support families even further with student assistance. One staff

member explained, “At the beginning of the year, we get lots of resources. We get school supplies, backpacks, and new clothes like jackets, so lots of families utilize those resources.” An after school staff member recalled some instances where other products were supplied, “For a few instances, we were able to provide hygiene products for a few of our students – deodorant, soap, toothpaste…things they needed that they didn’t have.” The school nurse even provides, seemingly insignificant but valuable, resource information to families to get these basic needs met, as reported by one staff member, “She helps with the little things like she says ‘I can’t believe the parents didn’t know they can take their glasses to Wal-Mart to get ‘em fixed for free.’ So she found that out and know she lets them know.”

Community connections to assist with school efforts. Assisting with the acquisition of resources to address families’ basic needs is at times a large undertaking, so the school takes advantage of local assets and their community connections in the area. The after school director, one of the individuals specifically assigned to help families in this area, described the network of resources that are utilized to support the families at the school. “And then there’s the wrap-around services… it’s just knowing all the different services that are here in our communities, like surrounding community all the way through Western Metropolis. You know so if families come to us and say ‘we’re hungry,’ ‘we need shelter,’ ‘we need help with our energy bill,’ like that kind of thing, then we know the different non-profits that are local and that are in the community and we can refer the parents there or connect them.” The school counselor described several other connections that have been made in the past to support families, “There are several organizations, which have worked with the school in the past, like Operation School Bell,

Clothes for Kids, Sam Sandos Foundation, and Zara Project. They've all helped us get those supplies that we need for our families."

These community connections are imperative for the school to continue to support the large number of families that they do. The after school program's connection to the Boys & Girls Club ensures numerous local connections in this regard. "Since we are connected with the Boys and Girls Club, we have such a huge support system. Like there's a coalition of local partners who come and give their updates and it's basically like, 'hey we've got a bunch of jackets to give away, is anyone interested in those?' or 'I found a great partnership with the local food bank, you know they want more people so let's use that!' And just all the connections with Boys & Girls Club… I could write an email and say, 'Cherie broke her glasses, her parents can't afford it, anyone know anyone right now giving out free glasses?' And I'll get like a bunch of emails back. It goes to show that it takes more than one person or organization to contribute to the success of students."

Themes That Stand Out Within at Least One Data Source

The occurrence of a few of the components, not mentioned previously, was significant within at least one, or two, of the data sources, or, more specifically, a group designation within the interview data and often supported further by the other data sources. Three of those components, *creating community spaces*, *transparency with practices and policies*, and *multiple avenues for engagement*, will be briefly discussed here. Of particular note, two of these are emergent themes within the study.

Creating community spaces. Again, from Chapter 1, for this study, *creating community spaces* is defined as physical locations or events in the school that are created

for and designated as spaces for community members to socialize. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, comfortable seating areas for multiple people to congregate and school events where school community members have time and space to socialize. At Southwest Elementary, both the observation data (Table 4.7) and reports from staff members (Table 4.8) provided confirmation of this component's existence. Before even entering the doors of the school, the ample green area in front of the building invites families to congregate, and quite often they were observed doing just that. Upon entry, the set of couches and armchairs arranged in a circular pattern were regularly occupied by parents and young siblings before pick up and after drop off. Multiple events are held at Southwest regularly to allow for congregating of community members from small groups (i.e. free adult Zumba classes, science fair for kids and families) to whole school gatherings (i.e. Dr. Seuss Night, family math night, Spring Celebration), many of which are regularly attended by both school employees and family members. Southwest involves the parents in the creation of many of the events as well, as described by one staff member, "I know the school itself does a lot of fun things like the movie night, like the selling food after school. And a lot of those events, there are parents that are like participating and helping put that all together."

Transparency with practices and policies. Again, for this study, *transparency with practices and policies* is defined as behaviors from school personnel that create an overall sense of visibility with procedures to other members of the community, particularly family members. Examples of this include, but are not limited to, school personnel being available to answer questions about school practices and policies and classrooms, and the school in general, being accessible and open to families for visits or

questions. The importance of maintaining an atmosphere of transparency and openness is clearly evident with the staff and faculty (Table 4.8) of Southwest Elementary, as both of these groups highlighted this component. One secretary described this belief perfectly, when she stated, "I think parents just always appreciate that openness that they will be able to talk to either the principal or the vice-principal or the teacher or someone about what is going on in the school." Another secretary described how she views her role, "It's really just you know face to face I try to make it just as personable as possible and as personal as possible. And let them know that I'm accessible…always." This policy exists from the administration all the way to the individual classrooms. One staff member reported, "We have a very outgoing assistant principal and principal. They really have that open door policy with everyone so they're very approachable." Faculty members confirmed this sentiment within their practices as well. A teacher recalled, "I tell them that this is an open door classroom. Please come in anytime. You know I don't make appointments just come in to ask me questions or to see what is happening in here."

Multiple avenues for engagement. As a reminder from Chapter 1, for the purposes of this study, *multiple avenues for engagement* is defined as the school recognizing the varying ways that families can participate as members of the school community and providing numerous opportunities for said participation. Faculty members (Table 4.8) were the group to mention this component most frequently. Teachers often mentioned the various manners in which family members engaged with the school. In relation to one parent, a teacher explained how she participated in her own ways, "She participates with after school stuff, she helps in the classroom, she has a little one too with her, you know, so she comes in and out but she does what she can and she's

awesome." Another teacher focused on the need for a flexible understanding of what parent participation can look like, "You know, they don't always know when they can come in, so they can sign in whenever and we are flexible. We want them here so if it is last minute that is generally fine."

Comparing the Findings from the Two Case Study Schools

Although these two schools professed differing philosophies regarding family engagement (Nocon et al, 2010), the findings from this study revealed some stark similarities in their approaches, both of which seemed to serve the populations of the schools and the schools themselves quite well. This section will provide a comparison and related discussion first of the shared components at both case study schools and then the one component present at a single school.

Similar Salient Themes Revealed at Both Case Study Schools

Several components highlighted as integral to family engagement were present at both case study schools as evident in various data sources and types as described previously. This section will discuss these similar components and compare their presence at each school. Information from Tables 4.1 and 4.5 have been sorted by the highest-ranking components at both schools and listed in Table 4.9 for comparison purposes.

The highest-ranking themes. There were two components that stood out in the data for both case study schools. *Communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling* ranked as either the highest or second highest-ranking component at both Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary. In fact, when combined from the two schools, both components were present in the data an equal number of times. In addition, through

analysis, the themes of *establishing* and *maintaining the relationship* appeared to blend and become less important as these two components, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*, emerged as highly interconnected with the other components and thus more significant. Thus, the conceptual framework was adapted (Figure 1.6) as discussed in Chapter 1 and again in Chapter 5.

Communicating effectively. As previously shown in the data, *communicating effectively* ranked fairly high in all data types at both case study schools. Actions at both

Table 4.9. Highest to Lowest Ranking Theme Tallies from All Data Sources Combined for Both Case Study Schools

Study School Tallies		
NW	**SW**	**Highest to Lowest Ranking at Both Schools**
90	82	Communicating effectively
80	92	Culturally responsive schooling
60	67	Academic partnership
48	74	Welcoming attitude/environment
50	56	Acknowledging individual family needs
41	58	Nurturing children (emergent)
36	50	Creating community spaces (emergent)
32	53	Addressing basic needs (emergent)
33	40	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
25	44	Multiple avenues for engagement
27	30	Shared expectations
22	25	Sharing learning experiences
16	20	Family invitations
16	19	Decision-making power
14	19	Utilizing funds of knowledge

schools are very intentional in nature and are based on a similar philosophy of all families' "right to know" and providing a sense of empowerment to family members. As

discussed earlier, both schools regularly relay information about school events, important topics related to students or families, and news of possible interest to individual families. The forms of communication at the schools are similar as well. Both utilize both written and verbal communication in the forms of flyers, information boards, weekly notices, one-on-one conversations and announcements. Most notably, both Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary regularly provide many opportunities for families to voice their ideas, questions, concerns, or complaints in numerous formats and venues.

Culturally responsive schooling. *Culturally responsive schooling* also made an impressive showing within all of the data sources at both case study schools. Since Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary both have large ELL populations, culturally responsive decisions are viewed as second nature at the schools. Administration, staff, and faculty at both schools view their families through an asset lens and purposefully seek out culturally appropriate ways to interact. Generally speaking, families are afforded the opportunity to converse with school staff in their native language, whether English or Spanish, as both schools have a considerable amount of bi-lingual employees. When needed, staff members at both schools help families navigate the various systems and become cultural brokers in a sense. Lastly, best practices for ELLs were regularly utilized at the two schools when considering the students and their families. Only at Southwest was the concept of bias brought forth. At this school, the administration and other employees were cognizant of the power of uncovering their own biases in relation to their interactions with others.

Other similar themes. There were seven other similarly ranked themes between both Southwest Elementary and Northwest K-8 and their cumulative rankings have set

these components apart from the others. Four of those themes, *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, *acknowledging individual family needs*, and *nurturing children*, were considered to be more significant than the others based on the frequency of appearances in the data (Table 4.9). However, all seven components will be discussed here.

Academic partnership. This component was also highly valued by both schools, as it was ranked at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary in third and fourth, respectively (Table 4.9). The philosophy of partnership that existed at both schools was evident throughout all data sources as discussed earlier. Through this philosophy, employees of the school see family members as reciprocal collaborators and equal contributors in the education of students. Both case study schools pay special attention to the communications they employ to ensure the success of the endeavors of the partnership. Regular, personal connections are made with families as needed to support student learning; and, when appropriate, classroom- or school-wide communications are utilized to do the same. Finally, both Southwest and Northwest schools implement individual, small group, and all-school family education events as needed to further sustain the academic partnerships that exist at their schools. Although faculty or staff members instigate the creation of many of these events, a significant number of educational opportunities are requested by family members at the school.

Welcoming attitude/environment. This component of the framework was definitely valued by both schools as it ranked number three at Southwest and fifth and Northwest (Table 4.9). This component ranked high in the observation data at both schools and fairly high in the interview data for both. The *welcoming*

attitude/environment component is easy to observe at both case study schools as visitors to the schools are greeted by friendly faces and clean, colorful entryways and hallways adorned with greeting signs and children's artwork. Upon entering either school office, new and returning families are received by a warm hello and a huge smile from any one of the secretaries. Outside of the classrooms, students' class work is prominently displayed and viewers are often invited to engage with the text or visual display. Families are welcomed similarly into the classrooms and afterschool activities, as all are encouraged to participate however they can.

Acknowledging individual family needs. Both schools saw the importance of *acknowledging individual family needs*, as at Northwest it ranked fourth and Southwest it ranked sixth (Table 4.9). The appearance of this component was most noticeable throughout the interview data for both of the case study schools. Community members acknowledged the importance of both creating spaces for families to express their specific needs but also the actions taken in response to those needs. Parents and school employees alike noticed the recognition and response to families' various needs at both case study schools.

Nurturing children. The *nurturing children* component is the final one highlighted as a major theme for both case study schools. At Southwest, it ranked fifth and at Northwest, sixth (Table 4.9). This, again, was a component that was found throughout all data sources but was most significant within the interview data. Administrators, faculty, and staff at both of the case study schools were reported as showing concern for students, individually and as a whole. Students were often greeted with hugs or high fives and always a huge smile by staff and faculty alike. The

administrators of both schools knew specific details about student's lives and showed a deep concern for their wellbeing. Families, especially, reported and appreciated a strong sense of nurturing from the school employees at both Southwest K-8 and Northwest Elementary.

Creating community spaces. Although this was not listed as one of the more salient components at either case study school on its own, it ranked seventh and eighth at Northwest and Southwest respectively (Table 4.9), *creating community spaces* is still worthy of discussion, as it ranked seventh with both case study school combined. This component was easily observed at the two schools, as numerous gathering areas could be found where families were invited to congregate. Events at both Southwest and Northwest schools, from all-school gatherings to small class meetings, offered times for families and staff to chat and get to know one another. Community members also reported instances of this component through accounts of regular socialization opportunities at their school.

Addressing basic needs. Another component that was present in the data for both case study schools was *addressing basic needs*. For Southwest, it was listed as the final salient theme. But, because it was listed lower for Northwest, it is being discussed here based on its cumulative ranking (Table 4.9). This was another component that was more likely to be observed or reported through interviews at both of the schools. Due to the high numbers of free/reduced lunch student populations at the case study schools, it is not surprising that both of the schools view the support that they offer families in terms of basic needs as essential. Because Southwest is a self-described 'community school,' it is also not surprising that they viewed these supports as even more vital to a successful

relationship with families. The mere safety of students within locked and well-monitored schools satisfies one basic need for many parents. Food, clothing, assistance with shelter, and connections to numerous local resources are supplemental services that families notice, utilize, and appreciate at the case study schools.

Transparency with practices and policies. Although the lowest ranking cumulative component, *transparency with practices and policies* was listed eighth at Northwest and ninth at Southwest (Table 4.9). This component was most evident in the interview data as community members reported the openness of both administration and faculty in regard to school happenings at both schools. Parents reported the ease with which they can access school personnel and information at their schools and the proactive behaviors of administration, staff and faculty members in regard to relaying pertinent information as well.

Conclusion. Nine themes were listed as integral to the establishment and maintenance of the family-school relationships at the two case study schools. Two of those themes, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*, ranked highest with both schools and were interwoven into many of the other identified components. Even though these schools present as seemingly disparate in many ways, the beliefs and practices that they exhibit in regard to family engagement overlap in many ways. Findings from both schools show the ultimate importance of the previously mentioned highest-ranking themes. Although the other components vary in the level of importance at each school according to the findings from this study, viewed as a whole, the components each offer an integral piece of the puzzle that seems to work for each organization.

Salient Theme Revealed at Only One Case Study School

Although several of the other themes were present at both case study schools, only one other component was highlighted due to the frequency of occurrences within the data sources. While not as significant at Northwest, *multiple avenues for engagement* was present in the data for Southwest Elementary (Table 4.9) and therefore was briefly discussed as one of the less significant components in the success of their family engagement. The teachers discussed the importance of this component as they described the various ways some of their parents engaged with the school as well as the various definitions of engagement and thus how it presents. This was also visible at the school as multiple methods for engagement were observed in the form of meetings, homework help, fundraising, participating in family education nights, after-school activity groups, and multiple iterations of school-wide events. *Multiple avenues for engagement* were also visible at Northwest but the school personnel did not mention this component as often. For Southwest Elementary, it appears that continued recognition of this component is stressed among the faculty and staff. In an effort to be culturally responsive at a school with a majority of White staff and faculty, it seems reasonable that this component might be more explicit at Southwest than Northwest.

Conclusion

A research collaborative between Metropolis School District and Western University looked at identifying practices of schools that successfully serve large numbers of ELLs. Among eight identified schools, two, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary, were chosen for this extension study. The two school sites were selected based on the following factors: both serve a large number of Latino students, the

organizations hold different theoretical perspectives on parent engagement; and both serve an ECE population at their institutions, an area of specialization and continued interest for the researcher. Despite the fact that Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary are described as differing in their family engagement practices, both schools were viewed as utilizing similar beliefs and practices in regard to the engagement of families. These behaviors were considered as important contributors to the continued success of their relationships with families as evidenced through the data and discussed further in Chapter 5. Two components stood out as essential, especially given the population of the students at the two schools, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. Several other components were highlighted as important to the establishment and maintenance of family relationships, including *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, *acknowledging individual family needs*, *nurturing children*, *creating community spaces*, *addressing basic needs*, and *transparency with practices and policies*. Comparisons of the two schools show similar behaviors and beliefs regarding the relationships with family members.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This comparative case study was conducted with the intent to understand the necessary relational components, or the ways that individuals are connected, that promote family engagement in school environments with populations of primarily Latino students and a majority of English language learners (ELLs). The following research question was formed to specifically explore this phenomenon:

> What relational beliefs and practices that strengthen the engagement of families are present in elementary schools with primarily Latino and ELL student populations that have demonstrated unusual success?

Despite the fact that the two case study schools, Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary, were initially described as differing in their family engagement practices (H. Nocon, personal communication, June 7, 2011), both schools tended to view similar practices as important to the continued success of their relationships with families as evidenced through the data. Within the findings, two components stood out as essential, especially given the population of the students at the two schools, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. These findings were consistent throughout all data sources and types and helped to explain why they ranked as the most salient themes overall. Several other components were highlighted as important to the establishment and maintenance of family/school relationships, including *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, *acknowledging individual family needs*, *nurturing children*, *creating community spaces*, *addressing basic needs*, and

transparency with practices and policies. Comparisons of the two schools show similar behaviors and beliefs regarding their relationships with family members. Descriptions of the findings in relation to these specific components can be found in Chapter 4.

As previously outlined, family engagement in children's school settings greatly enhances the numerous outcomes for students (Albright & Weissberg, 2010; Burns, 1993; Domina, 2005; Dorfman & Fisher, 2002; Epstein, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Herman & Yeh, 1983; Houtenville & Conway, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007; Jeynes, 2007; Marschall, 2006; Tolan & Woo, 2010). This study emerged first from a personal interest to investigate the proclaimed differences regarding the approaches to family engagement at the two case study schools, which produce similar student results. Second, the discovery of a lack of a comprehensive framework focused on school beliefs and practices that support the engagement of families, specifically of Latino ELL students, was another influential factor in the implementation of this study. The work of Ferlazzo & Hammond (2009) informed my definition of family engagement for this study's purposes as "schools and (families) leading together with the (families') self-interests in mind in an effort to develop a genuine partnership" (p. 4).

This chapter has three principle sections. In the first section, I use my conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) and my review of the literature to frame my discussion and interpretation of the findings of how these elementary schools created and maintained relationships to engage the families of their students, primarily Latina/o ELL populations. In doing so, I address whether the results from my study were what I expected, what was congruent, or not, in my research compared to the literature and how my research contributes to the existing literature base. I also address what I found most surprising in

the findings and those findings not pursued in this particular study. In the second section, I discuss the implications of this research and make recommendations for its application to educational improvement strategies. In doing so, I argue that the impacts of a positive and effective family-school relationship are more than worthy of the time and effort that is required by school personnel. In the third section, I make suggestions for future research to build upon my study and further contribute to the literature base.

Discussion and Interpretation of Results

The discussion of the results in this section is situated within both my conceptual framework and the review of the literature that guided this study. After reviewing the development of my conceptual framework and its relationship to the literature, I reflect on how some of my findings were similar to those in the literature, those that differed that that found in the literature, what my original contributions are, what findings surprised me and the findings that were not pursued in this study.

Review of Conceptual Framework

To begin this chapter, I review my adapted conceptual framework (Figure 5.1) and how it aligns with my interpretation of the data. I developed the original conceptual framework (Figure 1.1) from my reading of the literature on parent involvement, family/school relationships, and family engagement. In addition, a few components of the framework emerged from the data. Though the literature specifically on the relational aspects of family engagement is sparse, there is much to glean from in terms of research and theory on parent involvement and family/school relationships. Through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (1979), I stated that a relationship between schools and families is inevitable. Then I created a structure of school beliefs and actions that

support the creation and maintenance of this relationship to engage families with the school, especially schools with high populations of Latina/o ELL students. The original and adapted conceptual frameworks illustrate the various components needed to support this relationship between schools and families. However, the adapted framework, as shown here, was altered prior to the interpretation of the findings for three reasons. First, the adapted framework accounts for the dissolution and in essence blending of the prior themes of *establishing the relationship* and *maintaining the relationship* and instead

Figure 5.1. Adapted Conceptual Framework.

shows the significant overarching impact of two components, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. Second, the adapted framework illustrates the overlapping nature of all of the components, including the two major themes. Third, the framework through this graphic accounts for the time component that was mentioned but

not fully considered in the previous framework. The adaptation of the framework helped me to make sense of the findings and to describe the interpretations from a clearer relational perspective.

Findings Similar to Those in the Literature

There are a number of findings from my study that align to those found in the literature. These findings include the overall sense of the importance of relationship between schools and families, the time and effort requirements, and similar ideas about the beliefs and actions that are important in creating and maintaining those relationships, including the concept of establishing trust. Some of the specific components found to be similar include the concepts of *communicating effectively*, *culturally responsive schooling*, *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, and *acknowledging individual family needs*. All of these general findings and specific components will be discussed as each is regarded as a significant outcome in consideration of the overall framework.

Overall sense of importance of relationship. In this study, I found that many of the members of the family-school relationship deemed the relationship aspect as integral to any progress being made toward student or school success. The power of this concept is the reason that it lies as the central most tenet of my framework. Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated that when schools "focus on building respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members, they are effective in creating and sustaining family and community connections with schools" (p. 43). For without the mindset that a positive relationship is a necessity, many believe that a true partnership will not develop (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010; Epstein, 2001; Ferlazzo &

Hammond, 2009; Jeynes, 2007; Swick, 1979). This was an overarching theme at the schools and was evident in those who were interviewed, as administrators, faculty and parents alike relayed the importance of positive relationships between other community members at their case study school in working to create effective collaborations. In fact, many teachers at both schools stated how integral establishing early relationships with families was in creating a partnership that is effective and supportive of the student.

However, they also acknowledged the necessity of nurturing the maintenance of authentic relationships, which strengthens the overall quality. In review, Patrikakou & Weissberg (1999) stated that the quality of family-school relationships has a greater impact on student achievement than merely the number of times that families make contact with the school. Additionally, Pianta and Walsh (1996) identify the quality of the parent-school relationship as a primary contributing factor to reducing children's risk of school failure. To obtain the quality status required, faculty, staff, and administrators at the case study schools took intentional and continual steps to build relationships with their families, both new and returning.

Commitment of time and effort to maintain relationships. The findings indicate that school personnel must possess a dedicated mindset towards creating and maintaining these relationships, as a substantial commitment of time and effort is required. Time is illustrated as a key component in the framework for healthy family-school relationships presented by Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods (2010) as described in Chapter 2, which, through their illustration, appears to be connected to all of the other components. However, there is limited discussion as to *how* time interacts within their framework, other than within "Principle 5: Family-school relationships are developed

over time and need to be maintained throughout a child's development and education" (p. 65). The administrators at both case study schools described the on-going process that they and their personnel engage in with families in an effort to maintain those vital relationships. Faculty and staff at Northwest and Southwest confirmed the substantial time commitments necessary. However, it should be noted, none of the participants complained about the energy needed for the maintenance of these connections. More so, the efforts towards students' families were often spoken of in similar fashion as carrying on connections with a favored member of their own family.

School beliefs and actions important in creating and maintaining relationships with families. Several findings from my research coincided with the literature. Six of those components will be discussed in this next section, including a brief focus on *establishing trust* prior to the discussion of a *welcoming attitude/environment*.

Communicating effectively. "Communication is the primary method by which human beings empower one another, develop intimacy, and create interpersonal relationships (Swick, as cited in Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010, p. 70). Much of the literature on family engagement acknowledges effective communication as integral, whether focused solely on the Latino ELL population or not (Araujo, 2009; Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009; Christensen & Sheridan, 2001; Clarke, Sheridan & Woods, 2010; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Olivos, 2009; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Zarate, 2007). As one of the most salient findings in my study, *communicating effectively* surfaced as a vital component to the success of both establishing and maintaining relationships with families. This is not surprising as communication was interrelated

with many of the other components of the framework. The evidence clearly shows that communication is a high priority for both Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary. One of the administrators highlighted its fundamental importance in her statement, "if there's no communication to begin with, we already have a problem."

The manner in which the case study schools communicate with families matches the expectations found in the literature. School personnel were repeatedly reported as listening carefully and being nonjudgmental (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010), having consistent and personalized communications with families about student progress (Christenson, Palan & Scullin, 2009; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999), and being conscious and considerate of families' native language and possible language barriers (Olivos, 2009; Zarate, 2007). Evidence from this study confirms that the use of multiple methods of communication that are timely, frequent, personalized, considerate of differences in families, use positive, jargon-free, and nonjudgmental language, and are in the families' home language support the creation and maintenance of relationships between schools and families, especially in schools with large populations of Latino ELL students.

The philosophy that both schools maintain in regard to communication is what I found to be most significant. Not only do school personnel at Southwest and Northwest allow for reciprocity in their communication with families (Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010) but, in understanding its importance, they also intentionally ensure their families have regular and understandable access to information, as this is viewed at the schools as each family's "right." In addition, as found in the literature, administrators, staff and faculty at both schools showed evidence of making themselves available to family

members on a consistent basis (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), including the direct contact that Latino families appreciate (Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999). However, again here, school personnel at Northwest and Southwest at times appeared to go above and beyond by providing personal phone numbers, talking with parents in the evenings or on weekends as needed according to families' schedules, and meeting with families multiple times until situations were resolved.

Clarke, Sheridan, & Woods (2010) noted that effective communication practices allow both families and the school to recognize and acknowledge the goals and needs of the other party, in addition to relaying information. This was found to be true at Northwest and Southwest, especially in terms of the schools discovering the families' needs and goals. Although Christenson and Sheridan (2001) found that educators tend to do poorly at providing certain information such as specifics regarding how families can help children learn at home, available community resources, school-led workshops or classes and opportunities where parents can actively be involved as decision makers, I did not find this to be the case at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary. The data provided specific examples of how personnel at these two schools were exceptional at disseminating these particular types of information, especially in relation to specific needs or requests of families.

Culturally responsive schooling. *Culturally responsive schooling* is the "behavioral expressions of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity" in the learning environment (Gay, 2010, p. 31). As the other most salient finding in the study, the component, *culturally responsive schooling,* was especially integral at both case study school sites. I believe this is due in part to the

majority Latino student, and thus family, populations at the two schools. Floyd (1998) stated, "If educational institutions are serious about improving parental and family involvement, then they must change their approaches to them…. School personnel must make it their business to learn about the ethnic groups they teach, and find out what customs and values they have" (p. 134). Evidence from my study shows that the two case study schools *have* made it their business to learn about their individual families and their customs and values and they have integrated the families' culture into the fabric of the schools in authentic and respectful ways. This coincides with Henderson and Mapp's (2002) findings that state that schools successful at engaging families from diverse backgrounds "recognize, respect, and address cultural and class differences" (p. 48).

One of the most apparent ways that both schools exhibited their cultural awareness was in their asset perspective on the diversity of their families, which was viewed as an asset to both the students and the school. Chamberlain (2005) noted the importance of school's possessing an asset lens as they express their awareness of differences. Maintaining this perspective is vital to building the family-school relationship as parents at both schools acknowledged that personnel at their children's schools were not only aware of the differences in students' cultures but also respectfully included families' cultural values and beliefs into the school environment (Commins & Miramontes, 2005; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Valdes, 1996).

Both schools participated in behaviors that exhibited their understanding of culturally responsive schooling. Terriquez (2013) promoted the use of cultural brokers for school families as an expression of cultural responsiveness. Northwest and Southwest, as described in Chapter 4, engaged in numerous actions to either provide cultural

brokerage to families or connect them to other necessary resources to support families' navigation of various systems. Zarate (2007) suggested that the utilization of families' home language in all communications shows that schools are culturally aware and responsive. Both case study schools regularly communicated with families in Spanish and English, whether that communication was written or verbal. Families' native language, Spanish, was seen as equivalent to English in the school setting.

Understanding the varying contexts that impact the households of students is critical in understanding both teaching and learning, as well as relating to those who are important in the child's life (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). Neuman (1995) contends that successful organizations are those that recognize these contextual factors and thoughtfully utilize them. School personnel, specifically faculty at both schools, regularly referenced best practice in regard to the ELLs in the school. Quite often, teachers recounted stories of altering the learning environment to accommodate these students. This coincides with Brown's (2007) contention that schools that show a willingness to transform the current curriculum and school environment to one that addresses all of the students' and families' needs are exhibiting cultural responsiveness. Not only would teachers at the case study schools alter classroom situations to fit the students' needs but they would also regularly utilize information relevant to students' lives to enhance their school experience, another best practice exhibiting cultural responsiveness (Tharpe, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000).

Exploring school personnel's own biases and how those perceptions may impact their relationships with families is another action in which culturally responsive schools can engage (Ferguson, 2008; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Voltz, 1994). At Southwest

Elementary, this was regular practice for school personnel. Examining their own biases was instilled as integral from the administration and discussed regularly as reported by staff and faculty. This aspect was not as prevalent at Northwest and I speculate that this may be due to the fact that many of the personnel at Northwest were Latina/o, including the administrators. Exploring their biases in relation to the student and family culture may not be identified as a priority since a large portion of the staff can personally relate to the families from a cultural standpoint. At Southwest, although there were some Latina/o faculty and staff, the majority of personnel, including the administrators, were White. When interviewed, the principal at Southwest spoke often about the need for the staff to continually explore their biases to best support the students and families of the school. Her personal journey in her Master's Program with this process led the charge at Southwest to have specific professional development days and staff conversations at meetings in relation to their own biases and how they may be impacting their family and student relationships.

At times, exploring biases also means understanding the differences in the ways that culture can impact families' involvement maybe through definitions of engagement or in the logistical ways that families are able to interact. Cooper and Christie (2005), Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, and George (2004) and Lopez (2001) all discussed the importance of making this distinction in reference to culturally responsive behavior. Instead of utilizing traditional models of engagement, both schools engaged with families in ways that were considerate of families' cultures, schedules and expectations. Culture was considered in the types of engagement opportunities that were available, such as the mariachi group at Northwest or the English language classes at Southwest, as well as

multiple opportunities to attend a single event, as in the case of Southwest and their Dr. Seuss Night. Due to multiple schedules, the school made an organizational decision to hold the same event at two different times to encourage greater family attendance.

Academic partnership. This component also ranked fairly high with both schools, thus cementing the importance of viewing and utilizing families as academic partners to maintain an effective family-school relationship. This relates directly to Henderson and Mapp's (2002) findings where they noted that those institutions that "embrace a philosophy of partnership" are more likely to be effective at engaging families (p. 51). There is a philosophy of partnership that is pervasive amongst the school personnel at both Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary. Families are seen as full academic partners at the schools and are treated as such. Lucas, Henze & Donato (as cited by Commins & Miramontes, 2005) noted that schools experiencing success with language minority students encouraged their parents to become engaged academic partners. Although a causal link has not been established here, both of these schools have shown success with their ELL students and evidence from this study shows that both schools view families as integral partners in the academic endeavors of the school.

As previously noted, communication plays a role in several components throughout the framework, including this one. At times, communications are focused specifically around academic content and behaviors, whether school-wide or on an individual basis. These conversations are consistently reciprocal in nature and equally involve family members. Hornby (2011) stated that parents and families generally *want* to be involved more in academic contributions for their children. Personnel at Southwest and Northwest make this possible through the constant communications regarding

academics and the opportunities to engage in academically focused school events. Furthermore, Henderson and Mapp (2002) noted that families' desires to be engaged, and subsequent actions towards academic engagement, are enhanced when school staff are caring and trusting and view families as "partners in the educational development of children" (p. 45). Family members at both schools acknowledged that they were consistently informed of and encouraged to be involved in the academics of their children.

Mapp (2002) noted that families notice when the school recognizes them as equal partners. This was the case at both Northwest and Southwest as parents continually noted their role in the academic development of their children and the school's explicit perspective of them as partners. This perspective was evident in the school personnel's consistent availability to interact and willingness to educate families as needed to empower them to become even stronger contributing partners. Clearly, the beliefs that both of the case study schools have towards families as academic partners and the actions they exhibit to support that partnership augment their family-school relationships.

Establishing trust. Although the tallies for this code were not calculated, several of the sub-codes ranked fairly high, making this component worthy of a brief discussion here. *Welcoming attitude/environment* will be discussed next and two other sub-codes, *creating community spaces* and *transparency with policies and practices* will be discussed in a later section. As stated previously, both parents and professionals identify trust as a vital component of effective family–school relationships (Dunst, Johanson, Rounds, Trivette, & Hamby, 1992). This is true at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary as well. In fact while discussing the previous and current hardships of some of the families at the school, one staff member aptly stated, "The only thing we have with

some of these families is trust." He highlighted the lack of trust that many of their families have had, both with schools and just in their lives in general. His comments, like those of several others, alluded to the monumental importance of this component within any relationship, but especially the family-school relationship.

Adams and Christenson (2000) contend that trust between families and school is implicit for effective collaboration; and, Mapp (2002) found that the parents in her study emphasized trust as an important influence on their school engagement. Because trust is difficult to define, observe or gauge (Adams & Christenson, 2000), I broke the concept, in relation to the establishment of family-school relationships, into multiple factors. These components, as evidenced at both case study schools, define the importance of *establishing trust* in creating effective family-school partnerships.

Welcoming attitude/environment. Many in the field agree that the sense of welcome families feel from the school is a primary factor in further involvement from those families (Ferguson, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Clooson, 2005; Mapp, 2002). Members of both case study schools also agreed with this contention as the component, *welcoming attitude/environment*, was ranked fairly high at Southwest and Northwest. Personnel at the schools are all very intentional in their interactions with both new and returning families. Administrators, staff, and faculty members recounted thoughtful behaviors in which they engage to purposefully welcome families into the schools and the classrooms.

Mapp (2002) notes that attitude and also the physical environment contribute to a sense of welcome, such as colorful walls with children's work displayed and clean, inviting spaces. As already stated, the attitudes at the case study schools can be

considered contributing factors. However, the environments at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary definitely play an equal role. As evidenced, both schools regularly had children's work prominently and attractively displayed, areas were set up to greet visitors at events, and bright signs welcomed all into classrooms and other areas of the schools. Adams and Christenson (1998) see these personal greetings to families in the form of signs as welcoming gestures that build trust. This was evident in parent responses at the schools as many noted the sense of welcome and belonging they felt upon first coming to the school and, for those returning families, still do. Ferguson (2008) stated that school-family partnerships that are characterized by a sense of welcome, possess beliefs and practices that in turn foster the relationship between the educators and the families. Interview data from this study showed this to be true as well, as all members of the school communities acknowledged in some way the importance of a *welcoming attitude/environment*. Included as an element of establishing trust, a *welcoming attitude/environment,* as evidenced in this study, is a necessary component to build the trust needed for the establishment and eventual maintenance of the family-school relationship.

Acknowledging individual family needs. Henderson and Mapp (2002) stated that schools aspiring to engage families must "recognize, respect and address families' needs" (p. 7). School personnel at both Southwest Elementary and Northwest K-8 do all three of these things on a regular basis. They recognize the needs of individual families by first providing spaces for them to voice their needs. In addition to administrators and teachers, there are staff members and parent representatives at both schools available for families to talk with. The titles at the schools vary and, in both cases, the school personnel have

other responsibilities as well, but one of those responsibilities is to be a sounding board for the families of students. These actions coincide with the literature as integral to family engagement as expressed by Cooper and Christie (2005), whose study focused on the phenomenon of parent empowerment but highlighted the integral first step of schools allowing family members to voice their needs and then acknowledging and validating the families. This is especially true in regard to the Latino population as suggested by Olivos (2009), whose writing focused on collaboration with Latino families. He suggested that educators create the opportunities for families to provide input about their needs, especially regularly to the classroom teacher as s/he is generally viewed as the person that Latino families trust the most.

School personnel at both case study schools also take the time to get to know the families of their students. Swick (1979) determined that a lack of this action could result in unnecessary issues. Through their actions, the staff and faculty at the schools are showing respect for the students and their families and supporting the overall family-school relationship.

Finally, the needs of individual families are addressed at the schools both on individual and school-wide bases. Individual parents or other family members are assisted or supported in numerous ways as the needs arise through the aforementioned staff or ad hoc situations, as in the case of the family who lost their home to fire at Southwest. Interestingly, the schools both tend to instill school-wide initiatives based on the requests or needs of one or a few families, as appropriate. At Northwest, the request of a few families for information on immigration inspired a parent informational event for all. Terriquez (2013) and Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) found these types of

specific needs to be commonplace for Latino families. Therefore, providing help navigating school systems or larger social structures could be beneficial for many of the families at Northwest, even those who do not explicitly request it. Flexible scheduling for school-family interactions, as suggested in the literature (Weiss, Mayer, Kreider, Vaughan, Dearing, Hencke & Pinto, 2003), is also common practice at both schools, even though they are aware that not all families require this option. Creating spaces to both *acknowledge individual family needs* and then meaningfully address those needs clearly supports the family-school relationship.

Conclusions. Six components were highlighted in this section: *communicating effectively*, *culturally responsive schooling*, *academic partnership*, *establishing trust*, *welcoming environment/attitude*, and *acknowledging individual family needs*. The findings from this study showed these components to be consistent with the literature, as evidence from both case study schools highlighted the importance of the inclusion of each of them in the establishment and maintenance of effective family-school relationships.

Findings Different from Those in the Literature

There were a few components discussed in the literature that, although present, were not as prevalent in my findings. Some of the incongruent results were undoubtedly due to my adaptation of the components to fit into my conceptual framework and specifically the relational focus, as was discussed within the limitations section in Chapter 3. Originally, some of these components were not mentioned specifically in regard to a relationship context. However, the infrequency of these components in the

data was interesting and worthy of discussion here, as I had a few interpretations in regard to their limited presence.

Invitations for families. *Invitations for families*, which for this study is defined as requests made by school personnel for family members to engage in school happenings, whether social or academic, ranked in the bottom three for both case study schools. Although there was evidence of this component present, it was discussed minimally at both schools and observed even less. With the research of Henderson and Mapp (2002) in mind, who view invitations to families as valued members of the community as critical, I propose that the invitations proffered at these two schools are subtle in nature. Based on earlier discussions in regard to *communicating effectively* and *academic partnership*, the philosophies regarding families as respected and equal partners at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary may make these invitations more implied and less visible than at other schools. On a regular basis, families at these schools are included and their inclusion is treated with respect and importance (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006); therefore, there is not as much of a need to explicitly invite them to be a part of the school community, outside of upcoming events.

Utilizing funds of knowledge. "People are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p. ix). This concept is highly acknowledged at Southwest Elementary and Northwest K-8 as both schools regard students and their families as possessing great masses of knowledge. This component, although vitally important, seemed less visible on its own at either school as it may have been usurped into other components, namely *culturally*

responsive schooling and *academic partnership*. Araujo (2009) suggested that schools should devote more time to bringing families into the school to share their knowledge and expertise both in the classroom and in school wide leadership roles. Although I did not observe many family members providing insights to students or staff from their own wealth of knowledge, I did receive reports from school personnel and parents alike as to the participation of families in classroom settings and in school leadership positions. In two examples at Southwest, family members collaborated with school personnel at TPAC meetings and shared their expertise as instructors in after school Zumba classes for other parents and school staff. Northwest K-8 families held leadership positions on both district-wide and the school Mariachi committee as well as volunteered in classrooms to share cooking secrets and their math expertise. This suggests that parents engaged actively and contributed to school governance and activities as respected partners. This practice of co-education at both case study schools, in addition to the bias checking at Southwest Elementary, precludes the lack of knowledge and respect that a funds of knowledge approach assumes.

School hallways and classrooms in both case study schools are emblazoned with décor, which acknowledges the culture of the students and their families. Classes are taught with the culture and language of the students in mind and thus parents are able to more readily participate as academic partners. This culturally aware attitude coupled with the expectation of families as partners in the academic development of children may have reduced significantly the need to explicitly reach out for families' funds of knowledge, as they were present at the schools already. In essence, this suggests that *utilizing funds of knowledge* could be viewed as a descriptive factor within *culturally*

responsive schooling and *academic partnership*, especially in regard to this specific population of families. The findings from the two case study schools suggest deeper relationships have been established with their families and, therefore, family members do not always need overt requests to share their funds of knowledge as the approach is woven into the fabric of the schools. In addition, the overlap of this component with *culturally responsive schooling* and *academic partnership* during the coding process further supports this interpretation.

Decision-making power. Cooper and Christie (2005) stated that true partnerships with families require schools to acknowledge and validate families' views and ultimately share power with them. Many in the field stress the importance of including decision-making power as part of a comprehensive family engagement program (Epstein & Dauber, 1991; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), including the engagement of Latino families (Olivos, 2009) because family involvement in decision-making initiatives shows purposeful inclusion of all stakeholder voices (Terriquez, 2013). However, *decision-making power* did not rank very high at either of the case study schools. There was definite evidence of families' voices throughout the school as a new school dress code was being voted upon at one site while the agenda for a parent education meeting was based solely on family input at another. These actions align with the ideas from Swick (1979) who proposed to include families in planning and decision-making processes to create a "sense of realism" in the program and reflect authentic needs (p. 98); however, this component was not as overt. There are a few interpretations that could be made from this. For example, in Mexico, educators are respected as professionals and families do not consider trying to influence them within

the school context (Restrepo & Dubasik, 2008; Zarate, 2007). As proposed with the other components in this section, I have also considered the fact that *decision-making power* could be assumed into another component, especially due to the overlap in coding; and, although integral in the family-school relationship, *decision-making power* may align better as a descriptive factor for the *academic partnership* component.

Conclusions. Three components that I expected to see more of within the data due to their presence in the literature were *invitations for families*, *utilizing funds of knowledge*, and *decision-making power*. All three components were prevalent throughout many studies and mainstream conceptual understandings of family engagement. Initially, the limited presence of these components was a bit surprising. However, I ultimately interpreted the absence of *decision-making power* as rationale for consideration of this component as a descriptor for other beliefs and practices that were highlighted within the study. This could also be the case for the lack of *invitations for families* and *utilizing funds of knowledge*; however, the purposeful inclusion of families as equal and respected partners at the two case study schools could also preclude the need for these two components.

Original Contributions

A few findings that emerged from my research addressed gaps identified in the literature regarding the relational aspects of family engagement thus making original contributions to the current research base. In all of the cases as described below, there was a basis within the literature for their inclusion in the family engagement conversation even though not explicitly connected to the relational aspects of family engagement. The

evidence presented in this study shows that these components should always be considered in that conversation as illustrated below.

Contributing to the trust element. Two of the components highlighted in the evidence, *creating community spaces* and *transparency with practices and policies*, directly support the inclusion of the code, *establishing trust*. Both of these components are mentioned in the literature but, again, the direct connection to the conversation of family-school partnerships is weak. They are discussed here briefly.

Creating community spaces. In their discussions of building trust, Adams and Christenson (1998) suggest schools designate a specific area for families to gather. This is very relevant to the discussion of family-school relationship building, as establishing trust is an integral component within that process. As such, *creating community spaces* was designated as a component in the framework for this study. Reyes, Scribner, and Scribner (1999) spoke of the significance of a warm environment for families to congregate but did not provide specific steps for the creation or examples of these spaces. At Southwest and Northwest, the significance of these spaces was evident immediately as both schools had created comfortable congregation areas immediately upon entry. Community members also regularly used this and numerous other areas around the schools to meet, chat, and catch up with one another, both families and school personnel alike. Interviews with administrators, staff and faculty confirmed that the creation of these areas and regular social events are intentional, as they help to strengthen the connections between families and the school.

Transparency with practices and policies. Hornby (2011) contends that a key factor to establishing strong family-school connections is the openness to families that

schools demonstrate through their contacts with them. This openness signifies full transparency of both information and policies, which solidifies the trust in the relationship (Bastiani, 1987). This was evident at both Northwest and Southwest as school personnel were quite intentional in their steps to inform families of all school and community occurrences, decisions, or actions, whether individually based or school- or district-wide. The *transparency with practices and policies* exhibited by the case study schools was appreciated by the parent community and contributed to the trust being established within the family-school relationship. This coincides with Auerbach (2007), who claims that this type of visibility and accessibility of practices and communications with staff shows families that the school has a vested interest in the relationship.

Nurturing children. Although some of the literature did show limited acknowledgement of the importance of school personnel's care of children in the eyes of families (Mapp, 2002; Zarate, 2007), even specifically linguistically diverse students (Araujo, 2009), this component was not included as a specific step to take or a belief to have in regard to increasing family-school connections. Parents at both schools observed and appreciated the care given to their children but also all of the children school-wide. School personnel at Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary ranked this component as integral as well but sometimes subtly. The consistent care and nurturance shown by teachers, staff, and administrators towards the children appeared natural and was spoken of in a matter-of-fact way, as though it were not out of the ordinary. Although school personnel may not explicitly see these actions as impacting the connections between themselves and families, the way teachers, staff members and administrators nurture the

children at Southwest and Northwest directly strengthens their family-school relationships.

Addressing basic needs. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) suggested that "parents who struggle to meet their family's basic needs may face several important barriers to their school engagement" (p. 654). In considering Maslow's (1943) "hierarchy of needs," this statement makes sense. When families are focused on obtaining food, shelter, clothing, or other basic resources, there is little, if any, time to engage with the school. Although helping families acquire resources to *address basic needs* was not specifically mentioned in the literature in connection to strengthening family-school relationships, this component quickly emerged as integral at both Northwest and Southwest. In fact, there were staff members hired at the two schools who had specific responsibilities to assist families with their needs regarding food, shelter, clothing, school supplies, and other physiological and safety needs. In addition, the continued safety provided at the schools afforded families with a sense of comfort as they left their most valued asset in the school's care. The high level of concern observed by parents in regard to safety could also be attributed to the recent tragedies at school sites, both in Colorado at Columbine and across the country. In alignment with Maslow's ideas, it appears that when the school and school personnel help families address these basic physiological and safety needs, families then have more time and energy to put towards the family-school relationship, what would be deemed a higher level need.

Particularly Surprising Findings

There were a few findings from my study that I found particularly surprising. The first was the interrelatedness of the various components. This connection and almost

interdependence of the components at times was not something that I expected to see. Of course, when I consider the complexity of most systems, this overlap of components seems inevitable. Still, I was not anticipating observing so many instances of the components working together to create or maintain the family-school relationship. As discussed in an earlier section, *effective communication* and *culturally responsive schooling* are both inextricably linked to several other components and, at times, cannot be viewed as a separate entity. The linking of these components illustrates that there is no *one* answer or *one* right way to create and maintain relationships with families. The evidence shows that a combination of the components of the framework, depending on the context (i.e. group of families), can help to support the family-school relationship to increase family engagement. As previously stated, both case study schools send out all written communication to families in both English and Spanish to ensure that pertinent information is relayed to all. This practice necessitates consideration of both *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. In another example, during a book-sorting event I observed at Northwest, the existence of *community spaces* and the *welcoming attitude/environment* at the school no doubt contributed to the increased participation in the *academic partnership*. The fact that family members feel welcome to gather at the couches prior to the end of school to chat and regularly do so and the proximity of the "book sort" to those couches in all probability increased the number of family members who ended up participating as *academic partners* in the event.

Another surprising finding that I encountered in this study were the incredible similarities between the case study schools. Northwest K-8 and Southwest Elementary were presented to me as very different in their philosophies and approaches towards

family engagement. When I first spoke to the administrators, this difference was substantiated somewhat as I perceived these seemingly different, but not explicit, philosophies after the initial interviews. For example, the principal at Southwest granted me, an outsider, open access to any and all classrooms, offices, and personnel at the school. She relayed that she allows similar access to prospective families, as she encourages them to observe as much as they like. In contrast, the principal at Northwest asked that I liaise with her prior to any contact with personnel, parents or events at the school. I discovered later that she utilizes a similar hands-on approach with prospective parents as well, as she provides personal tours for individual and small groups regularly, including lengthy one-on-one discussions. However, as I began observing at the schools and speaking to more members of the two communities, I realized that the schools appeared more similar than different. As I launched into data analysis, salient codes began emerging and my recent observations were confirmed. The two case study schools ranked very similarly in most of the components of the framework, including the ones that were not as prevalent. These similarities, although not apparent at first, support even further the use of many of the components of the proposed framework in this study.

Findings Not Pursued in This Study

There were a few findings from this study that are of particular note but were not within the purview of this study and therefore were not examined. In one case, the findings could be utilized for future research possibilities and, thus, are also mentioned in a later section. The first finding not pursued but quite apparent was the previously existing culture of respect and inclusion at both of the case study schools. This school-wide culture definitely supported the beliefs and behaviors that were present that aligned

with the components of the framework of the study. How this philosophy was established at the school was not explored and such exploration could provide some valuable information for schools wishing to follow in their footsteps.

Along those same lines, another finding, which was not explored, relates to the importance of a strong leader with a clear vision towards this mindset of effective family-school relationships. In regard to the leaders of the schools, at face value they could not be more different. The principal at Northwest has been at the school in way or another for over twelve years. She is Latina and relates fervently with the family population at the school. In contrast, Southwest Elementary has relatively new leadership. The current principal had only been at this position for three years at the time of the study. Although the new principal is White and monolingual, the climate of the school community has recently shifted as evidenced by several comments from participants. One long-tenured staff member at Southwest stated, for example, "(O)ur parents are actually here more, they're not afraid to come here anymore." Although there are clear variations in leadership, the positive results of student success are similar and, from the results of this study, the family engagement beliefs and practices are also similar. How these seemingly disparate leaders achieved these similar results was a finding also not examined and could also contribute to the conversation of family engagement.

The last finding of considerable note was actually quite subtle in nature but piqued my interest nonetheless. Upon analysis, I realized that several of the staff and faculty members whom I interviewed lived in or near the communities surrounding the schools. I am not certain if this finding has any significance but I would venture to say that the proximity of geography may have some effect on personnel attitudes towards the

school location and thus the students and families that make up the school population. This is a finding in need of further examination.

Implications and Recommendations for Application

The evidence of the study suggest that specific beliefs and practices are present at these two schools that are successful at engaging families of Latino ELL students. The inclusion and implementation of several school beliefs and practices, as suggested by the findings, possibly could support relationships with families at schools similar to the case study schools. The focus of the next section is on the school implications of applying this framework; however, policy implications will be briefly discussed as well.

School Implications

A key predictor of student development and success, especially for students at risk in an urban environment, is a positive school culture of achievement, with strong measures of safety, cultural identification, and personalization (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Delpit, 1995). The necessity of garnering these important components seems to make a strong case for developing solid relationships among those adults that are important in the child's life. These healthy relationships may be achieved through the application of the conceptual framework presented in this study, at least in its adapted form (Figure 5.1) as mentioned earlier and discussed further in Chapter 1. There was evidence present in this study at the two case study schools, which serve primarily Latino, low-income students and their families, which showed many beliefs and practices of effective family-school relationships that can be attempted by other similar schools to hopefully enhance family engagement.

The findings also showed that the integration of many of the components helps lead further to the success of an effective family-school relationship, as illustrated in the adapted conceptual framework. Therefore, throughout the rest of this section, even as the components are discussed individually, reference will be made to any connected components and their relationship. Due to the interrelatedness of the components, the first two will be discussed together. The other seven supplementary components will be discussed individually afterwards. Discussion in this section is first a reminder of the findings for the case study schools and then suggested steps for other similar schools to try.

The vital components: *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. Although several components were found to be valuable to the creation and growth of the family-school relationship with the families of Latino ELL students at the case study schools, none were shown to be more valuable than *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. Both the philosophy of school personnel in regard to these two components and the actions taken supported the relationships between themselves and the families they worked with on a daily basis.

Therefore, a shared belief must first be present amongst school administrators, staff, and faculty that views all families as valuable, contributing assets to the partnership who have the right to receive relevant information in a format that is most understandable to them. At times to reach this perspective, school personnel may need to intentionally engage in activities that challenge them to uncover their own biases. This shared belief should be accompanied by intentional actions, which are complimentary to this view. Actions could include regularly relaying information about school events, important

topics related to students or families, and news of possible interest to individual families both in written and verbal formats in families' native languages. Staff members are expected to show genuine interest in student's home lives. Teachers may regularly elicit visits from parents to share rituals or routines from their individual cultures. Another measure that should be acknowledged and implemented in reference to both effective communication and culturally responsive schooling involve eliciting families' opinions, ideas, questions, and/or concerns in culturally appropriate ways. Merely practicing this philosophy and accompanying actions in reference to *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling* alone may increase the effectiveness of the family-school relationship; however, the implementation of these and several more components will strengthen this relationship even further.

Supplementary components. Evidence from my study showed several key contributors to the success of these schools in engaging their students' families, which were primarily low-income, Latino. There were seven more components acknowledged as positively impacting the relationship between the schools and families: *academic partnership*, *welcoming attitude/environment*, *acknowledging individual family needs*, *nurturing children*, *creating community spaces*, *addressing basic needs*, and *transparency with practices and policies*. The interrelatedness of the components, as discussed earlier, warrants a discussion of them here with reference to one another as appropriate and, especially, the two components mentioned earlier.

Academic partnership. Positive parent connections can provide a powerful resource to schools for understanding individual student needs. Therefore, a philosophy of partnership, where family members are seen as reciprocal collaborators and equal

contributors in the education of students, was a necessary element, as evidenced at the case study schools. *Communicating effectively*, as relayed earlier, is vital to the family-school relationship and particularly in relation to this component, as regular, personal connections should be made with families as needed to support student learning, both individually and school-wide. Evidence also showed that schools should implement individual, small group, and all-school family education events as needed to further support the academic partnerships at their schools, instigated by both school personnel as well as families. In reference to *culturally responsive schooling*, schools should take into consideration the various definitions that families hold in terms of their role in the partnership based on their cultural values or beliefs.

Welcoming attitude/environment. This component of the framework is easy to implement and yet holds great value towards supporting the family-school relationship, as shown in the findings from the case study schools. Schools can exhibit a *welcoming attitude/environment* by maintaining clean, colorful entryways and hallways, greeting visitors with smiles and salutations, and adorning walls with welcome signs and children's artwork. Both new and returning families should receive warm hellos and smiles from school personnel. Teachers can support this attitude as well by prominently displaying children's work and inviting viewers to engage with the display. Both *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling* come into play here as schools should consistently send out messages of welcome to families but must do so in a culturally responsive manner, such as using families' native language or including images on welcome signs of cultural similarity for families.

Acknowledging individual family needs. Individual families bring various needs to the school community based on their particular situations. Evidence from this study showed that it was imperative for these schools to both acknowledge and take action in response to those needs to help support the family-school relationship. Of course, creating spaces for families to express those needs, whether through specified staff members or consistent opportunities to talk with faculty or administrators, is an integral step to recognizing the needs of families. Here the connection to *communicating effectively* is quite evident as constant communication is necessary to acknowledge family needs. In regard to *culturally responsive schooling*, schools must hold a perspective that families will come into the setting with varying needs based on their backgrounds, values and expectations, which obviously includes a cultural component.

Nurturing children. The evidence shows that families at the case study schools, which were primarily Latino, showed enormous appreciation for the care and nurturance shown to their children by school personnel. In showing *culturally responsive schooling* practices, schools should be considerate of the desire of families for their children to be cared for as the parents themselves care for them. Administrators, teachers, and school staff should make a concerted effort to get to know their students and regularly show a deep concern for their wellbeing. Families notice when this care is, or is not, present; and, its presence definitely strengthened the family-school relationship at the case study schools.

Creating community spaces. This component is also a key aspect of establishing trust with families in support of building and maintaining effective family-school relationships. The evidence from the case study schools shows that intentionally taken

steps to *create community spaces* for families to congregate and socialize strengthens the overall family-school relationship. If other schools are following suit, these spaces should be both physical and social in nature. Small comfortable gathering spaces in hallways and outside of classrooms as well as school events where school personnel and family members can talk, get to know one another, and share some lighthearted moments can strengthen the trust between them and further build the family-school relationship.

Addressing basic needs. Through his concept of the hierarchy of needs, Maslow (1943) contended that individuals could not focus on attaining certain higher-level goals until lower, more basic needs were first met. Evidence from this study showed this to be the case for some of the families at the case study schools. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) suggested that "parents who struggle to meet their family's basic needs may face several important barriers to their school engagement" (p. 654). In consideration of these findings, other similar schools should make an intentional effort to both provide resources for addressing basic needs for families, such as food, shelter, clothing, and school supplies, as well as provide opportunities for families to express the needs that they may have. In terms of safety specifically, families at the case study schools were encouraged by and appreciated that the school environment was considerate of the safety of their children, both from intruders on the outside and from potential harm internally.

Transparency with practices and policies. In consideration of establishing trust with families to support relationships, this study has provided evidence at the case study schools that showing *transparency with practices and policies* helped to build that trust. Schools should intentionally and proactively provide families with information about the

school's goals, expectations, policies, curricula, and strategic plans, especially as related to students and their families. Schools can accomplish this by *communicating effectively* with families and by exhibiting *culturally responsive schooling* in their considerations of how to relay this information and how much background knowledge their families may need based on prior knowledge of the system.

Policy Implications

Auerbach (2007) mentioned the difficulties that schools and administrators sometimes face when they are presented with district mandates and expectations that prevent, or at times directly contradict, the engagement of families. Examining proposed mandates through the lens of this conceptual framework prior to implementation to identify any areas of contradiction could alleviate the misuse of precious school resources, as well as prevent the creation of unhealthy family-school relationships.

A collaborative team of district and school administrators, teachers and parents could compare the components of proposed mandates with the components of the adapted framework (Figure 5. 1), to check for alignment with the various components to enhance the overall family-school relationship. First, the team can assess alignment of the policy with the initial two components, *communicating effectively* and *culturally responsive schooling*. When new mandates are being considered, decision-making members of these organizations can ask themselves, "Will this new policy be communicated in an effective manner? Are considerations being made for the cultural backgrounds of students and their families in regard to this new policy?" If the mandate is altering an existing policy, other questions could be considered. "Does this policy change alter our existing relationships with families by jeopardizing our communication efforts? Is our cultural

responsivity being threatened with this policy change?" By initially considering this first level of components of the framework, policy decisions could be more considerate of the families. This may contribute to less wasted time and, ultimately, salvaged resources, as unsuccessful policy changes tend to consume valuable resources. Further use of the adapted framework in regard to the second level of components could follow the same structure. With a specific component in mind, organization team members proffer questions of the mandate. Alignment with the beliefs and practices presented herein can then be assessed.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are a few recommendations that I include here for future research, some of which have been alluded to previously. First of all, the framework presented in this study is based on only two case studies. Because of this, there is the need to research the presence of the components of this framework at other similar schools to test its validity. Following this, the refined framework should then be employed in other schools and researched in context to establish its reliability and further applicability.

Another area for future research in relation to this study, as was mentioned previously, has to do with leadership. Both of the case study schools possessed strong leaders that maintained a philosophy of inclusion and respect for their families. Because this leadership component was a given at the two schools, it was not examined as a contributing factor. As the framework is applied in other schools and researched further, it may become apparent that another component related to the nature of leadership may need to be added to the framework.

As with many other research findings that are geared towards a specific group of students, this framework, based heavily on the literatures on parent-school engagement and relations and then refined through the case studies, seems feasible in most school settings. I recommend researching the applicability of the conceptual framework at schools with populations different from those at the two schools in this study. The components of this framework were examined in general terms and then in terms of the specific population of study, families of Latino ELL students; therefore, it would stand to reason that most, if not all, of the components would translate to these other environments and are worthy of examination.

Finally, there may be larger systemic impacts of applying this framework to schools similar to the case study schools, and possibly others, such as economic ramifications of including these practices longitudinally. I recommend exploring these broader impacts as the framework is applied to more organizations over time. An examination of possible extensive outcomes could provide more credence to the framework and further solidify its implementation at other schools to the benefit of students and their families.

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APPENDIX A

CODEBOOK

Level			
1	2	3	**Theme**/*Code*/Sub-code
1.00			**Establishing the Relationship**
	1.10		*Establishing Trust*
		1.11	Welcoming attitude/environment
		1.12	Shared expectations
		1.13	Creating community spaces (emergent)
		1.14	Transparency with practices and policies (emergent)
	1.20		*Communicating Effectively*
	1.30		*Understanding and Relating to Families*
		1.31	Culturally responsive schooling
		1.32	Acknowledging individual family needs
		1.33	Multiple avenues for engagement
	1.40		*Invitations for Families*
2.00			**Maintaining the Relationship**
	2.10		*Shared Roles & Responsibilities*
		2.11	Academic partnership
		2.12	Utilizing funds of knowledge
		2.13	Decision-making power
		2.14	Nurturing children (emergent)
	2.20		*Sharing Learning Experiences*
	2.30		*Addressing basic needs (emergent)*

APPENDIX B

EMAIL SCRIPTS

Scripts for Recruitment Emails

Date: **Valid for Use Through:**

Study Title: DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study

Principal Investigator: Honorine D. Nocon

COMIRB No: 10-1250
Version Date: Oct. 19, 2011
Version No: 1

For school personnel:

Dear *name:*

I am a researcher with the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study, a project of the DPS UCD Research Collaborative. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an extension of the case study at your school that will look more deeply at leadership and parent engagement practices. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are an administrator, teacher, or staff member who has knowledge of or experience with leadership and/or parent engagement practices at your school. I would like to meet with you to discuss your possible participation in the study. Explanation of the study will take 10-15 minutes of your time, during which I will explain what will happen if you choose to participate.

Briefly, if you join the study, you will be interviewed and/or surveyed anonymously one to three times. Interview time is approximated at between 30 and 70 minutes; paper survey completion is approximated at 15 minutes. School leaders and their designees will be interviewed initially for 30 minutes and in follow-up interviews for 70 minutes. Other participants will be interviewed one time for up to 70 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. You may be observed at school meetings and social events that involve parents. All of this will be explained in more detail when we meet. Agreement to discuss participation does not mean that you have agreed to participate. It means you have agreed to be informed about the study and that you may consent to participate. Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If you have questions, you can call *name of research team member*, at <*insert phone number*>. You can also call the study's Principal Investigator, Honorine Nocon, at 303-315-6306. You can call and ask questions at any time. You can email me at the address

on this message, or email Honorine at honorine.nocon@ucdenver.edu. You can also call the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB) at 303-724-1055.

If you want to learn more about this study, please send me some times that will work for you. I will come to your school.

Thank you.

For district personnel:

I am a researcher with the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study, a project of the DPS UCD Research Collaborative. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an extension of the case studies that will look more deeply at leadership practices that appear to have an impact on the success of English language learners. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are an administrator with DPS who has knowledge of or experience working with schools identified as exemplary in supporting the success of English language learners.

Briefly, if you join the study, you will be interviewed one time for up to 70 minutes. We may ask you to suggest other district or school personnel that we should invite to participate in the study. Additionally, we may invite you complete a paper survey on leadership. I would like to meet with you to discuss your possible participation in the study. Explanation of the study will take will take 10-15 minutes of your time, during which I will explain what will happen if you choose to participate. Agreement to discuss participation does not mean that you have agreed to participate. It means you have agreed to be informed about the study and that you may consent to participate. Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If you have questions, you can call *name of research team member*, at <*insert phone number*>. You can also call the study's Principal Investigator, Honorine Nocon, at 303-315-6306. You can call and ask questions at any time. You can email me at the address on this message, or email Honorine at honorine.nocon@ucdenver.edu. You can also call the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB) at 303-724-1055.

If you want to learn more about this study, please send me some times that will work for you. I will come to your school.

Thank you.

For parents:

I am a researcher with the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study, a project of the DPS UCD Research Collaborative. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in an extension of the case studies that will look more deeply at parent involvement practices that appear to have an impact on the success of English language learners. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are the parent of a child who attends a school identified as exemplary in supporting the success of English language learners.

Briefly, if you join the study, you will be interviewed one time for up to 70 minutes. We may ask you to suggest other school personnel or parents that we should invite to participate in the study. I would like to meet with you to discuss your possible participation in the study. Explanation of the study will take will take 10-15 minutes of your time, during which I will explain what will happen if you choose to participate. Agreement to discuss participation does not mean that you have agreed to participate. It means you have agreed to be informed about the study and that you may consent to participate. Participation in the study is completely voluntary.

If you have questions, you can call *name of research team member*, at <*insert phone number*>. You can also call the study's Principal Investigator, Honorine Nocon, at 303-315-6306. You can call and ask questions at any time. You can email me at the address on this message, or email Honorine at honorine.nocon@ucdenver.edu. You can also call the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB) at 303-724-1055.

APPENDIX C

SCHOOL PERSONNEL CONSENT FORM

Protocol: 10-1250 **CONSENT FOR SCHOOL PERSONNEL BW & Force**
PI: Honorine D. Nocon
Version 2: Oct. 19, 2011

Date: **Valid for use through:**

Study Title: DPS-UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The investigator will describe this study to you and answer all your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Why is this study being done?

This study is an extension of the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study and plans to continue to learn more about effective school-wide practices currently used at Bryant-Webster and Force Elementary Schools where English language learners are experiencing academic success. This extension study, in particular, looks at parental engagement of ECE students at these two schools. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a school leader, teacher, or adult professional staff member at one of these schools. Up to 400 people will participate in this extension study.

What happens if I join this study?

If you join the study, you will be interviewed and/or surveyed one to four times. Interview time is approximated at between 30 and 70 minutes. School leaders and teachers will be interviewed initially for 30 minutes and in follow-up interviews for 70 minutes. Most other participants will be interviewed one time for up to 70 minutes. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. You may be observed in your classroom, or at school meetings and parent functions. Your name will not be used unless you ask us to use your name in reporting. Your participation will last through March 2012.

What are the possible discomforts or risks?

Discomforts you may experience while in this study include possible discomfort if the practices you describe are not consistent with DPS policy or the literature on best practices for learners of English. You may also feel embarrassment at some of your comments.

Other possible risks include the low likelihood that confidentiality regarding your participation in the study can be maintained, given the targeted nature of the study, and

the less likely risk that your name may be associated with specific comments should the data become lost or confidentiality be breached.

What are the possible benefits of the study?

This study is designed for the researchers to learn more about school-wide practices—in this particular case parental engagement—that are effective in guiding learners of English as a second language to academic success. The findings from this extension study may support educational efforts of Bryant-Webster, Force, DPS, and other districts.

Will I be paid for being in this study?

You will not be paid for participation in this study.

Will I have to pay for anything?

There is no financial cost for participation in this study.

Is my participation voluntary?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled.

Who do I call if I have questions?

The researcher carrying out this study is Julie Hart, a doctoral candidate with UCD and contributor to the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study. You may ask any questions you have now. Should questions arise later, you may call Julie Hart at 303.579.8914 or Honorine Nocon at 303.315.6306.

You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. You can call Julie Hart with questions. You can also call the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB) at 303.724.1055.

Who will see my research information?

I will do everything I can to keep your records a secret. It cannot be guaranteed.

Others may look at both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you.

These include:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- People at the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB)
- Members of the research study team

- Regulatory officials from the institution where the research is being conducted who want to ensure the research is safe

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your name will be kept private when the information is presented, unless you specify in writing, after having seen the findings, that you wish us to use your name.

Audio recordings of your interview will be transported to the investigator's home, where they will be stored in a locked firebox. Paper transcripts will be store in the same manner. Electronic versions of the transcripts will be stored on a flash drive and stored in the same manner. Pseudonyms will be applied in the transcription process and codebooks will be stored in a locked firebox in the investigator's home. All materials will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

Before the findings of this study are disseminated, you will be offered the opportunity to read the reports and asked if you wish your name to be included. Your name will not be included in any dissemination of findings without your written permission.

Agreement to be in this study:

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary.

I know that my interviews will be audiotaped. I choose to be in this study and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature: _____
Date: _____

Print name: _____

Use of name in reports on this study (not necessary for study participation)

Because this study will report effective practices guiding students who are learners of English as a second language to academic success, I would like my name to be used in written or presented reports of this work. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review those reports prior to presentation or publication.

Signature: _____

Consent form explained by _____
Date: _____

Investigator's signature:
_____

Print name: Julie Hart

APPENDIX D

PARENT CONSENT FORM

Protocol 10-1250 **CONSENT FOR PARENTS BW & Force**
PI: Honorine D. Nocon
Version 2: Oct. 19, 2011

Date: **Valid for use through:**

Study Title: DPS-UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study

You are being asked to be in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The investigator will describe this study to you and answer all your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether or not to take part.

Why is this study being done?

This study is an extension of the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study and plans to continue to learn more about effective school-wide practices currently used at Bryant-Webster and Force Elementary Schools where English language learners are experiencing academic success. This extension study, in particular, looks at parental engagement of ECE students at these two schools. You are being asked to be in this research study because you are a parent of a student at one of these schools. Up to 400 people will participate in this extension study.

What happens if I join this study?

If you join the study, you will be interviewed and/or surveyed one to three times. Interview time is approximated at between 30 and 70 minutes and will have a casual tone. With your permission, the interviews will be audio taped (depending on context) and transcribed. You may be observed at school meetings and social events that involve parents. Your name will not be used unless you ask us to use your name in reporting. Your participation will last through March 2012.

What are the possible discomforts or risks?

Discomforts you may experience while in this study include possible discomfort if you describe things that people, like teachers, principals, school staff, students, or other parents could find negative or maybe upsetting. You may also feel embarrassment at some of your comments.

Other possible risks include the difficulty in maintaining complete confidentiality regarding your participation in the study, because there is a relatively small group of

parents and school staff who will participate and who may know and/or recommend one another for participation, and the less likely risk that your name may be associated with specific comments should the data become lost or confidentiality be breached.

What are the possible benefits of the study?

This study is designed for the researchers to learn more about school-wide practices—in this particular case parental engagement—that are effective in guiding learners of English as a second language to academic success. The findings from this extension study may support educational efforts of Bryant-Webster, Force, DPS, and other districts.

Will I be paid for being in this study?

You will not be paid for participation in this study.

Will I have to pay for anything?

There is no financial cost for participation in this study.

Is my participation voluntary?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you choose to take part, you have the right to stop at any time. If you refuse or decide to withdraw later, you will not lose any benefits or rights to which you are entitled.

Who do I call if I have questions?

The researcher carrying out this study is Julie Hart, a doctoral candidate with UCD and contributor to the DPS UCD ELA Exemplary Schools Case Study. You may ask any questions you have now. Should questions arise later, you may call Julie Hart at 303.579.8914 or Honorine Nocon at 303.315.6306.

You may have questions about your rights as someone in this study. You can call Julie Hart with questions. You can also call the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB) at 303.724.1055.

Who will see my research information?

I will do everything I can to keep your records a secret. It cannot be guaranteed.

Others may look at both the records that identify you and the consent form signed by you.

These include:

- Federal agencies that monitor human subject research
- People at the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (COMIRB)

- Members of the research study team
- Regulatory officials from the institution where the research is being conducted who want to ensure the research is safe

The results from the research may be shared at a meeting. The results from the research may be in published articles. Your name will be kept private when the information is presented, unless you specify in writing, after having seen the findings, that you wish us to use your name.

Audio recordings of your interview will be transported to the investigator's home, where they will be stored in a locked firebox. Paper transcripts will be store in the same manner. Electronic versions of the transcripts will be stored on a flash drive and stored in the same manner. Pseudonyms will be applied in the transcription process and codebooks will be stored in a locked firebox in the investigator's home. All materials will be kept for three years and then destroyed.

Before the findings of this study are disseminated, you will be offered the opportunity to read the reports and asked if you wish your name to be included. Your name will not be included in any dissemination of findings without your written permission.

Agreement to be in this study:

I have read this paper about the study or it was read to me. I understand the possible risks and benefits of this study. I know that being in this study is voluntary.

I know that my interviews will be audiotaped and **agree/do not agree (please circle one)** to taping. I choose to be in this study and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature: _____
Date: _____

Print name: _____

Use of name in reports on this study (not necessary for study participation)

Because this study will report effective practices guiding students who are learners of English as a second language to academic success, I would like my name to be used in written or presented reports of this work. I understand that I will be given the opportunity to review those reports prior to presentation or publication.

Signature: _____

Consent form explained by _____
Date: _____

Investigator's signature:
_____

Print name: Julie Hart