

**EL INVOLUCRAMIENTO DE PADRES EN EDUCACIÓN / PARENTAL
INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION: THE PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF
LATINOS IN CHELSEA, MASSACHUSETTS**

by

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This study examined Latino parents' perceptions of the nature, purposes, and consequences of their involvement (or lack thereof) in elementary and middle schools and in their children's education. Parents also provided their conceptualization education as well as the positive and negative factors perceived to affect their involvement: aspects of parents' own situation and institutional/contextual factors.

This study focused on the views and experiences of parents of the two major Latino groups of Chelsea (Puerto Ricans and Central Americans) with children in different grades in the four regular elementary schools and the two regular middle schools of Chelsea, Massachusetts. Thirteen families were interviewed, including nine couples, three single mothers, and a grandmother. The selection of the participants was guided by my prior involvement in the community and by advice elicited from key members of the Chelsea community. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected.

All parents participating in the study conceptualized education as an integrated process that includes both learning at school (formal education) and "learning" at home (personal education). They emphasized home/personal education and approached parental involvement in light of this conception of education at home. The majority of parents referred to a cultural clash when describing parents' and teachers' roles. Roles that are exercised around two domains, parents' domain (based on traditional Latino value systems) that for most of the parents has not

influence over schooling, and teachers' domain (based on the United States value system) that is viewed by the majority of the parents as exercising the major influence in the formal education of their children and parents' actions in relation to their involvement in school-related activities.

Although this emphasis on home education, the interviewees mentioned different forms of involvement in school-related activities, particularly in those related to their children's education, though none of the parents reported attending, let alone actively participating in, formal school organizational meetings, such parent teacher organization (PTO) or the district-level school board. Most of the parents expressed their lack of interest and some were skeptical about whether such involvement was worthwhile, since it was unlikely that any changes would happen in relation to school policy.

DEDICATION

This is dedicated with all my love to:

Sofy, my loving spouse,

Without her patience, understanding, support, inspiration, encouragement, and most of all love, the completion of this work would not have been possible.

Isabella and Victoria, my two little daughters,

They have also inspired me to make this work possible...they are teaching me how to be a non-traditional and very committed father.

Blanca, my mother and Victor, my father (in his memory)

They instilled in me strong family principles and values to get personal and professional success.

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1. BACKGROUND AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

According to U.S. National Education Goal No. 8, “every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children” (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, 15). This goal, whether or not it is really a priority for the federal government and whether or not the federal government can influence states and local districts to accomplish this goal, focuses attention on the issues of parental involvement. Such involvement can take a variety of forms, including being active in school and school-system governance, as critics or supporters of current policies and practices.

Parental involvement in school-related activities is everywhere considered a key factor positively affecting students’ school performance (e.g., Epstein, 1992; Garcia, 1990; Goldenber, C.N, 1987),¹ a popular belief that is supported by an extensive body of research (e.g., Ascher, 1988; Baker and Soden, 1998; Chavkin, 1993; Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995; Epstein, 1996; Floyd, 1998; Inger, 1992; Petersen, 1989). For instance, Inger (1992) states:

There is considerable evidence that parent involvement leads to improved student achievement, better school attendance, and reduced dropout rates, and that these

¹ According to the Massachusetts Department of Education (MA-DOE), based on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), which is applied in order to assess student learning in English language arts (ELA), math, science and technology (S&T), and history and social science. The percent of Latino students of the Grade 10 passing were:

ELA ---1998 (61%), 1999 (52%), and 2000 (45%)

Math – 1998 (28%), 1999 (27%), and 2000 (31%)

S&T — 1998 (38%), 1999 (41%), and 2000 (35%)

The history and social science test was administered to 8th graders only.

improvements occur regardless of the economic, racial, or cultural background of the family (p. 1).

Parental involvement in school affairs, like other forms of participation, is also seen to have direct benefits for the adult who is active (e.g., Delgado-Gaitán, 2001; Trueba, 1998, Sampson, 2003; Gordon, 1978; Leler, 1983). Particularly relevant to this research is the conclusion that “research on Latinos [also indicates] the value of parental involvement” (Rivera, 1993, p.78; see also Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Trueba, 1998; Garcia, 2001; Lopez, 1998).²

Parental involvement in children’s education and school-related activities, in general, may be viewed from different perspectives. The two most relevant perspectives for this study are what I term “the institutional” and “the parental.” From an “institutional perspective,” research shows that minority racial/ethnic group parents tend to be less active than their majority group counterparts (Floyd, 1998; Moles, 1993). More specifically, school personnel tend to express concerns, or even complaints, about Latino parents’ limited or lack of involvement in school activities, including volunteering, serving as paraprofessional, attending meetings, planning activities, running for school boards, etc. (Inger, 1992; Rockwel et al., 1996; Samposon, 2003; Trueba, 1998). Latinos’ limited or lack of participation is seen to affect negatively their children’s school performance and produce a negative image of Latino parents among educators. For instance, Concha Delgado-Gaitan (2001) found that the vast majority (98%) of the teachers in the school she studied viewed parental involvement to be very important, but most of them believed that (the predominantly) Latino group of parents were not working enough with their children at home. And in the community on which this research focuses, Chelsea,

² The term *Latinos* in this study will refer, in general, to people with Latin American country background, including people from Puerto Rico. The Latino population in Chelsea is mainly comprised of Central American (35.4%) and Puerto Rican (31.6%). The term *padres* (*parents*) will refer to male and female parents or guardians.

Massachusetts, the superintendent recently expressed concerns about the level of Latino student achievement and bemoaned the fact that, despite school officials' efforts to encourage parental participation, Latino parents remained relatively uninvolved (*Chelsea Record*, April 17, 2003 1 and 6; see also *A Different September Foundation's* 2001 annual report).³

According to some scholars (e.g., Ascher, 1988; Carger, 1997; Floyd, 1998; Moles, 1993), many educators believe that Latino parents lack interest in their children's education. However, such a view may be a misinterpretation by educators. As Inger (1992, p.1) states, "many school administrators and teachers misread the reserve, the non-confrontational manners, and the non-involvement of Hispanic parents to mean that they are uncaring about their children's education" (see also Carger, 1997; Lopez, 2001). Furthermore, some research has found that, in fact, Latino parents do care very much about their children's education (Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995; Chavkin & Williams, 1987; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz, 2001). Other studies, also based on a "parental perspective," have documented that Latino parents have high goals for their children (Shannon, 1996) and that they "are highly interested in being involved in their children's education" (Trumbull et al., 2001, p. 32; see also Lopez, 2001; Sampson, 2003).

Most of the research on Latinos reporting limited or lack of parental involvement is based on an institutional (i.e., teachers' and school administrators') point of view (Trueba, 1998; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Furthermore, projects, programs and other government activities designed to promote parental involvement are usually based on an "institutional perspective" (Scribner et. al., 1999). Educators' and other school personnel's understandings of parental involvement (or lack thereof) are very important, but may be different the understandings of

³ A Different September is the foundation in charge of maintaining the Boston University-Chelsea School System partnership.

others , such as the parents/families. And since parents are important stakeholders in this matter, their perspectives on parental involvement (or lack thereof) deserves to be examined (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

In discussing issues related to parental involvement in education, it is important to note that parents are not a homogeneous group. Depending on their situations and their family and life experiences and their contact (or lack of contact) with schools, different individuals and subgroups of parents (including subgroups of Latinos parents) may vary in how they define parental involvement and in how they perceive various educators' attitudes and actions as encouraging or discouraging their involvement.

This study sought to examine Latino parents' perceptions of the nature, purposes, and consequences of their involvement (or lack thereof) in the Chelsea (Massachusetts) elementary and middle schools and in their children's education. Attention was also given to parents' views of what encourages or discourages their involvement in school-related activities/actions, including aspects of their own situation as well as the intentional and unintentional behaviors of school personnel. Though not the major emphasis, this study also focused on potential similarities and differences within and between the Central American and Puerto Rican subgroups of Latino parents. These two subgroups constitute the majority of Latinos in Chelsea. Moreover, these groups provide a potentially interesting comparison between what Ogbu (1995) terms a "voluntary minority" group (viz., Central Americans) and an "involuntary minority" group (viz., Puerto Ricans).

More specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

- How do various Latino parents in Chelsea, Massachusetts conceptualize "education"?

- How central do they view schooling (at different levels) as a part of their children's education and lives?
- How do they define school "success" for their children?
- What do they believe are the immediate and future consequences of their children achieving "success" in schooling?
- How do they understand the relationship between education and social (non)mobility?
- What do various Latino parents in Chelsea understand by "parental involvement"?
- What roles do they think educators (teachers, administrators, etc.) and parents should play in helping their children to succeed in school?
- What do they believe about parents' role (in relation to others' roles) in the school and other school-related matters?
- How do these parents want to be involved?
- How are various Latino parents in Chelsea, Massachusetts involved in activities that are connected to their children's schooling?
- What do parents do at home that might facilitate/impede their children's achievement in school?
- How frequently do parents have what kinds of contact with educators at the school(s) their children attend?
- How, if at all, are parents involved in classroom- or school-level activities, and how are such activities viewed to influence the quality of schooling and/or their children's achievement?

- How, if at all, are parents involved in school district- or community-level activities, and how are such activities viewed to influence the quality of schooling and/or their children's achievement?
- How do parents perceive the effects of their involvement or non-involvement on their, their family's, and the community's future situation?
- What kinds of factors/experiences have shaped/are shaping various Latino parents' conceptualizations of education, their forms/degrees of activity, and the perceived consequences of such?
- What kinds of experiences did these parents have with formal education (e.g., schooling) when they were younger, and how have these shaped their ideas, actions, and perceptions?
- In what non-formal education programs have they participated, and how have these experiences shaped their ideas, actions, and perceptions?
- What, if any, involvement have parents had in social movements, community campaigns, etc., and how have these experiences shaped their ideas, actions, and perceptions?
- In what ways do their family (social and economic) situations shape parents' ideas, actions, and perceptions?
- What do parents think school personnel do (or do not do) that encourages/discourages or facilitates/inhibits their involvement?
- Are there similarities or differences between Central American and Puerto Rican parents with respect to their conceptualizations of education, their forms/degrees of activity, and the perceived consequences of such "involvement?"

2. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AND RELATED RESEARCH

2.1. Theoretical Perspectives and Views on Schools and Schooling/Education

Understanding the way Latino parents of Chelsea define schools and its purposes, as well as their perceptions on the nature, purposes and consequences of schooling, for example, requires more than one perspective. Researchers interpret people's perceptions of the purposes of schooling in accordance with specific theories about how schools relate to society. Here I review two major theoretical perspectives of social science in order to provide the first elements of the framework: Structural-Functionalist and Conflict perspectives on schooling and society. It is very common for social scientists to highlight contradictions between paradigms or worldviews, either emphasizing one of the two positions or simply putting attention on one of the two and ignoring the other perspective.

2.1.1. *Structural-Functionalist Perspective on Schooling and Society*

Theorists under the umbrella of the Functionalist and Structural-Functionalist perspective are concerned with describing schooling as a process taking places in specific structures (e.g., educational system and schools) and examining how these structures contribute in facilitating the general functioning of society. Individuals (including students, teachers, parents, etc.) are treated as relatively passive (Ballantine, 1997). Of particular importance for this framework is that functionalists are concerned with how social structures are copied from generation to generation, regardless of the thoughts and actions of groups or individuals, such as those of parents. Durkheim (1956, p.28), one of main proponents of functionalism, defines education as follows:

Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual, and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special milieu for which he is specifically destined (cited in Ballantine, 1997, p.7).

As we can see, from this perspective a primary function of schools is the passing on of the knowledge and behaviors necessary to maintain order in society. This role of schools is assumed to be in consonance with a general assumption of stability or balance. This function is also related to the idea of the integration of the system via shared values, or consensus, among members (Ballantine, 1997). According to Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1995), Structural-Functionalism theorists believe that schooling “reinforce[s] the existing social and political order. They assume there is consensus on the values and beliefs in society, especially on the allocation and use of power” (p.7).

Drawing on the idea of functionalist sociologists such as Durkheim (1969), Merton (1967), and Parson (1959), Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1995, pp. 7-11) identify four general purposes of schooling:

Intellectual: acquisition of cognitive skills, acquisition of substantive knowledge, and acquisition of inquiry skills;

Political: to educate future citizens for appropriate participation in the given political order, to promote patriotism, to promote the assimilation of immigrants – who initially may not share the U.S. social and political values, and to ensure order, public civility, and conformity to laws;

Economic: to prepare students for later work roles and to select and train the labor force; and

Social: to promote a sense of social and moral responsibility, to serve as sites for the solution or amelioration of social problems, and to supplement the efforts of others institutions of socialization, such as the family and the church.

As Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1995) point out, theorists of Structural Functionalism identify not only the various functions, but also the connection between such:

For example, structural-functionalists assert that if one socializing institution is not fulfilling its function, another will take over its role to maintain the equilibrium of the society. In today's society, structural-functionalists would argue that as more families have both parents working, schools have taken over many of the functions formerly performed by the family (p.6).

This quotation points to an important issue in examining Latino parents' understandings of education, which is concerned with the limits of the school's responsibility for socialization. Moreover, it is not uncommon to find in some research (e.g., Moles, 1993) a general tendency to overemphasize schooling as the only way for individual to receive education, which could make people praise or blame schools for individuals' good or bad behaviors.

The Functionalists' views on education and schooling can be summarized as means that "offer an opportunity for students with greater ability and drive to get ahead" (Henslin, 1995, p. 472). Implied within this perspective are several aspects that might affect Latino parents' perceptions of schooling and society. Parents' ideas may or may not be in line with Functionalist views of schools as providing equality of opportunity in an open class system, promoting individual and social well being, and rewarding those with talent and the desire to succeed. Latinos may or may not view the purposes of schooling in the following way, in accord with the Functionalist stance of Tate (2004, p.8):

a) The cultural transmission of values such as American individualism, competition, and patriotism, b) the socialization and care of the young through the school as a primary agent of the socialization process, c) social integration and the promotion of a common identity (e.g., assimilation into the peer culture, learning a common language, and the promotion of nationalism,) d) the promotion of personal change by teaching students to "think for themselves,"⁴ e) social placement through the sorting of society members on the basis of merit (i.e., supporting the idea of a meritocracy, a social system based on acquiring status through ability and effort), f) gate-keeping and credentialism (i.e., determining which societal members will enter which educational or occupational tracks).

2.1.2. Conflict Perspective on Schooling and Society

Contrary to the structural-functionalist perspective, Conflict theorists explain the dynamism of the social system not in terms of a tendency towards stability or homeostasis, but in terms of a fundamental contradictions and conflicts. The emphasis is placed on “the instability of social system and the conflict over values, resources, and power that follow as an historical consequence” (Simmons 1983, 12). From a Conflict perspective, formal education is characterized as a part of the ideological apparatus by which a ruling class seeks to maintain its dominance over other groups. Schools are seen as reflecting the unequal group relations within society and as reproducing both the ideologies of the dominant social groups and the hierarchy of the class structure. In the words of Bennett deMarries and LeCompte (1997, p. 12), “schools serve as tools to keep wealth and power in the hands of the white middle- and upper-class

⁴Henslin, 1995, p. 472.

groups”. Moreover, according to Collins (1971, p.1010; cited by Ballantine, 1997, p.9), the “main activity of school is to teach particular ‘status cultures’, both in and outside the classroom.” The stratification of students and the reproduction of the hierarchical division of labor are viewed as core activities of schools. Bennett deMarries and LeCompte (1997, p.12) drawing on theorists like Bowles, Gintis, and Carnoy describe this:

Schools tend to magnify class difference by sorting individuals into occupational niches, not so much by their ability as by their social class origin. Lower-class and minority students are viewed as less able and are placed in vocational curricula with lower job expectations. Children also are encouraged toward fulfillment of traditional [unequal and unjust] gender roles.

For Conflict theorists schooling is a process of multiple contradictions that involves individuals from different statuses, ideologies, etc., and it is considered a means of indoctrination. Although individuals are viewed as having the capacity to analyze and not accept the world as it is as well as having the capacity to take action and become “empowered” (Ellsworth 1989, p.307), schools are seen as inhibiting full human and social development (Simmons, 1983, p. 13). Kendal (1973, p.18: cited in Spring 2000) points out that:

The history of education...revealed that government schools are primarily used for indoctrinating the younger generation in ...religious beliefs and ... to develop a sense of loyalty to the political group or nation. The indoctrinating function of education was accompanied by unequal educational opportunities, which contributed to the separation of social classes.

We can recapitulate the main assumptions of the Conflict Theory perspective views on education and schooling in the following terms: education and schooling are seen as “systems of

social control designed to support the controlling sectors of society, and to perpetuate social inequality in gender, race, and class” (Tate, 2004, 8-9). Several aspects of this perspective might be relevant to Latino parents’ perceptions of schools and schooling. Parents may or may not share with Conflict theorists a view of schooling and society that emphasizes that inequalities in family income, social class, and educational funding are reflected and promoted in a system of educational inequality, in which some are deemed to be more equal than others. Latinos may or may not share with Tate (2004, pp. 8-9) and other Conflict theorists (e.g., Henslin, 1995; Kohol, 1992; Renzetti & Curran, 1998) a view of schools as:

- a) [having] a "hidden curriculum" of unwritten rules which promotes obedience to authority and conformity to cultural norms, and one’s "allotted" place in society;
- b) [providing] unequal funding ... which leads to an educational system of "savage inequalities" in the states and in local school districts throughout the United States (Kozol, 1992);
- c) [using] culturally-biased IQ and achievement tests which favor the middle and upper classes and discriminate against working and lower classes, and racial and ethnic minorities;
- d) [reinforcing] such societal values as free enterprise (i.e., school competition), social inequality (i.e., in-school tracking of the poor to vocational rather than academic studies), and racial and ethnic prejudice and discrimination (i.e., in-school placement/tracking of minorities);

- e) reproducing an unequal social class structure through a funneling effect which allows more affluent whites to score higher on tests,⁵ complete high school, go to college, and attain a bachelor's degree, while low-income students (Henslin, 1995, p. 477);
- f) transforming social privilege into personal merit (e.g., the success of a wealthy [child] of a rich [person]), and social disadvantage into personal deficiency (e.g., a high school dropout with little or no family income sources or home support); and
- g) [being] school tracking systems or "sorting machines" (Renzetti and Curran, 1998, p. 428) that separate students into different ability groups, and thus reflect and perpetuate social inequalities.

2.2. Participation in Education as a Social Phenomenon:

2.2.1. General Perspective

Because of the difficulty of defining *participation*, many researchers and writers talk about participation without defining the concept and use it, more or less consciously, in different senses (Heller, 1998). The word 'participation' generally has a positive, optimistic tone; it implies that someone is 'inter-acting' with someone else or a group, is cooperating, is working with others to achieve something. Participation is, of course, a fact of everyday life, a social act. We all are continuously participating in society, communities, neighborhoods, etc, and we participate in culture, politics, etc.

According to Rahnema (1999) "a person may participate *passively* or *actively*" (p. 117), and such degrees of involvement are associated with two main meanings of participation:

⁵ Such as Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).

mainstream participation and popular participation (Rahnema, 1999). The mainstream concept considers participation to be the act of partaking in the objectives of the economy and the societal arrangements related to it. In this definition a person has to be part of an *economic* project in order to qualify as a participant. This can be conceived as a passive form of participation (Heller, 1998; Rahnema, 1999). The popular concept of participation is associated with a more radical view, within which the purpose of participation is to achieve people's power. Here participation is seen as “a process of dialogue and interaction which should replace the existing subject/object relationship between intervenors and the intervened; this would enable the oppressed to act as the free subjects of their own destiny” (Rahnema, 1999; p. 123). This can be conceived as an active form of participation (Heller, 1998; Rahnema, 1999). Either form of participation can be characterized as “willingly” or “unwillingly” done and “may happen spontaneously or it can be subtly stage managed from outside” (Rahnema, 1999, p. 118).

Following a mainstream or traditional view, Viera da Cunha and Junho Peña (1997) characterize participation as a form of a voluntary and rational social act, which is based on individuals' joint interests of cooperation. However, Rahnema (1999) calls our attention to the possibility that participation may be used as a means of manipulation, arguing that “more often than not, people are asked or dragged to participate in activities of no interest of them, in the name of participation” (Rahnema, 1999, p. 123; cited in Mantilla, 2002, p. 23).

Social and political and other types of implications of participation have been studied in many fields such as political sciences, economy, psychology, etc. The concept of participation also has been also used to design, implement and evaluate different types of projects and programs (e.g., community development programs, international cooperation, politics, etc.) Participation has also acquired relevance in the field of education in different respects (academic,

research, policy making, programs, projects, etc.). The category participation has been much employed in education in relation to the interactions between schools and community groups, although issues of teacher and student participation have also been addressed (see Darden et al, 1997; Delgado-Gaitán, 1991a; and Meier and Stewart, 1991).

2.2.2. Types or forms and Degrees of Participation

There are three models of participation that seem to be relevant for the study of Latino parental involvement in education, which include types or forms and degrees of participation. First, Arnstein (1969) model, “A Ladder of Citizen Participation,” illustrates varying functional degrees of participation from the highest level of citizen control (in which participant are fully in charge of governing and policy making) to the lowest level of ‘manipulation’ (which I associate with passive participation or nonparticipation and which does not go beyond the appearance of advising officials who really make the decisions). In the intermediate levels one can identify “Consultation” and “Placation” (Arnstein 1969, p.218; cited by Mantilla, 2002, pp. 32-22).

The second model, developed by Paul (1987), represents a multi-dimensional arrangement of objectives, instruments, and intensities that mold and shape the participation process. Under the dimension of “intensity of participation” (similar to Arnstein’s conception), the levels go from ‘information sharing’ to ‘Initiating Actions’. The two intermediate levels are ‘consultation’ and ‘decision-making’. The dimension of “instruments” includes: field workers, community workers/committees, and user groups.” Finally, “objectives of participation” include: efficiency, cost sharing, effectiveness, capacity building, and empowerment.” (Paul, 1987; cited in Mantilla, 2000, p.34)

The third model consists of a division proposed by Rahnema (1999) of four types of participation, which are presented as functions of participation:

- the cognitive function, which generates a different mode of understanding of the realities to be addressed;
- the political function, which empowers the voiceless and the powerless, eventually creating a bridge between the establishment and its target population;
- the instrumental function, which provides the re-empowered actors with the new answers and to propose new alternatives to their quest; and
- the social function, through which individual, groups and institutions join together in the hope that the participatory approach enables them to meet everyone's needs.

2.3. Participation in Education

2.3.1. Functionalist Approach

Based on the assumptions of functioning of schools and families as components that complement each other and contribute to the well integrated, smooth-running and stable system (Ballantine, 1997, p. 8), there is a tendency to see all members as sharing values and agreeing on goals for the system. Families (and parents as their major representatives) are called upon to comply with specific and functional roles, which ought to be in harmony with the school. As John Dewey (1966, p. 87) observes, participation in school may lead to improved schooling because:

Bringing people into closer and more perceptible connection enables them to find a) more numerous and more varied points of shared common interests; b) greater reliance upon

the recognition of mutual interest; and c) continuous readjustment in social habits through meeting new situations produced by varied intercourse.

Participation in this context (attitudes, behaviors, actions, etc.) is seen or defined in terms of supports for the balance of the general system. From the functionalist perspective there is not recognition of or at least not a major focus upon possible divergent interests, ideologies, goals, and strategies. Conflict is viewed as pathological or temporary malfunctioning of the system. From this perspective, participation in school-related matters is generally seen as necessary and harmonious. Thus, nothing else could be seen as expected from Latino parents but support, for example, because confrontations (or even differing opinions) are not usually considered part of the interactions within the system, or better said there is not a real focus on systematic barriers to participation by some groups.

2.3.2. *Conflict Approach*

In contrast to the functionalist perspective, conflict theory assumes a tension in society and its parts, which is created by the competing interests of individuals and groups. As Waller (1965, pp. 8-9) states, “schools are in a state of constant disequilibrium; [...] and authority is constantly being threatened by students, parents, school boards, and alumni who represent other, often competing, interest groups in the system” (cited in Ballantine, 1997, p. 10). According to the conflict approach, parental participation (attitudes, behaviors, actions, etc.) may not necessarily be seen or defined in terms of supports, but mostly in terms of opposition or resistance by certain (subordinate) groups in relation to other (dominant) groups. There is recognition of the existence and importance of possible divergent interests, ideologies, goals, and strategies; the differences are often seen to be based on social class and racial and ethnic group

divisions. Though, conflict perspective also recognizes possibility of smooth-running system as ideologies deflect people from challenging system that does not serve their interest. In this context, interactions among groups are found to contain fundamental contradictions and conflicts of interest, domination, coercion, and subjugation; but not necessarily leading to mobilization of opposition or resistance (Bennett deMarrais and LeCompte, 1997). Moreover, Illich (1971, cited by Mantilla, 2002) argues that the top-down, oppressive and unidirectional nature of the relations of schools with individuals (students, parents, etc.) place the latter in a position of powerlessness. According to Kreisberg (1992), in a power-over dynamic, roles are well defined and shaped within the structure of the relationship. Parents participate in a subordinate and unequal condition in relation to school people. School personnel possess the mechanisms to influence or control parental actions, because power exists within the context of a relationship between people or things. Power does not exist in isolation nor is it inherent in individuals (Weber, 1946).

2.4. Defining “Community” and “Latinos”

It is important now to briefly discuss two important concepts, *community* and *Latinos*. It is very common that when talking about Latinos (as with other minority groups) in a particular place to refer to “the Latino community”. Community, then, tends to be associated with homogeneity and social common interest; thus, categories such as diversity, differences, and dissent seem not to be relevant.

2.4.1. Community

According to the *Webster’s New World Dictionary of the American Language* (1986), community is defined as:

1. a) all the people living in the same district, city, etc. b) the district, city, etc., where they live 2. a group of people having interest, work, etc. in common 3. society; the public 4. ownership or participation in common 5. a groups of animals and/or plants living together and having close interactions.

The term ‘community’ typically refers to a social group with similar interests, social structures, values and lifestyles. As Hewitt (1988, pp. 130-31) suggests, community is:

a territorially based social unit –such as the small town or village- that thoroughly embraces the lives of its members, who feel bound to one another as whole persons and whose sense of identification with one another and with the community is strong.

This definition implies a shared sense of values, norms, expectations, sentiments, worldview, etc. As Butler Flora et al. (1992, p. 14) write, “community refers to a place, a location in which a group of people interact with one another.” By relating the term to that of a social system, Butler Flora et al. (1992) identify place, people, and their institutions as key elements of any community. In this sense, community involves “the organization or set of organizations through which a group of people [or groups of people in a specific place seek to] meet their needs” (Flora et al, 1992, p.14; see also Eyles, 1985).⁶ Hewitt (1988, p. 131) categorizes this type of community as an “organic community; a community in which the members’ lives are rooted in and dependent on this social unit.”

According to McInerney (2002) this type of definition, what Iris Marion Young (1990) terms the “ideal of community,” is related to conventional understandings of community that “imply homogeneity, self-containment, and commonality of interests that often deny the

⁶ The social system, in this case, does not necessarily refer to the local or immediate system. It may refer to a broader level such as city, state, region, etc. A community in this sense may or may not exist “locally” (Butler Flora et al., 1992, 312).

complexity and diversity of people inhabiting a community.” Moreover, Butler Flora et al. (1992) assert that in the United States today identification as a member of a community also often occurs as an oppositional differentiation from other groups.” (p.311).

Young (1990) indicates that “there is no universally shared concept of community, only particular articulations that overlap, complement, or sit at acute angles to one another” (p.302). She argues, however, that the conventional way community is conceived “privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one’s understanding of others from their points of view” (p.300). From this idealistic perspective, Iris Young (1990) suggests, “community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another...the dream is understandable but politically problematic.” (p. 302)

Young (1990) problematizes “community” by reviewing the work of different scholars (Adorno and Derrida, among others), though her main point is that we need to treat the term “community” dialectically, a category that assumes unity by denying it. As Young (1990) asserts, “any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure.” (p.303). Moreover, Young (1990) illustrates that “any definition [of community] creates an inside/outside distinction, and the logic of identity seeks to keep those borders firmly drawn” (p.303). She summarizes: “Community appears, that is, as part of an opposition, individual/community, separated self/shared self. In this opposition, each term comes to be defined by its negative relation to the other, thus existing is a logical dependency” (Young, 1990, p. 306).

Young (1990) identifies a variety of limitations that central idea of community as involving face-to-face relationships among a relatively homogenous population. She argues that

this ideal notion of community denies difference within subjects, emphasizes totality, and ignores contradictions between individuality and collectivity or community. Young (1990) highlights instead as an alternative concept, the politics of difference, explaining that:

A politics of differences lays down institutional and ideological means for recognizing and affirming different ... groups in two basis senses: giving political representation to group interests and celebrating the distinctive cultures and characteristics of different groups. (p. 319)

As we can see, one of the main elements of discussion about “community” is related to homogeneity and difference. Also of considerable importance is that community does not necessarily imply geographical location. For example, although sometimes our discussion will be centered on a spatial referent, “the local”, this is not necessarily going to be the only referent for community when discussing the Latino parents in Chelsea. The Latino community may refer to the whole Latino population in the United States, some groups of them (e.g., Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Central American, etc.), a specific subgroup, large or small, etc. And for some participants, their community includes other Latinos (or other people) living in other parts of the U.S. or the world.

In this sense, conventional conceptualizations of community might be in some way associated with the functionalist perspective, because of the emphasis on homogeneity and consensus. From this perspective, Latinos are treated as a homogeneous group. However, as will be discussed in the next sections, Latinos are diverse along several dimensions and, because of that, their interactions and their forms of involvement with schools will vary depending on such differences. Young’s (1990) ideas about the ‘politics of difference’ may also be used to illustrate important issues for the discussion of Latino parental involvement in education. Moreover,

assumptions related to Conflict Theory, which seems to inspire Young, can be also used to examine the involvement of Latino parents of Chelsea in school-related activities. Latino parents, mothers and fathers, in general or in relation to specific subgroups, cannot be expected to participate in the same way and level, nor to unanimously support or challenge decisions and actions by schools authorities and personnel.

2.4.2. *Latinos/Hispanics*

Labels form part of the experience of individuals and groups (e.g., ethnic and racial groups) within the U.S. and other societies. Labels can be used by individuals and/or groups for purposes of self-identification or to identify other groups and have either constructive or destructive consequences (e.g., Nieto, 1992; Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1995).⁷ Labels are particularly important in studies about ethnicity and in ethnographic studies. Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte (1995, pp. 220-21) remind us that very “often labels are ascribed by the dominant group in society but, particularly in recent decades, ethnic groups have selected their preferred labels” and that “labels change frequently and not all labels are universally accepted by all members in a particular group.”

“Latinos” could be discussed as a dialectic term that synthesizes similarity with diversity and homogeneity with heterogeneity (Darder et al., 1997). Latinos are diverse and can be characterized as a “multicultural, multi-racial group, with roots in several continents, from native people whose ancestors came from Asia to settle in the Western Hemisphere several millenniums ago, to people from Europe and the Middle East and Africa” (Moquin et al., 1971, p.340). Latinos include Roman Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and people with deep connections to

⁷ Categories such as minorities, Hispanos, Hispanic(s), Latinas, Latinos are used here in a constructive way, although at times I will discuss how these terms are used in destructive ways.

Mixtec, Nahua, and other native American religious beliefs (Alvarez, J., 1991). A group that comprises peoples whose first language can be a European language (e.g., Spanish, Portuguese or English) or a native language (e.g., Quechua, Nahuatl, or Qiché.) As Rodriguez and Trueba (1999) put it: “The Latino people are racially, socially, and economically highly diversified; but they share cultures, language, history, values, a worldview, and ideals” (p.48) For Trueba (1999), “the terms multiple identities and multiple affiliations ... are characteristics of Latinos” (p. xxxix).

In academic or conventional terms, “Latinos” are considered a “minority” and the U.S. law categorizes them as Hispanics (although this category excludes people from Brazil and other regions in which Spanish is not the main language). According to the 2000 census, the Latino population is the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., but one that continues to experience the worst social, political and economic situation. Perhaps this is one of the sources that have traditionally inspired researchers from different fields to study “what is wrong” with the Latino population, looking mostly at its malfunctioning in the general society, although some studies might seek to illuminate “what is wrong” with the way the system treats Latinos (Trueba, 1999).

In education, as many other societal institutions, Latinos have been traditionally associated with failure and not with success; however, recently, there is more interest for showing some of struggles won by Latinos (e.g., Carrasquillo, 1991; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1993). In some social science literature and in popular culture images Latinos are associated with negative terms and stereotypes: laziness, alcoholism, delinquency, drugs, vandalism, etc. (Moquin et al., 1971; Carter, 1970). There have also been some studies that show Latinos positively as hard workers, family-oriented people, enthusiastic, etc. (Hurtado, 1995).

Latinos' experiences in the United States have been both unique and complex. Latinos predate Anglo populations in the Western hemisphere, and they have not followed the assimilationist patterns of other immigrants. According to Hurtado (1995), "numerous factors (e.g., continued immigration, resistance to marginalization) account for why Latinos ... maintain self-identity, familism, and Spanish language." (p. 705). Oftentimes, the Latino experience in the United States has consisted of living between the hyphens. For example, third- and fourth-generation, U.S.-born Puerto Rican Americans may be considered "too American" in Puerto Rico and "not American enough" in the United States. This bicultural experience is shared by many Latinos (Parker, Deyhle & Villenas, 1999, p. 102). The suffix "American" has acquired a connotation in the process of becoming assimilated (by force or voluntarily) without losing completely the connection with one's roots; thus, we find labels such as Mexican-American, Guatemalan-American, Salvadoran-American, Honduran-American, Nicaraguan-American, Costa Rican-American, Panamanian-American, Central American-American, Colombian-American, etc. (Arturo Arias, 2000). Every Latino immigrant group has had somewhat different experiences in the United States, having been incorporated or migrated as a result of different experiences, traumas, etc. in their countries of origin. As Truebas (1999) points out:

Prior to arriving in the United States, many Latinos have experienced terrorism, poverty, political and religious persecution, hunger, extended periods of high stress, arduous physical activities, the bureaucratic nightmare of standing in daily lines to obtain legal documents, physical danger, and other test of mental endurance. Their histories are as diverse as their physical, socioeconomic, and cultural characteristics. (p. xxxviii).

Exchanges between Latinos and members of other groups entail a type of dynamic that, according to Morales (2002), is transforming this society. In other words, while many Latinos

continue to experience structural exclusion and discrimination, the situation of Latinos is changing the United States. For example, bilingual education has been challenged politically and legally and the “English-only” movement has won some battles (counting Arizona, California, and Massachusetts); yet, more non-Latino people are speaking Spanish or wish to learn this language, which also is one of the most important languages in commerce: one also sees more Latino products, particularly foods, becoming prominent in the United States.

Puerto Rican and Central American are two subgroups of Latinos that exhibit many similarities as well as differences. As with other groups of Latinos:

these [two] groups share various degrees of familiarity with Spanish language and such cultural traits as the importance of the extended family [‘familism’], an emphasis on spiritual and interpersonal relationships, respect for authority, and a focus on the ‘here and now’... (Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco, 1995, pp. 48-49)

While almost all Central Americans, with the exception of those born in the U.S., have experienced a long process of legal incorporation into the U.S., Puerto Ricans are unique among the Latino groups, in that they are all U.S. citizens by birth. This distinction gives Puerto Ricans – different from Central American – the potential for political participation and other possibilities to act in the U.S. society (Contreras et al., 2000). According to the 2000 Census, after people of Mexican background (58 %), Puerto Ricans (9.6 %) represent the second largest groups of Latinos from specific countries, while Central Americans (including Costa Ricans, Guatemalans, Hondurans, Nicaraguans, Salvadorans and ‘other Central Americans’) are in third place (4.8%). As both Trueba (1999) and Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1993) point out, Central Americans, coming from relatively impoverished developing countries and typically from

the lower socioeconomic strata, tend to have experienced traumatic experience before and during the process of arriving to the United States.⁸

2.5. Group Differences in Experience and Perceptions/Conceptions

In explaining why some minority groups differ with respect to school achievement, Gibson and Ogbu (1991) distinguish between what they call immigrants or voluntary minorities and nonimmigrant or involuntary minorities, based on how they were incorporated into the United States or other host societies:

Voluntary or immigrant minorities are people (and their descendants) who have moved more or less voluntarily to the United States because they believe that this will lead to more economic ... opportunities and greater political freedom. Involuntary minorities (and their descendants) are those groups who were initially incorporated into U.S. society against their will by Euro-Americans through slavery, conquest, or colonization (p.5)

Examples of voluntary minorities are Latinos (e.g., Central Americans), with the exceptions of Puerto Ricans and Cubans.⁹ Puerto Ricans – along with Native Americans, African Americans, Mexican Americans,¹⁰ and Native Hawaiians – can be considered to be involuntary minorities.¹¹

Gibson and Ogbu (1991) go on to state that:

⁸ However, people from Nicaraguan coming to the U.S. during 1980's are an exception to this rule.

⁹ Though Cubans in recent years have come to this country under similar circumstances to many Central Americans, once they arrive on U.S. land, they are automatically integrated – at least officially – into this society; something that do not happen to Central Americans.

¹⁰ Mexican Americans are classified as involuntary minority group because they were initially incorporated by conquest and annexation through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago in 1848. Mexicans coming more recently to the United States from Mexico are considered voluntary immigrants.

¹¹ The United States “colonized” or “liberated” Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines in 1898, when Spanish rule of these territories ended. Both Cuba and the Philippines later gained political independence from the U.S.. For this reason, Cubans and Filipinos coming to the United States come more or less as voluntary immigrants or refugees.

Some [...] ethnographic studies indicate, specifically, that there may be different patterns of adaptation in school which lead to differential school success for immigrants and nonimmigrant minorities, partly because of different historical which lead to different adaptive responses (p.4).

According to Gibson and Ogbu (1991), there are some community forces that affect students differently across different groups, including: a) cultural models, b) cultural frames of reference, c) degrees of trust or acquiescence minorities have for White American and the societal institutions they control, and d) educational strategies that are developed and used in schools that result from the other elements. As Gibson and Ogbu (1991) affirm, these factors are dependent in part on the group's history, its present situation, and its future expectations.

Ogbu's (1978) Cultural Model focuses on peoples' understandings of their world, which guide their interpretation of events in that world and their own actions in it. The folk theories or folk models of different groups serve as cultural frames that orient members of the group to be ambivalent, oppositional, or non-oppositional (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991). For example, according to Gibson and Ogbu (1991), voluntary minorities develop -- and the pass of the next generation - - expectations that continue to influence the way that they perceive and respond to obstacles that confront them in their host society, including discrimination in education. That is, voluntary minorities:

(a) ... chose to come to the United States instead of going to Japan or Britain and (b) ... were not forced by Euro-Americans against their will to come to the United States, either through conquest, slavery, or colonization. What is important here is that members of

The status of Puerto Rico is ambiguous: It is neither a state within the U.S. polity nor an independent nation in the real sense. Many Puerto Ricans feel that their "country" is still a colony of the United States (see Ogbu, 1978, 1990).

these minority groups do not interpret their presence in the United States as forced on them by Euro-Americans (Gibson and Ogbu, 1991; p. 28)

In contrast, involuntary minorities experience a different situation in regards of their incorporation to the United States society. These minorities have been relegated to menial positions and denied true assimilation into the mainstream of U.S. society (as were non-White immigrants).

Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1992 & 1995) are among of the scholars who have been focusing their research on Latinos for a long time. In the last ten years they have studied Latino immigrants' experiences in the United States. They have documented trends in education and other aspects of the socialization process experienced by Central Americans, in particular. Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1992 and 1995) agree with Gibson and Ogbu that cultural constructions in new settings are always based on individuals' and/or groups' previous experiences.

Erickson (1987), however, raises criticisms about Gibson's and Ogbu's theories in regard to the unproblematic way in which they generalize about voluntary immigrant groups. For example, he questions the overgeneralization that most of the students of voluntary minority groups do well in school and society and that all involuntary minorities groups' group members fail. Erickson also questions Gibson's and Ogbu's idea that all voluntary immigrants are willing to become assimilated into the United States society (cited in Merry, 2004-forthcoming).

The work of Barlund (1996) contributes to this study in the sense of situating sources of an individuals' or a group's perceptions. According to this scholar, every person creates her/his own distinctive world(s), which are related to the individual's social context and her/his culture, group, subgroup, etc. Barlund (1996) points out that cultures encourage different interpretations

and definitions of things happening in societal spaces (e.g., family, school, etc.). Moreover, Garza and Gallegos (1985) point out that differences in people's perceptions of various influences can lead to different social behaviors.

2.6. Latino Parental Involvement in Education

Conventional definitions of parental involvement imply deep, close/intimate acts, which are not isolated but linked. Such definitions encourage us to think about acts that go beyond 'attending' or even 'participating' and are more related to 'commitment'. Parental involvement, thus, implies more than one individual, more than one person's willingness; in other words, it implies mutuality.

There are different views of exactly what parent involvement is (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999) and these views vary across cultures (Trumbull et. al., 2001). According to Ascher (1988), parent involvement may easily mean quite different things to different people:

It can mean advocacy: parents sitting on councils and committees, participating in the decisions and operation of schools. It can mean parents serving as classroom aides, accompanying a class on an outing, or assisting teachers in a variety of other ways, either as volunteers or for wages. It can also conjure up images of teachers sending home notes to parents, or of parents working on bake sales and other projects that bring schools much needed support. Increasingly, parent involvement means parents initiating learning activities at home to improve their children's performance in school: reading to them, helping them with homework, playing educational games, discussing current events, and so on (p. 109).

Parental involvement or participation in education refers to parental behaviors and attitudes toward children's learning at home, at schools, and in the community. Parental involvement in learning at home includes such things that are logically related to the act of "parenting" as showing an interest in and encouraging children's learning, having high learning expectations, being enthusiastic about learning, checking students' studying and doing homework, and participation in school events (e.g. Epstein, 1996; Espinosa, 1995). As Chavkin (1995) indicates, all of these behaviors communicate positive messages to children about learning. Parental involvement at school can include participation in conferences, training programs, and other school events; assistance at school; or service as an advisor or decision-maker at school. According to Epstein (1996), these behaviors and actions may provide parents with opportunities to interact in a more or less equal way with school personnel as well as to be informed about school policies and activities.

Bermudez (1994) observes that, traditionally, parental involvement in education has been associated with parents as agents of service for the school rather than as equal partners in the educational endeavor. Schools determined the areas for assistance and how parents would assist. Nevertheless, Salinas-Sosa (1997) suggests that "[p]arent involvement is now seen as greater than parents participating in the "bake sale," while Fine (1993) encourages us to be aware about *[ap]parent involvement*, that is, manipulation of parents –and their participation- for political ends.

It is important to consider that schools and parents may have different views about what involvement entails, and they may have different conceptions of the goals of such involvement (Trumbull et. al., 2001). For example, Scribner, Young and Pedroza (1999) found through interviews with teachers in high-performing Hispanic schools in Texas that teachers define

parental involvement as participation in formal activities, such as school events and meetings, or working as a teacher assistant or tutor. This same study showed that parents tend to define involvement as in terms of informal activities at home, such as "checking homework assignments, reading and listening to children read, obtaining tutorial assistance, providing nurturance, instilling cultural values, talking with children, and sending them to school well fed, clean, and rested" (p. 37). While teachers viewed parent involvement as a means to improving academic achievement, parents viewed their involvement as "a means of supporting the total well-being of children" (Scribner, Young, & Pedroza, 1999, p. 37). School personnel tended to define parental involvement as participation in formal activities, and thus parent involvement was measured through attendance at these events. However, if participation at school events is used as the only indicator of parental involvement, it may not provide a full picture of the contribution of parents (at least from the perspective of parents).

By synthesizing some of the results of Gerardo Lopez's (2001) research on a Latino migrant family, Barri Tinkler (2002) illustrates how definitions of parental involvement are affected by cultural/familial factors:

Gerardo Lopez (2001), who studied a migrant family in Texas whose children consistently maintained a high level of academic achievement, proposes a different definition of parent involvement. Lopez sees the traditional definitions of parent involvement to be exclusionary of marginalized people such as migrant workers. The family he studied, the Padillas, provided evidence of their involvement by the achievement of their children, but they were not involved in their children's education in any of the traditionally defined ways. For the Padillas, their goal was to teach "their children to appreciate the value of their education through the medium of hard work" (p.

420). In order to do this, the Padillas took their children to work with them in the fields and constantly reminded them of the importance of hard work. The Padillas also consistently pointed out the employment limitations created by a lack of education. The Padillas essentially gave their children a choice "to either work hard at school or work hard in the fields" (p. 420). Thus, included in the many definitions of parent involvement is now added the "transmission of socio-cultural values" (p. 430).

When considering varying perceptions of parent involvement, not only might there be differences in defining involvement, but there may also differences in the perceived roles that educators and parents should play. Several studies of Latino parents, found that they see a sharp distinction between the role of the school and the role of parents, with the role of parents being to provide nurturance and to teach morals, respect and good behavior and the role of the school being to instill knowledge (Carger, 1997; Chavkin, 1991; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Trumbull et. al., 2001). When parents are asked to take on responsibilities that they traditionally view as the domain of school personnel, they may be unsure of the role they are asked to play (Sosa, 1997) and they may feel that they are encroaching on the school's territory. In the Latino culture, teachers are highly respected (Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995) and any interference from parents may be considered rude and disrespectful (Chavkin, 1991; Chavkin & Gonzalez, 1995; Espinosa, 1995; Trumbull et. al., 2001). Therefore, though teachers view parents asking questions about assignments and grades to show caring for their child's education, Latino parents may view this as a sign of disrespect (Trumbull et al., 2001).

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Research Design

This study is defined as a case study because of its research design and method, as well as its research emphasis on a particular setting (Miles & Huberman, 1986). For example, this study focuses on parental involvement in Chelsea's Latino community, specifically the perceptions of thirteen families (twenty-two parents). Yin (1989) suggests that the case study, as an empirical form of inquiry, is the "preferred" method when:

- 1) "how" or "why" questions are being posed,
- 2) the investigator has little control over events, and
- 3) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon some real-life context (p. 13)

The research questions are closely linked with the subject of the case study, namely Latino parents' perceptions of the nature, purposes, and consequences of their involvement in Chelsea (Massachusetts) elementary and middle schools. Parents provided their conceptualization and understanding of their and others' roles regarding children's education and the positive and negative factors affecting their involvement with it. Parental involvement represents a phenomenon that, for various reasons, has been of interest to such individuals as educators, researchers, and government officials in the United States and other societies. In the case of Chelsea, parental involvement has been a phenomenon for many people in the local community and as well as Massachusetts organizations concerned with Latinos' education in general. In fact, when this research began, there was an initiative in Chelsea to promote the

engagement of the Latino community in issues of education, which encouraged my study. A missing piece of the initiative was the parental perspective – parents’ own understanding of education, particularly their role and involvement in their children’s education and school-related activities.

It was not my intention in this study to replicate any particular previous study on parental involvement; instead, the case study research method was used in order to present valuable insight to the field regarding Latino parental involvement in Chelsea.

3.2. The Setting of the Study

This study was focused on the views and experiences of parents of the two major Latino groups of Chelsea (Puerto Ricans and Central Americans) with children in different grades in the four regular elementary schools and the two regular middle schools of Chelsea, Massachusetts.¹² The schools under investigation are located in two complex buildings, but each school functions with its own administration. For the purpose of this study, the schools listed in the table below were given the following pseudonyms;¹³

Elementary Schools:	Middle Schools:
<i>Town Elementary School</i>	<i>North Pole Middle School</i>
<i>Ville Elementary School</i>	<i>South Pole Middle School</i>
<i>City Elementary School</i>	
<i>County Elementary School</i>	

¹² It is important to note that while parents with high school children were not included in the study per se, several of the participating parents who have either elementary or middle school children, or both, also reported having children at the high school.

¹³ Italics are intentionally used to signify that these names are pseudonyms.

The Chelsea Public School system is the only school district in the US managed (since 1989) by a private university, Boston University (BU). Chelsea is a small city, is located across the Charles River from Boston, and has a large low-income population (65%). According to the 2000 census, Chelsea has a population of about 35,000 people, with non-Latino Whites (38.3%) and Latinos (48.4%) constituting the largest ethnic groups. Central Americans and Puerto Ricans are the two major groups, constituting 35.4% and 31.6% of the Latino population in Chelsea, respectively. Importantly, Latinos have been the majority of the diverse student population for many years (approximately 60% in 1989 and 70% in 2002).¹⁴

Chelsea, Massachusetts exhibits similar characteristics to many communities in the United States, with large and diverse Latino populations (Meier & Stewart, 1991; Garcia, 2001). A significant proportion of the Latino population are immigrants,¹⁵ a factor which puts them at a disadvantage for being represented formally in the political system.¹⁶ For examples, only one member of the Latino community has ever been elected to the school board (Rivera, 1993)¹⁷ and – at the time of the study – only two of the eleven city council members were Latinos (despite Latinos comprising 48% of the city’s adult population).¹⁸ In the past, Puerto Ricans most often occupied these two positions in city council. In the history of Chelsea, Central Americans have never been elected to office.

¹⁴ Census 2000.

¹⁵ Although not specified, according to the 2000 Census, 67% of Latinos living in Chelsea are not Puerto Ricans.

¹⁶ Although insignificant, we must note that this is not the only barrier for Latinos who aspire to run for political representation in Chelsea, which is similar to other cities with large Latino populations. At-large system elections and non Spanish-speaking poll workers are examples of other barriers.

¹⁷ During the past five years, six white women and men as well as one African-American woman have been on Chelsea’s School Committee. Among the six non-immigrant white members, three of them have been serving for more than thirty years. According to Rivera (1993), from the beginning of the intervention, BU and the school system were questioned about Latino community participation in the process of defining educational policy and school practices.

¹⁸ These include currently a woman of Cuban background and a man of Argentina background.

3.3. Entering into the Field Setting

I entered the field setting in July 2002, not as a researcher but as a political/community activist affiliated with a community-based organization serving the Latino community of Chelsea. Before doing my research activity per se, I spent some time becoming familiar with aspects of Chelsea, mainly those aspects related to parents' situations in the Latino community. During the first six months in Chelsea, I had an intensive political involvement, which gave me the opportunity to meet leaders and other members of the Latino community. In addition to my duties as an activist, I organized and conducted workshops for parents and participated in meetings intended to promote the engagement of the Latino community in education issues.

This process allowed me to become involved with key persons in the community. I approached them to insure my topic choice was of interest to them to seek their advice in how to develop the study. This process of accessing the field with key Latinos in Chelsea was beneficial for designing the research, selecting participants, as well as defining the type of data and the way it would be collected. These key members of the Latino Community were particularly familiar with Latino parents' wishes and needs, limitations and worries, as well as interests and habits. I was conscious that in order to gain access to certain parents I needed to approach different sources or various 'sponsors' (Walker 1980, p. 49).

The key members of the Chelsea Latino community I met represented different positions, roles, and statuses. They included: a Presbyterian priest, a Latino member of the Catholic Church committee, two political activists, the superintendent,¹⁹ a teacher, three leaders of community-based organizations, the director of a state-wide organization supporting the

¹⁹ I just had a short conversation in person and a phone call with her. She talked about the concerns the school district had about Latino parents' lack of involvement, and suggested I contact parents related to "Padres Unidos".

initiative for community engagement, a staff member of the local community college, two businessmen with high school-aged (who also were initially contacted to be interviewed.)

This “first stage” of the research allowed me to become a Chelsea insider, and develop good relationships and trust with key members of the community. It also contributed to developing relationships with several of the twenty-two participants (of thirteen families.) Being part of an incipient group of Latino men working on an initiative against domestic violence and participating in other community activities and events (e.g., festivals, religious services, parties) facilitated my research process.²⁰ I was able to quickly learn the rules of social relationships within Chelsea’s Latino community and some of the expectations and understandings that people in Chelsea share.

Entering into field setting, initially as leader and member of the Chelsea community, then later as a researcher, was beneficial in order to develop rapport, trust, and empathy with the participants of the study. Once such an exercise was completed, I had a more realistic appreciation of the aspects of parental involvement on which to concentrate. These preliminary observations, however, are not used extensively within this study, since the purpose of them was considered part of my introduction to the field; they were used primarily to begin to establish relationships and to provide background information.

3.4. Defining the Roles of the Researcher

The intensive process of research was done after I stepped out of my role as a “professional” activist. After finishing my appointment at the end of August 2003, I became fully concentrated on my study and identified by all participants in my exclusive role as a researcher.

²⁰ Being part of this group of Latino men against domestic violence could have positioned me in conflict with at least some males in the community.

However, during the first year in Chelsea, playing a role as an activist combined with my personal/family activities as members of the Latino community, facilitated the process of interviewing and making key observations when visiting the participants' homes.

The personal contacts I made (first with leaders of the Latino community and then with parents participating in the study) helped me to elicit richer and more detailed responses. In addition, this method provided an excellent opportunity to make some adjustments to my research focus and anticipate the type of data needed. I was fortunate enough to speak with regular members of the community as well as with the leaders of the most important organizations and agencies serving Latinos in Chelsea. This quickly allowed me to develop confidence, trust, and rapport within the community and with several of the participants of the study. At the same time, however, there were some limitations for the research stemming from such personal contacts and (non-researcher) involvement.

Perhaps the most difficult area for me in this research experience while conducting my study was dealing with my own feelings, emotions, and attitudes. The people of Chelsea in general and particularly Latino parents knew me firstly in my role as a "professional" activist, and secondly from my personal and scholarly interests and concerns. I always showed my strong concern for Latino parental involvement in education and my interest in Latino parents' thoughts on that subject. In essence, I tried to communicate honestly to other Latinos of Chelsea who I am. They knew that I was a Salvadoran, a very committed husband and father, that I was pursuing a doctoral degree, and that my research interest was related to parental involvement in children's education.

Though dealing with these forces of the dual role of the researcher (Fetterman, 1998; Spradley, 1980; Yin, 1989), I was conscious that the more my views, attitudes and opinions

entered into the research situation, the less space would be available for other parents' perspectives and ideas. I tried to not lose sight of the ultimate goal of my endeavors: the description, elaboration, and analysis of the participants' perspective.²¹ Thus, becoming a familiar participant in the setting put me in a double situation, in one sense an easy one, and in another sense a more difficult one. This was, in part, one of the reasons why I decided to delay collecting the data until I could become somewhat detached from the field at the end of my appointment as a community activist and become fully concentrated on my role as a researcher.

3.5. Data Collection

This study employed ethnographic methods including interviewing, observation and collection of documents and other materials. Limited participant observation focused on informal conversations, home visits, and interactions with community members (e.g., in churches, recreational/sport facilities, community organizations). Some observations also focused on events related to parents' involvement in school or community activities organized by school personnel or representatives of other community organizations. Examples of these events or activities included workshops for parents and community forums. As was described in earlier sections, these were preliminary research activities that helped to provide background for the research.

I used interviewing as the main method for data collection in order to gather in-depth perceptions, conceptions, attitudes, and beliefs from all the participant parents. This method of data collection enables close interaction with the participants, employing a humanistic approach

²¹ According to scholars such as Fetterman (1998), Spradley (1980), and Yin (1989), this has to do with the fact that in qualitative studies the researcher is the main instrument of the research, and usually finds her/himself simultaneously as a participant and social scientist. Within the ethnographic field of investigation, for example, it is argued that the researcher may participate in the lives of the people under study but also maintain a professional distance that allows valid and reliable observation and recording data (Fetterman, 1998).

(Fetterman, 1998). This was essential in that it helped uncover rich and in-depth community views of Latino parental involvement.

The interviews focused on the individual's perception of educational purposes and parental involvement in his or her children's education (see interview guide in Annex D.) Tape-recorded interviews of one and one-half to two and one-half hours in length were conducted from March 17 to April 26, 2004. The interviews were all conducted in Spanish, and after each session the interview was transcribed.²² (I translated some important quotes and excerpts from them and included them in Chapters Four and Five.) Prior to the interviews, all participants were contacted personally for a brief explanation of the study, followed by one or two phone calls for other related matters such as setting up the interview. After conducting the interviews, some of the participants were contacted again to clarify some points raised during their interviews.

3.6. The Participants

Thirteen "family" interviews were conducted – including twenty-two mothers and fathers (see Table 1 for participants' summary information).²³ In some cases there was only one parent and in others there were two, although both parents were not necessarily equally active in the conversation.²⁴ The thirteen families, including nine couples, three single mothers, and a grandmother, reflect the characteristics of the Latino population in Chelsea: employed adults (most with long working hours), members of low to middle-low income families, homemakers,

²² A summary of the main aspects of each interview is included in Chapter Four.

²³ Given the in-depth nature of my proposed interviews (see Annex D for Interview Guide), together with the volume of data they were sure to generate, I concluded that the sample size of twenty-four interviews would give me the best combination of range and depth while still proving manageable within the scope of a qualitative-ethnographic dissertation study. Two parents could not participate at the last minute due to a family emergency in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

²⁴ Each case is explained in Chapter Four.

and unemployed adults. The participants also reflect other important characteristics of the diversity of the Latino population with children in Chelsea public schools in terms of their beliefs and religious practices (Catholics, Presbyterians, and Protestants) and other aspects (i.e., most of them are Spanish speakers from different countries, and are either immigrants or non-immigrants.) Interviewees also vary in the amount of time they have been living in Chelsea.

The selection of the participants was guided by my prior involvement in the community and by advice elicited from key members of the Chelsea community. Also, to provide some basis for cross-group comparisons, twelve Central American and ten Puerto Rican parents were interviewed.

Table 1
Parents' Data Summary by Children's School Attendance and National/Ethnic Background

	Families	Parents by Children's Attendance	National/Ethnic Background	School Elem.	Mid.	Total Child.	Years in Chelsea	Labor Status
Fam.	<u>Elementary</u>							
1	Valladares*	Tomas Valladares* Teresa Valladares	El Salvador El Salvador	1		2	8 8	Employed Home
2	Tapia	Lucia Tapia Alejandro Tapia	Honduras Honduras	1		2	3 10	Employed Employed
3	Ramirez	Silvia Ramirez	Puerto Rico	1		2	15	Employed
4	Barraza	Mirna Barraza	Puerto Rico	1		1	7	Home
5	Santiago	Juana Santiago Ernesto Santiago	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico	1		1	13 9	Home Unemployed
	<u>Middle</u>							
6	Fernández	Carlota Fernández Abdón Fernández	El Salvador Puerto Rico		1	3	18 25	Employed Employed
7	Rosario	Yadira Rosario Milton Rosario	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico		1	2	7 7	Employed Employed
8	Rosales-Mejia	Angela Mejia Nestor Rosales	Puerto Rico El Salvador		2	2	5 5	Employed Employed
	<u>Elem. and Middle</u>							
9	Cortez	Eliseo Cortez Julia Cortez	Guatemala Guatemala	1	1	4	10 10	Employed Employed
10	Guevara	Cecilia Guevara	Guatemala	2	1	3	16	Employed
11	Torres	Sulma Torres Valiente Torres	Honduras Honduras	1	1	2	2 2	Employed Employed
12	Ortega	Maribel Ortega Julio Ortega	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico	1	1	6	15 15	Home Employed
13	Rivas	Rosibel Rivas	Honduras	1	1	2	5	Employed

* Note that pseudonyms are used to protect informants' identities.

The main criteria for sample selection were my theoretical and experiential “informed judgment” (Johnson, 1990, p.28) and the nature of the data I wanted to collect in relation to Puerto Rican and Central American parents’ perspectives. Networking with key informants/gatekeepers and the “snowball” technique were used to identify potential participants in the study.

The “snowball” method relies on contacting key individuals (potential participants or not) who then introduce the researcher to, or at least offer contact information about, other knowledgeable community members who may be willing to be interviewed or participate in the research. Although this method is a non-random way of selecting people to interview, it is often the most effective method for identifying a variety of busy Latino people who will be willing to participate in the study. The “snowball” method was also appropriate in the particular situation – such as the Latino community of Chelsea – where there are no available datasets or other necessary conditions for a random sampling approach.²⁵ Important studies on Latino parental involvement, which have used ethnographic methods (e.g., Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), found that networking methods such as the “snowball” approach are useful in identifying informants.

As presented in previous sections, the fieldwork involved a range of activities for becoming acquainted with potential participants. A Presbyterian vicar, a Latino member of the Catholic Church committee, two political activists, the superintendent, a teacher, three leaders of based-community organizations, the director of a state-wide organization supporting the initiative for community engagement, staff members of the local community college, and two

²⁵ Latino education studies conducted by the Gaston Institute-University of Massachusetts at Boston have not generated a database and include few elements that were used in this study for situating the problem (e.g., Nieto, S. and Rivera, R.; 1994, and Rivera, R. 1993).

businessmen formed the initial list of the key informants and gatekeepers.²⁶ Other potential participants were contacted through the “snow-ball” method in which potential and actual participants introduced me with other potential interviewees.

The following constituted the main criteria used in selecting the Latino parents for the study:

1. Parents/guardians with children in the four regular elementary and two regular middle schools under study.²⁷
2. All elementary and middle schools under study should be “represented,” with a variety of grades. The thirteen families (twenty-two parents in total) included five families with children in elementary schools, three families with children in middle schools, and five families with children in both elementary and middle schools.²⁸ The total number children related to the study was twenty-one, including twelve in elementary and nine in middle schools, ranging in age from 6-14 years old as shown in the following table:

²⁶ Although this study did not seek direct involvement of school personnel in contacting parents in order to avoid the “official/institutional referral,” the research did include a few names of parents suggested by the superintendent and two other employees of Chelsea public schools.

²⁷ Although there were several cases of parents participating in the study who also have children in the high school and other schools, the focus was related to the children in the four specific elementary schools and two middle schools. The Early Learning Center and the two-special/transitional education schools were not considered part of the study.

²⁸ In several cases, parents reflect combinations of both schools; this means that several parents with children in elementary school have children in middle school (or in High School.) The frame used for selecting participants did not seek to make contrast between the two school levels; instead it was intended that the study needed to reflect perspectives of parents from both school, so the study needed to have parents with children in all the elementary and the middle schools. It was a purpose of the study to generate data that help to portray a perspective of parents from all the schools. I prioritized to try to have this type of representation in the study, in terms of serving as a good source of “evidence” of the perceptions of parental involvement.

<u>Elementary Schools:</u>	<u>Children</u>	<u>Middle Schools</u>	<u>Children</u>
<i>Town Elementary School</i>	4	<i>North Pole Middle School</i>	5
<i>Ville Elementary School</i>	3	<i>South Pole Middle School</i>	4
<i>City Elementary School</i>	2		
<i>County Elementary School</i>	3		

3. In order to be a participant of the study, at least one parent had to be Puerto Rican or Central American (Guatemalan, Honduran, or Salvadoran).²⁹ This criterion is related not only to the fact that Puerto Ricans and Central Americans constitute majority subgroups among Latinos in Chelsea, but also to be able to address research question number five.³⁰
4. The participants had to be the main individuals responsible for their children's education; meaning that parents and guardians were considered potential participants (there is one case where the participant is an adoptive grandmother).
5. History of involvement in educational or community activities was not a criterion for selecting the participants per se, although some effort was made to include parents who varied with respect to the extent and forms of participation.
6. All the participants were working class, low to middle-low income parents.

This study represents, in some ways, the collection of multiple perspectives under similar/different situations. The interviewees were people with a variety of family situations, relationships to the school systems, different lengths of time of time living in Chelsea, etc. In this

²⁹ Central Americans from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras were the three major groups of Central Americans in Chelsea. Many people from these three countries had come to the United States to escape from military and government repression. People came from El Salvador and Guatemala during the 1970's and 1980's during civil wars in their countries, while Hondurans have mostly suffered military and government repression during the 1990's to the present. No one from Belize, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, or Panama is included in the statistics related to Chelsea. They are grouped under the Other Central American category.

³⁰ Interesting cases for the study were two cases of a Salvadoran woman married to a Puerto Rican man as well as another case of a Puerto Rican woman married to a Salvadoran man. These two cases were significant for the brief analysis of possible similarities and/or differences in views between Central Americans and Puerto Ricans.

sense, an important assumption related to the process of selection was that every participant's perception of parental involvement was affected by her/his past and present experience, including formal, informal and non-formal education, family situation, community involvement, processes of incorporation or insertion to the setting and to the context, etc.³¹

The process of choosing participants also implied a process of elimination of those potential interviewees who did not fit with the criteria. The first list of potential participants, before presenting the dissertation proposal, had nineteen families (forty-three parents), including parents with children in both elementary, middle, and high school. After redefining the focus of the research on only elementary and middle schools, seven families were omitted from the list. Due to time constraints and some of the aspects already mentioned in the first paragraph of this section (i.e., inclusion of parents from all elementary and middle schools with children in different grades and distribution of the two major groups of Chelsea Latinos), this study finally included twenty-two parents (including thirteen families.) This final list was the result of a process of a continued consultation with key Latino informants of Chelsea, including potential and actual participants. This process also included replacements of parents who had to withdraw from the study.

I collected and analyzed important documents and other material from the school system (e.g., a copy of the original agreement between Boston University/Chelsea School Districts, announcements, memos to parents, annual reports, public announcements, newspaper articles). I also located and reviewed other published studies on the Chelsea school system. These documents were used to provide some background for the research, to situate part of the problem

³¹ "The Latino people are racially, socially, and economically highly diversified; but they share cultures, language, history, values, a world of view, and ideals" (Trueba, 1998, p.48) For Trueba (1999), the terms "multiple identities and multiple affiliations ... are characteristics of Latinos." (p. xxxix).

of parental involvement in Chelsea, and to help define elements included in the interview protocol.

3.7. Data Analysis

I employed thematic analysis, which involved the coding and contextualizing of data to reflect the research relationships, main themes, concepts, and other specific components of the research. This was done based on LeCompte & Schensul (1999a & b) structures for organizing and analyzing the data.

The first step of this analysis (after collecting data – which also implies a sort of simultaneous analysis while working on data collection) was creating a codebook. This allowed me to categorize the first groups of data and helped me to organize – and thus gain access to – the data (e.g., narratives, quotes). I followed LeCompte and Schensul's (1999a & b) model in detail to organize and analyze the data I collected:

1. Becoming familiar with the data.

This introductory step provided me an early opportunity to reacquaint myself with the full body of information that I collected. Transcribing the thirteen audio-taped interviews to written narratives was a tedious but important task for later developing the analysis. In doing so, I listened and re-listened to the audiotapes to make sure I was including every word parents expressed in the interviews.³² A total of 278 written pages were the result of transcribing the thirteen 'family' interviews.

³² Driving four hours from Boston to Long Island gave me the chance to listen to several of the interviews before transcribing them.

During this process of reading and re-reading the transcriptions, I made and wrote down my impressions, which I later used to organize and frame my analysis. Given that parents participating in this study have different backgrounds and are from both urban/rural areas, I paid particular attention to some idiomatic expressions and other “special phrases” some parents used during the interviews. This helped to maintain a sort of “standardized” language in the data.

2. Focusing the analysis.

I focused my analysis by using the main research questions and some (re)interpretations of them (e.g., conceptualizing education, understanding of parental involvement, practice of parental involvement, and factors encouraging/discouraging involvement.) I looked at how each family responded to the questions and at all the respondents’ answers in order to identify consistencies and differences in their conceptions, involvement, and perceived opportunities/constraints. Given that the study included thirteen families with a total of twenty-two parents, I paid particular attention to the frequency of responses given by mothers or fathers as well as the quality of the responses in relation to the questions asked. When a question was directed to both of them and was answered by only one of them, I asked the other party in order to check for consistency. In most of such cases, there was more consistency than contradiction within couples interviewed. In these cases, I considered each statement as “a family statement.” This was not an issue in the cases of single mothers or the case of the adoptive grandmother.

For the fifth research question, which focused on comparing views of Puerto Ricans and Central Americans, the data were examined separately for each group (to look for homogeneity/heterogeneity within each group) and then cross-group analysis was undertaken.

3. Categorizing the Data.

I perused my data to identify themes. I read through the qualitative data I collected and identified the main themes and sub-themes parents articulated during the conversations. This process first involved reading and re-reading the 278 pages of transcriptions and then looking at main concepts and coherent categories among the participants. I assigned some letters and symbols/numbers next to the themes and ideas I found, which later helped me to identify and organize the data into categories.

In categorizing the narrative data, I used a combination of two approaches: preset categorization and emergent categorization. Some categories were first included in the research questions, and then others were added according to recurring data. For example, the first research question, “How do various Latino parents in Chelsea, Massachusetts conceptualize “education,” and the category “schooling” were connected to other categories of “formal education” and “home education.” This interactive process of combining preset with emergent categories allowed me to adjust the analysis and treatment of the data, and the process of generating results.

I then assigned codes and analyzed data. I manually organized data into the themes and sub-themes in a manner that allowed me to sort my data by assigning codes to everything I assembled from my interviews, observation, and informal conversation.

4. THE BACKGROUND AND VIEWS OF INDIVIDUAL PARENTS

4.1. Introduction

This chapter portrays the Latino parents in Chelsea who were interviewed, in terms of how they conceptualize “education” (and its contribution to their children’s lives); what they understand by “parental involvement” in their children’s education and school-related activities (in relation to teachers and other school personnel); and how, to what extent, and with what (perceived) consequences they are involved (or not involved) in their children’s education and school-related activities. In addition, this chapter examines the factors that have shaped these Latino parents’ views and actions, including their own prior experiences with schooling, non-formal education programs, social movements, community campaigns as well as their family (social and economic) situations and their interactions with and perceptions of school personnel.

Parents have been grouped according to their children’s attendance at elementary schools, middle schools, or both school levels.³³ As noted in Chapter 3, twenty-two parents were interviewed during thirteen interview sessions; all thirteen interviews sessions included “mothers” and nine of the thirteen included fathers. Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of the participants, with each quote being associated with the person(s) who made the statement. Table 2 summarizes important data about parents in the study, such as National/Ethnic background, educational attainment, children’s school attendance, total number of children, immigrant status, English facility, socio-economic status, and community/political involvement

³³ It is important to mention that several of the parents interviewed have other children, some of them attending Chelsea High School.

experience. A summary of what was said by each family is then presented, ordered by whether the parents have children in elementary, middle, or elementary and middle schools.

Table 2

Parents' Summary Data from School's Children Attendance

Family	Parents by Children's Attendance	Natl/Ethnic Background	Educational Attainment	School Elem.	Total Mid. Child.*	Immigrant Status**	English Facility	Socio-econ. Status	Comm/Polit. Involvement		
<u>Elementary</u>											
1	Valladares	Tomas Valladares Teresa Valladares	El Salvador El Salvador	Middle-8 High-9	1	2	Citizen Resident	Intermedia None	Low inc	Some little	
2	Tapia	Lucia Tapia Alejandro Tapia	Honduras Honduras	Assoc. Degree Assoc. Degree	1	2	Other Other	Elementary Intermedia	Mid-low inc	Strong little	
3	Ramirez	Silvia Ramirez	Puerto Rico	Assoc. Degree	1	2	Citizen	Proficiency	Mid-low inc	Strong	
4	Barraza	Mirna Barraza	Puerto Rico	Elementary-3	1	1	Citizen	None	Low inc	None	
5	Santiago	Juana Santiago Ernesto Santiago	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico	Elementary-4 Elementary-5	1	1	Citizen Citizen	Advance Advance	Low inc	None None	
<u>Middle</u>											
6	Fernández	Carlota Fernández Abdón Fernández	El Salvador Puerto Rico	Middle-GED HighSchool-12	1	3	Citizen Resident	Advance Advance	Mid-low inc	Some little	
7	Rosario	Yadira Rosario Milton Rosario	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico	Assoc. Degree HighSchool-12	1	2	Citizen Citizen	Proficiency Proficiency	Mid-low inc	Yes Unknown	
8	Mejia-Rosales	Angela Mejia Nestor Rosales	Puerto Rico El Salvador	High-GED Middle-GED	2	2	Citizen Citizen	Advance Advance	Low inc	Some Some	
<u>Elem. and Middle</u>											
9	Cortez	Eliseo Cortez Julia Cortez	Guatemala Guatemala	Middle-6 None	1	1	4 Other	None None	Low inc	None None	
10	Guevara	Cecilia Guevara	Guatemala	Assoc.Degree	2	1	3	Resident	Advance	Mid-low inc	Strong
11	Torres	Sulma Torres Valiente Torres	Honduras Honduras	College High-12	1	1	2	Other Other	Elementary Elementary	Low inc Low inc	Strong Strong
12	Ortega	Maribel Ortega Julio Ortega	Puerto Rico Puerto Rico	High-9 High-10	1	1	6	Citizen Citizen	Advance Advance	Low inc	None None
13	Rivas	Rosibel Rivas	Honduras	None	1	1	2	Other	None	Low inc	None

* Total children also include children at early learny centers and high school.

** This includes ilegal status and specific and limited work authorizations

4.2. Parents with Children in Chelsea Elementary Schools

4.2.1. *Tomas and Teresa Valladares*³⁴

Tomas and Teresa Valladares grew up in low-income families in El Salvador, and moved to the U.S. at different times. Tomas left El Salvador in 1986 to enter the U.S. and lived ten years in Los Angeles, California before moving to Chelsea in 1996. Teresa came to the U.S. directly to Chelsea in 1996 after getting married with Tomas. Tomas mentioned having many relatives living in Chelsea. Teresa and Tomas have two children, a seven-year-old son in first grade at *Ville Elementary School* and a four and one-half year old daughter enrolled in pre-school at Hills Early Education Center. Tomas works as a supervisor in the area of maintenance at Boston Housing, in Boston. He has been working a maximum of forty hours since he received his residence status (known as the “green card”) eight years ago. Teresa is dedicated to her children and has never been employed since coming to Chelsea, though she has participated as a volunteer for the St. Rose Catholic Church in Chelsea and other community-based organizations.

Teresa completed grade nine of high school, while Tomas finished middle school, both in El Salvador. Their formal education was interrupted because of their family’s economic situation, and the need to leave school to earn money, but particularly by the war. Tomas remembers that “working was first, then study in the evening. ... [I]t was not a matter that I did not want to continue [going to school] but [during the civil war] ‘curfew’ was set at 6 pm when classes started... [T]hen I left the country because I wanted to be alive.” Both said that the education of their children is one of their priorities; they want to give to their children something that they did not get. In this regard, Teresa commented that “first of all, we want our children to

³⁴ Both parents were very involved in the interview.

be educated as good persons, and also study [at school] in order for them to become university-educated, to achieve a good profession.”

They view education as occurring at home and at school, with the former serving as a foundation for the latter, Tomas indicated “one brings to school what it is learned at home, because parents are the ones who prepare children to go to school...but, it is also the lessons at school that helps a person to be successful.”

While interviewing these parents at their home on a Sunday morning, I observed that their two children were watching television for about one hour. Then their son – on whom the interview focused – approached quietly to ask his mom if he could play with his videogame, and his mom replied that he could do that after reading the book he was assigned to read during the weekend.³⁵

This couple sees formal education as central part of their children’s education and lives, defining school success not only in terms of getting good grades but also as developing a “pattern of success.” For example, they commented with pride that their son has good grades (A’s and B’s) and has received recognition from the principal and his teacher, but also discussed the importance of keeping developing a pattern of success. Tomas said:

...[I]t is the only way they can always have a successful attitude, because when you are doing things well, or very well, that motivates you to continue [achieving]. What I am trying to say is that continued success motives you to continue searching for success. The effect that it can have on our son is that he is going to always have informed and developed thoughts and aspirations.

³⁵ Roles in this family are well defined. Teresa in general is more concerned with caring for children and household activities, while Tomas is the provider. They said that it was carefully planned that he was going to concentrate more on working while Teresa would be at home.

Tomas and Teresa defined parental involvement in education connected to this success as a continued process of “always being with [one’s children] since their first days of life, giving to them all they need, support to always succeed.” Tomas also sees as necessary for his son’s continuing success to have an appropriate home environment as well as to establish and maintain good relationships with teachers, the principal and other school personnel. Although Teresa holds the major responsibility, both parents are involved in homework and other schoolwork. Tomas indicated that they have good relationships with school personnel, but that they do not visit the school often or participate much in meetings. Visiting school is a shared responsibility, and both of them attend open houses. They didn’t mention (nor were they directly asked) about their involvement in educational activities, such as visiting museums, which other parent interviewees discussed.

Tomas and Teresa identified the main factors favoring their level of involvement in their son’s education and school-related activities. The first factor is the families’ favorable economic situation. Since Tomas got his U.S. residency permit in 1995 and citizenship in 2001, he has had a good job and earns a decent income, which means that Teresa does not have to work outside the home and can dedicate her time to the children and the home. Tomas commented that they fortunately do not have to deal with issues of poverty and insecurity that other immigrants are experiencing. Other factors that they said enable them to participate are their level of formal education, their involvement in non-formal education programs related to parental involvement and their participation in some political/community activities, such as voter registration and mobilization. These experiences have helped them to develop a better understanding of their roles as parents as well as to become more aware of the needs of and ways to improve the situation of the Chelsea Latino community. Tomas commented:

Participating in community and political activities has definitely had very positive effects on our way of seeing things and our actions. Personally, it has helped me to have a better understanding of my capacities to help my family and my [Latino] community. Our children are learning about this through us. This experience has made me think how important it is for Latinos to participate and struggle for political representation, including at schools. Community participation is preparing me for future participation on school boards... it is important for me to share what I learn with my son.

Tomas and Teresa Valladares also identified factors affecting negatively their involvement in school-related activities and their son's education. The first factor is Teresa's limited fluency in English, which means that she cannot easily help her son with his schoolwork or become involved in the PTO or other type of school organizations, which tend to function only in English. A second factor is their lack of knowledge the school system, which particularly limits Teresa's ability to get involved in school-related activities. As Teresa mentioned "we feel intimidated by a system that we don't know." A third factor that limited their involvement is the lack of interest and efforts by school personnel to help them to know the system and in general motivate them to get involved with. As Tomas commented: "They [the school personnel] don't care if we really know or want to know and learn about the school system, nor [are they really interested] in our participation [in meetings and school activities] because they don't care about our opinion."

4.2.2. *Lucia and Alejandro Tapia*³⁶

Lucia and Alejandro Tapia have two children: a ten year old daughter who is in fourth grade at *Ville Elementary School* and a seventeen year old son who is a tenth grader in high

³⁶ Although both were involved in the interview, Lucia was more active in addressing issues and in including references to Alejandro's views. As it became evident through the interview, Lucia holds the major responsibility in their children's education and school-related activities.

school.³⁷ Alejandro has lived in Chelsea for more than ten years, while Lucia and her two children have lived there for three years. Alejandro completed an Accounting degree equivalent to an associate degree in the U.S., while Lucia completed also an associate degree in Nursing. Both of them earned their degrees in Honduras. Lucia works eight hours a day (9 am to 5 pm) as an assistant social worker in a community-based organization, providing health and educational assistance to teenage mothers and their children, while Alejandro works as a supervisor in a furniture factory. He usually works between ten and twelve hours a day, Monday to Friday, and six to eight hours on Saturday. Lucia as well as Alejandro mentioned they have relatives in Chelsea.

For them, the education of their two children is one of their main priorities. Alejandro commented how for their children “going to school is a must and getting good grades is very important for them to be prepared for their future lives as good people and university-professionals. Lucia, who has the major responsibility for their children’s education at home, commented that she and her husband always try to keep their children interested in studying by giving them support and spending time with them *<acompañándolos>* because “it is the only way they can succeed, particularly in a culture that is not our culture” (Lucia). Alejandro commented that Lucia and he take active role in their daughter’s education with respect schoolwork, although he admitted that his overload work usually limits his opportunities to visit school to talk with their daughter’s teacher, but that he never misses an open house. He also visits school, when it has been necessary, making arrangements at his work. For them schooling is their children’s path to success in their work and more general lives, and they believe that their

³⁷ At some point, due to the focus of the study, the interview was directed to the issues as they related to their daughter and the elementary school.

interaction with their children is a key since “we can not command them to do if we don’t do with them” (Lucia).

With this in mind, they shared their strong commitment to their children’s education. Particularly, Lucia was involved in many ways, including: being informed of everything regarding their daughter’s activities and needs at school (class schedule, materials, trips, extracurricular activities at school, etc.), monitoring her daughter’s homework and helping her with it when necessary, designating an appropriate place and resources for their daughter to study as well as setting up a schedule for her to follow (which includes not only schoolwork but also home responsibilities like household chores). In addition to these aspects, which these parents see as very important in contributing to their daughter’s success in schooling, they emphasized the ability and commitment of teachers and other school personnel.³⁸ For Lucia and Alejandro, communication in both directions between parents and educators is a key. Thus, in this regard, Lucia indicated that one of the things she had the opportunity to do during the first two years she was not working was taking the initiative to introduce herself to her daughter’s teachers and frequently talk (in person or by phone) with them, instead of waiting to be called into school for a problem. Lucia and, when possible, Alejandro also try to participate in at least the monthly “coffee hours” at school, which are organized to discuss general concerns about students’ academic performance.³⁹ However, neither Lucia nor Alejandro is currently participating in the PTO.

Although the family faced a difficult economic situation during the first two years after she and the two children came to the U.S., Lucia thinks that it was a good idea that she waited two years to start working outside the home. This way she could be completely focused on

³⁸ In giving a good teaching (where they showed satisfaction because “Curriculum has been improved [at Ville school]) and reinforcing their daughter’s attitude towards advancing in her academic preparation.”

³⁹ As commented by Lucia, “coffee-hours” are held only in English.

helping her children with their school and the process of transition to the new culture. Moreover, during this period she was able to learn at least few things about the school system – particularly parents’ rights and responsibilities, to become knowledgeable about the experience of Latinos and other residents of Chelsea, and to get involved in several community activities related to educational and political issues.⁴⁰

Lucia and Alejandro identified several main factors favoring and encouraging their involvement in school-related activities. First, Lucia’s and Alejandro’s views and attitudes towards their children’s education and success; in Lucia’s opinion “to want is to be able to do” <querer es poder>, a thought that is influenced by “all” the things that she and her family have brought with them from Honduras. For example this includes Lucia’s level of awareness, which she developed as a result of her upbringing and her continued involvement in community activities. As she recalls:

Every person always needs somebody or something to inspire or motivate them. I got that from my grandmother who, though she never went to school, was a leader in her small town. She ‘injected’ in me [the desire] to set goals and work to reach them, but always to struggle [to help] others, above all, [members of] the family.

Secondly, Lucia identified her and Alejandro’s level of formal education as something, which positively influences their involvement. Both Alejandro and Lucia hold associate degrees,

⁴⁰ The Tapia family hosted me at their home on five occasions to conduct the interviews. This gave me a great opportunity to make some observations at their home, which I got their consent to do. The most important things observed were: both parents, but mainly Lucia, discuss homework, her jobs and church activities with her daughter. I also observed these parents monitoring their daughter’s television programs and length of time to watch. The Tapia family also has two computers at home, as well as many written materials related to school, family, community development and religion. As I observed, extracurricular activities for this family consisted of sports or other types of activities happening at the St. Rose church, where the whole family seems to participate. Lucia involves her daughter in her activities as an instructor of catechism at St. Rose Church every Sunday at 8:30am, and at 11:30 the whole family regularly attends mass.

which give them confidence not only in helping their daughter with her schoolwork but also in interacting with school personnel.

Thirdly, Lucia identified as important factors in enabling/encouraging their participation is their relatively acceptable economic situation and the fact, as mentioned above, that Lucia did not have to work outside the home during a key transition period. Other factors that contribute are Lucia's involvement in very important community activities, such as becoming as one of the leaders of the Latino Catholic Church of Chelsea; participating in Chelsea voter registration and mobilization in the 2002 state elections, and being one of the main organizers of the group of Latino parents with children in Chelsea's school, "Padres Unidos."⁴¹ Both parents' participation in school-related activities has been facilitated because there is a "certain type of opening on the part of some people of elementary school," Lucia indicated.

Lucia identified key factors that limit or even sometimes inhibit her and her husband's participation. First, Lucia noted her problems interacting in English and thus the need to rely on interpreters to communicate with most of the people at the school (though the principal speaks some Spanish.) This happens when Alejandro is not able to participate. Lucia also commented that understanding English materials or any form of communication with the school has depended on Alejandro's English proficiency. However, it is noteworthy that at the time of the interview she was taking an English (and computer) class.

Secondly, Lucia commented that she still lacks in depth knowledge of the school system. Although she has made progress in learning about parents' rights and responsibilities, for example, by attending sessions organized by a community-based organization, it is difficult for her to understand how the system works. She wonders why the school authorities do not make

⁴¹ "Padres Unidos" is an organization created in 2001 by Lucia and other Latino parents with the support of a community-based organization. The mainly center their actions on parents with children in Chelsea High School. Lucia commented that "Padres Unidos" was still in a process of formation.

more of an effort to provide parents with this information. In this regard, Alejandro also admitted to having very little knowledge of the school system and limited involvement in community/political activities - only in the past two elections.

Another factor that discourages their participation in school-related activities is the limited multicultural awareness on the part of the school personnel. For example, Lucia questioned whether Boston University personnel, School Committee members and school administrators are really aware (or care) that Chelsea is a multicultural environment, and one in which Latinos are the majority. Lucia noted that she has not been motivated to participate in the school's PTO because the School Committee seems to block every initiative that favors Latinos. She said that this happens because "they [the School Committee members] are very old people, serving [in their positions] for many years, [and they do not] have anything to do with Chelsea; they don't even have grandchildren in Chelsea's schools."

4.2.3. *Silvia Ramirez*

Silvia Ramirez has two children, a sixteen-year-old son attending high school and a nine-year-old daughter at *Ville Elementary School*. Silvia was born in New York of Puerto Rican parents, and considers herself to be Puerto Rican. She moved to Chelsea fifteen years ago; many members of her [extended] family, except her father who went back to San Juan, also live in Chelsea. She is divorced and works as a coordinator of programs for Latino youth in a non-profit community-based organization forty hours a week. Silvia has been very involved for more than ten years in political activities with Latino groups in Chelsea. Silvia is fluent in both English and Spanish, having grown up speaking the two languages. Silvia completed high school in New York and an associate degree in Accounting in Chelsea.

The education of her children is very important so that they can “learn things they can contrast to reality and also ... interact with different people to get the sense of diversity. [Furthermore, school is] a space where they put in practice discipline, respect and the morals they receive at home.” Unlike most of the other parents who were interviewed, Silvia does not view schools as “preparing children for good jobs” and she also criticizes the schools in Chelsea for “denying the values of collaboration and equality by inculcating individuality and inequality.” For her, Chelsea’s schools system does not provide the kind of education most of people of Chelsea need.

Although Silvia wants her children to study “to become university-educated persons but with consciousness,” she was very clear that education should not be primarily about individual economic success, but should prepare youth to dedicate their service to the community. This view is modeled in her own life, as she notes: “I have to work double, at home and in the community.” For Silvia success at school must not only be reflected in grades, though she wants her children to get good grades, but also in acquiring knowledge that they can relate to their surroundings, their reality. For example, she comments: “I have played with my children to help them learn Chemistry and things like pollution by counting with them the number of factories around Chelsea and the type of cleaning system we have in Chelsea.” At the same time, Silvia works hard to socialize her children on how to interact with their teachers and to pay attention in class, because she recognizes that teachers have valuable knowledge to transmit and are dedicated to promoting the development of others.

Silvia stated that parental involvement in education means “seriously supporting her children with everything they need, guiding them with discipline... working for them and with them, leading them to be independent, but doing so without harming others.”

Silvia says that she encourages and demands from her children that they do their schoolwork, and, when necessary, she helps them with their homework. She also mentioned that she visits the library, reads the newspaper, and goes on field trips with them. In addition to arranging for her children to participate in extracurricular activities, such as the “Boys and Girls Club,” she involves her children in community activities and event, even the political ones, “which are very important for their [the children’s] development.”

Silvia usually attends the meetings that are concerned with her children’s academic performance and she makes direct contact with teachers and the principal. “All of them know who I am,” she reported. However, she does not participate in the PTO or other official school organizations.

According to Silvia, various factors encourage her involvement in her children’s education and school-related activities. First, there is her conviction that “children’s success is mostly in the hands of parents, and parents have not only to be vigilant, they have to act.” Thus, she has “high goals and expectations about her children’s future” and, in line with her strong “sense of responsibility,” she does whatever she can to help them achieve such. Silvia also identified her reasonably positive socio-economic situation as enabling her to take good care of her children’s educational needs. Other factors facilitating her involvement in education are her level of formal education and her extensive experience in community.

Silvia explained why she did not attend PTO meetings or get involved in similar official school organizations by noting that “nothing can be accomplished [in such organizations], unless there is a change in the School Committee. At the same time, however, this seems to be her

source of motivation for her involvement in district-level activism to challenge the School Committee and to influence BU's plans and actions for Chelsea's school district.⁴²

4.2.4. *Mirna Barraza*

Mirna Barraza was born and grew up in a low-income family in a small town of Puerto Rico. She has been a widow since she was thirty-two years old, when her youngest son was a baby. She moved to Chelsea seven years ago, when she was fifty-one years old, to provide short-term help for her third daughter in taking care of her children, and subsequently decided to stay. Two years prior to my interview with her,⁴³ she decided to adopt one of her grandchildren, a six-year-old girl (she calls "my daughter", "my child") because she wanted to help her son Mario who was facing a very critical economic situation. Her adopted daughter is in first grade at *County Elementary School*. Mirna does not work and has been receiving welfare benefits for a long time. She lives with her adopted daughter in a small apartment provided by the State Housing Department, Section 8. Two of her daughters (one who is separated and the other who is a single mother) also receive welfare benefits and live in Section 8 apartments in the same block Mirna.⁴⁴ Mirna does not speak English; she observed that English is not usually necessary in Chelsea, but when it is, someone from her church can help her. She has a third grade education.

⁴² Silvia is one of the activists participating in lawsuit before the Department of Justice against the School Committee.

⁴³ I met her on March 6, 2004 at a bus stop in Chelsea while both of us were waiting the bus. She volunteered herself to participate in the study when I explained to her about its purpose and asked her if she could introduce me with some members of her church who had children in Chelsea's schools. Our conversation started when she approached me to give a small booklet distributed by her church.

⁴⁴ At the time of the interview, Sunday early evening, she was taking care of three grandsons, ranging between 8 and 10 years of age, who were playing with her "daughter" and watching one of the two televisions I could see. I did not see any books or any other written material in her home.

Mirna says that she values education and wants to give “her daughter” something she could not receive from her parents and could not provide to her own six children.⁴⁵ Education for her is all she can give to her [grand]daughter to have a better future than has been the case for her children; education is the way to get a good job or at least, as she says, “to have a satisfactory life.” Education should also help a child to become “a person with good principles, who respects others, a good Christian.” She said her adopted “daughter is getting good grades and behaving excellently in school; so far teachers and school personnel have never called about her daughter having problems.” Mirna informed me that she talks to her daughter about the importance of school, but she does not help her daughter with homework nor does she insure that she completes it. She does not see it as necessary for her daughter at this age to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports), but that maybe when her daughter is older, they will visit museums.

Mirna defined parental involvement in children’s education and school-related activities by stating that “a good close-care parents must give to children in every way, especially spiritually.” Throughout the conversation she emphasized that spiritual aspects are the key for survival and success, especially in an environment like Chelsea. With respect to her participating in her adopted daughter’s education, she suggested that the “things I have learned from church help me to do good things for my daughter, to get well educated and to relate well with other, respecting them, which also helps her at school.” Mirna believes that good teachers teach good things and help children to be successful, and it is the parent’s role to do their part at home.

The type of involvement she described in her child’s education is much related to her environment at the church. Her daughter usually accompanies her when she visits people and goes to church (at least three times a week). Because it is not always possible for her daughter to

⁴⁵ She laments the fact that several of her children have experienced “vicious” problems and do not know how to handle life. She mentioned alcoholism and drugs as the vicious.

finish her homework before Mirna needs to go somewhere, sometimes her daughter brings her books and materials to church, where there are usually some adults who provide help with homework.

Mirna has visited school just once, to attend the open house. She “avoids visiting school unless it is necessary and prefers concentrating on things at home and making sure her daughter attends school. She does not find it useful to attend PTO or other official school organization meetings; in fact, she was really not aware of the existence of these types of organizations, even though the school sends home with her daughter announcements (in English and Spanish) informing parents and guardians about meetings.

Mirna identified the following factors encouraging her involvement in her granddaughter’s education (at home): 1) her new attitude towards education, explaining that in the past she did not value education as she does now, and she also did not have this type of positive influence from her parents; 2) the time she has for her daughter because she does not work outside the home;⁴⁶ and 3) the people at her church who have taught her many things and who have supported her and her (grand)daughter in many respects.

She identified the following factors as limiting her involvement either at home or at school: 1) her low level of formal education, which limits her ability to help with homework and which may also affect her confidence to interact with teachers and other school personnel; 2) her family’s economic situation, although she tries to give her daughter what she can; and 3) her attachment to the church and religious activities, which compete against time she could be more involved in her daughter’s education.

⁴⁶ She also said she thinks that she is not too old to provide her daughter an education.

4.2.5. *Juana and Ernesto Santiago*⁴⁷

Juana and Ernesto Santiago were born in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Juana is a young mother who lives in Chelsea since she came with her mom thirteen years ago. She has never worked. Ernesto came to Chelsea in 1995, seeking better opportunities than he found on the Island. He has been unemployed for about one year, after having worked continuously for five years in a cleaning company that is not affiliated to the Janitors (Jobs for Justice).⁴⁸ Juana and Ernesto both receive income from welfare and live in Section 8 housing, and they mentioned that they have relatives living in Chelsea. Both of them have an elementary school education; Juana stopped at grade four and Ernesto at grade five. They have one child, an eleven-year-old daughter attending fifth grade at *Town Elementary School*.

Both Juana and Ernesto believe that it is important that their daughter receives an education, and both of them, particularly Juana, devote time and energy to motivate her to do well in school. Juana said that Ernesto and she offer continuous verbal support to their daughter but expressed that she and her husband are limited in what they can do to help their daughter with her homework. Juana reported that she visits their daughter's school when there are some activities and when it is required.

In defining education, these parents emphasize schooling, though they also mention things that can/should be done at home to prepare a child for school. They view parental involvement in their child's education as "supporting [their daughter] with everything she needs at school and also as always taking care of her to prepare for school, to be good child." Juana

⁴⁷ Unlike Tomas Valladares' participation in the interview, Ernesto was less talkative and admitted that it is Juana who has traditionally been in charge of taking care of their daughter's education, though he has been slightly more involved during the last year because he has been unemployed.

⁴⁸ Ernesto briefly commented that he and other co-workers lost their jobs because the company they worked for did not have connections to a union or workers' organizations such as "Jobs for Justice" that help them protect their rights as workers.

says that it is important for them to inculcate in their daughter respect, discipline, punctuality and other values, which can be learned from people at the church. Involvement for this couple also means frequently talking to their daughter and bringing her to attend “Sunday School” and the church service.

Juana and Ernesto shared that their daughter was not doing well at school – she was getting C’s, but they did not know about this at first because they did not receive any note from school. It was the Vicar of their Church who brought the situation to their attention, after the girl commented to him that her teacher was treating her badly. At that point, Juana went to school to talk to her child’s teachers. This was the second time she had visited the school during the fall term; the other was when she attended the open house. Ernesto commented that he thought it was unnecessary to talk to her daughter’s teacher and that he would do so if he sees his daughter is not improving.

Besides attending open houses and visiting the school, when teachers request it, Juana does not currently participate in school-related organizational meetings. Juana commented that she had attended some meetings when her daughter was in first grade, because she saw it as necessary then. Ernesto said that, in the past, he has never participated in open houses or meetings, explaining that most of the things happening at school conflicted with working hours for the type of work he had in his former employment. In part because of a lack of interest, neither Juana nor Ernesto was aware of the PTO or other official school organization meetings, and they reported that they did not know anything about the School Committee.⁴⁹ Furthermore, neither of these parents had ever participated in any non-formal education programs or been

⁴⁹ I confirmed they are not really aware about School Board by asking them about their participation in electoral process and they answer was that both of them are not interested in those things, and never vote.

involved in any community/political organizations or activities. The exception being that Juana had on a few occasions volunteered in activities organized by the Chelsea Episcopal Church.

Juana and Ernesto identified several factors encouraging their involvement in their daughter's education (at home). The first was that since Juana and Ernesto do currently not work outside the home, they had time to devote to their daughter.⁵⁰ However, Ernesto commented he is looking for a job and depending on what he finds, he may or may not have much time to be with his daughter as in past years.⁵¹ Juana indicated that she was motivated to encourage her daughter concerning education because "my parents were never really interested in sending me to school. It was something relatively secondary for them. They were so hard with me; they treated me very badly."

With regard to factors discouraging these parents' involvement either at home or at school, Juana mentioned her and Ernesto's low level of formal education, which limits their ability to help with homework. She also referred to their family's economic situation as a factor influencing her and Ernesto's involvement in their child's education. She commented: "we have given our daughter all she needs. ... Although [we have economic] limitations, we always try." Juana stated that her lower level of education and poor economic situation affected how well she could participate in school-related activities. She indicated that it was difficult for her to communicate with teachers and other school personnel (because of a low literacy level in Spanish and/or English) and that educators did not really make an effort to communicate with her, from her perspective, because her appearance was different than some other who wear more expensive or more professional-looking clothes. She also identified some ethnic group bias,

⁵⁰ Thought he previously admitted that is Juana who mostly takes care of their daughters in everything.

⁵¹ Ernesto said that after spending time at home after he lost his job, he realized the importance of being at home and would like to have a job that gives him more time to be with his daughter and wife.

expressing the view that educators at Town Elementary School tend to interact well with non-Latino parents, and ignore Latinos.

4.3. Parents with Children in Middle Schools

4.3.1. Carlota and Abdón Fernandez⁵²

Carlota was born in a rural area of El Salvador, and left that country by the time of the civil war in 1986 and came to the U.S.; since then she has lived in Chelsea. She is married to Abdón, who was born in Puerto Rico and has lived in Chelsea for around twenty-five years. Abdón works forty hours per week as a bus driver for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. Carlota works around thirty hours a week as an assistant instructor in a child development center in Chelsea. As she does now, Carlota has always worked only a few hours because she and her husband thought it was very important for the well being of the family that Carlota has more time for taking care of their daughters.

Abdón and Carlota have three girls sixteen, fifteen and twelve years old. The two older daughters are studying at Chelsea High School, while the youngest is at *North Pole Middle School* in seventh grade (the interview focused on her and her schooling.) Carlota completed middle school in El Salvador and took the GED in Chelsea to get a certificate as an instructor assistant for daycare. Abdón completed high school before he left San Juan. They do not have problems speaking English.

Both of them believe that it is very important that their children go to school, defining education in terms of getting well educated and prepared for future. For them “it is the only thing to secure the future,” believing that their children have to study to “achieve intellectual growth.”

⁵² Similar to Ernesto Santiago, Abdón Fernandez was less talkative in the interview though he showed being more involved in his daughter’s education than what Ernesto does in regards of his daughter.

Carlota commented that at home they have been preparing their daughters to succeed in school by learning to be well mannered, “to not speak poorly, to dress well, to not be vulgar” to respect others, especially old people, and themselves. According to her, a good education at the university level ... will provide for an independent life, good jobs, and good positions for their daughters. She added that their “dreams are to see them all graduate.”

So far, Carlota and Abdón are satisfied with their daughter’s education and with what she is being taught, though they expressed some concerns regarding the lack of security at the middle school. They were even more worried about discipline in the school, noting that their daughter has to be more aware and work harder because of some disciplines problems at the Two Poles Middle School. From their experience with their other children, Abdón observed that their daughter is doing excellently in her academic work and attributed this success to a combination of parental actions that have been recognized by teachers and to their daughter’s achievement orientation.

In this regard, Carlota defined parental involvement in education as “guiding her daughter in her paths,” both at home and at school.⁵³ She explained that: “every child needs parents’ care to succeed in life, most of all a mother’s guidance.” She sees it as a process of “deep dedication of being always with them in and for everything.” Abdón and Carlota believe that such commitment is important because, as Abdón commented:

[I]n our case, Carlota’s attendance and participation in things, such as the school-site council has strongly motivated them [their children] to always study and attend school and be good persons. [This is] because they feel we support them, we care about their education.

⁵³ Coincidentally Carlota like Lucia uses the same term *acompañamiento* or “moral guidance”; a term used by people involved in activities of the Catholic Church, mainly those identified with a renewed line. I learned afterward that both of them have been involved in that type of activities.

Carlota said they are involved in their child's education by establishing and supervising a schedule for their daughter, helping with homework when necessary, having constant communication with her (as parents and friends), making her feel confident, applauding her success, and sharing her worries. Parents, as Abdón indicated, have to provide their children with an appropriate place and environment, materials, and computers, all the material things that reinforce children's confidence in succeeding in school.⁵⁴ Carlota said she often takes her daughter to visit the library, and that going to museums, theatres, and other such places is a family matter. Carlota has had more possibilities to participate in many school-related activities, such as assisting teachers in classes (something she did very often in elementary school but not in the middle school), chaperoning field trips, attending PTO meetings (of her daughter's previous elementary school, but never at the middle school).

In addition, both parents have been involved in community activities and organizations, though Carlota has been more active in workshops and campaigns focused specifically on the Latino community of Chelsea. For example, she volunteered in the last two elections in voter registration, civic education, voter mobilization and other related activities, while Abdón (along with their daughters) helped with voter mobilization the days of the 2002 and 2003 elections.

Abdón and Carlota think that their involvement at home and in things related to school have been facilitated by the following factors: 1) Carlota working only a part-time and having time for her children; 2) having a favorable economic situation; 3) Carlota not having a problem with legal immigrant status (she obtained quickly U.S. residency and because she married to a Puerto Rican, she became a U.S. citizen); 4) having strong and positive attitudes (which are

⁵⁴ The interview was held in the living room, located a few steps from the kitchen and next to the area designated as the "study room," which is "decorated" with many pictures of the extended family as well as certificates and award received by all members of the family. In the study room they have a medium size desk, a PC, two chairs, and many books] and other written materials, mostly in English, though I saw several books in Spanish.

rooted in family values for generations) towards education and to their children's success in school and in the future; 5) speaking English fluently; and 6) Carlota being involved in social, political and other community activities.

Factors discouraging their involvement include the following: 1) the middle school's time for scheduling meetings (2 to 4 pm versus 6 to 8 pm for the elementary school), which signals a negative attitude of the middle school principal and other school personnel towards parental participation⁵⁵ and 2) a lack of understanding of the Latino families by school personnel (for example, "they send many papers to inform us about things happening at school and they must know that the Latino style emphasizes more talking").

4.3.2. *Yadira and Milton Rosario*

Yadira and Milton Rosario have two sons, a sixteen year old who had been attending high school and living in Puerto Rico with Yadira's parents for two years at the time of the interview, and a fourteen year old son enrolled at *Chelsea South Pole Middle School*. Yadira and Milton, as well as their sons, were born and grew up in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and moved to Chelsea in 1997, after living seven years in New York City. Yadira received an associate degree in nursing and is working in a local health institution as an assistant nurse. Milton completed his high school in New York and works in a restaurant-bar as a supervisor. Both are away from home very often in the evening.⁵⁶

Yadira commented that they want their two sons to have a good education, defining this in terms of getting good grades and being prepared to get good jobs and to be good models for

⁵⁵ The principal's and teachers' pattern of interaction at PTO meetings in the elementary school was mentioned by Carlota as an aspects discouraging her interest in participating in PTO's because; "they do whatever they want to do and just ask opinions to apparently show they want to involve parents."

⁵⁶ As it was the interview with the couples Tapia and Santiago, this was another case where the mother took the initiative in the conversation; in this case included many of her answers in English, show being less involved in education and school-related activities.

their family, their community and the society. Currently their son at middle school is having problems with his grades (but not with discipline), although he excelled in elementary school and never had disciplinary problems. Yadira and Milton have decided to send him to Puerto Rico to live with his grandparents and to be with his brother. They expect their son to at least pass the classes he was enrolled in at the time of the interview (and, even if not, he will go to Puerto Rico). They had a similar experience with the older son, who now is doing very well in Puerto Rico, where Yadira's parents are taking care of him.⁵⁷ Yadira also mentioned her parents have involved their son after school in the business they have. This son is thinking of studying business at San Juan State University. They see this as a result of the combinations of encouragement, support, and discipline from grandparents. They want the same for their second son and believe that sending him to San Juan is the answer, because they are so busy working and do not have time to be with him. Yadira mentioned that one of her cousins helps her son in many senses, sometimes even attending meetings at school.⁵⁸

Yadira said that parental involvement is something ideal for them because they feel they are not doing the right things in relation to their son, especially because parental involvement is giving time to children and all the support and material things they need at home and for school. They regret that they have been working in "slavery jobs" trying to give to them everything they need, in material terms, but they have not been able to give to them time and needed attention. They would like to be able, for example, to supervise their son's schoolwork. Milton, in a sort of disagreeing tone, noted that Yadira's time for interacting with their son is limited because she

⁵⁷ Yadira indicated "everything at elementary [schools] seem to be okay, because our children are still learning how to discern but when children going to middle school problems start, we now realize that having a second experience with our youngest son, Carlos; we can see he is going to have better education in San Juan because there, our children are educated by us [the Puerto Rican], at home and at school."

⁵⁸ Milton commented that they are planning to go back to San Juan in a few years.

has been involved for two years in political/community activities.⁵⁹ Milton also commented that it is only during summer vacations that the family spends time together, shopping, going to the beach and lakes, and sometimes visiting their ‘family’ in San Juan. Yadira defines parental involvement as a wish for her, summarizing it as:

All children need their parents to have time to be with them, if not the two, at least one [parent]. But you can see that the reality here for many of us forces us to work and be away from home many hours, interfering with the possibility of helping our children with their homework; bringing them to school; talking to their teachers (not only when they call but from our own initiative); chaperoning on school field trips; and bringing them to library, museums, and other places that promote their educational advancement, things I used to do when they were in elementary school, [and] as ‘mamy’ did with me. I did not completely take advantage of the great opportunity, [but] I want my children ... to have the chance and complete it.

Yadira and Milton viewed teachers as the key for children’s success at school. According to Yadira, however, everything teachers taught to her son in elementary school was okay, but there is something wrong in the middle school:

I have not been able to do anything [like going to meetings of my son’s school] and have only participated in the open house. [However,] from a conversation with him and my cousin, I have learned [that teachers] ... are focused more on trying to discipline students and [that they] treat the children badly.

⁵⁹ Neither Yadira nor Milton mentioned anything regarding what Milton does during his free time. They did not directly relate Yadira’s political activism as a school related activity, but she observed that what she is doing [for example those activities linked with efforts for changing things at the level of the school board] is more than she can do participating in PTOs or other boards at school, feeling regret that she can not help her son with schoolwork at home.

Similar to Silvia Rivera, Yadira Rosario also discussed her views on the purpose of education at the Chelsea Schools. According to her, “children are taught unrealistic things at school.” Milton agreed. Although he and Yadira do not participate in school-related activities, they “have learned from other Latino parents that there is a lack of a connection with school and a lack of interest in participating because schools do not correspond with the needs of the community.”

4.3.3. *Angela Mejia and Nestor Rosales*⁶⁰

Angela Mejia and Nestor Rosales have lived with their children in Chelsea since 1999. Angela was born in Puerto Rico but moved to San Francisco in 1987, where she got involved as a volunteer in an organization supporting Salvadoran “political refugees.” Nestor grew up in a rural area in El Salvador and left that country in 1988 as a “political refugee” before the end of the civil war with the help of one of the UN programs.⁶¹ He first went to Washington DC, but after a few days moved to San Francisco. This is where he met Angela, and they were married one year later. Nestor currently works for a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, while Angela works for a Neighborhood Development Center in the Boston area. Angela completed her High School in San Juan, while (because of the war in El Salvador) Nestor stopped going to school in the eighth grade. Both took the GED in San Francisco, and have been involved in many non-formal education programs, mostly related to minority community development.

⁶⁰ Both Angela and Nestor were very involved in the interview.

⁶¹ They lived in a new community established after the peace agreement in 1992. Many of his relatives were directly linked with the political movement and participated in the revolutionary movement. Many of them lost relatives including two brothers of Nestor.

Angela and Nestor have two children, an eleven-year-old son in sixth grade and a thirteen-year-old daughter in eighth grade, both at *North Pole Middle School*. These parents view the education of their children as a priority; going to school for their children “is not an option, it is something they know they must do.” For Angela and Nestor, education is a process for developing a person’s capacities to become conscious university professionals, to get good jobs, which combine ‘competition’ and collaboration. Good grades and good behavior are required for success, with success being reflected in the “constant development of maturity and of criteria for making appropriate choices.” Angela also mentioned that their children have always done exceptionally well in school, except for her daughter for a short period during the first half of the year in the seventh grade.

Angela and Nestor mentioned specific actions they take to help their two children. Angela indicated that both of them help their children do their research for homework, set schedules for them and teach them discipline and a sense of responsibility. These values are reinforced through many extracurricular activities and household chores that are included in their children’s schedules. They said they have excellent communication with their children and talk a lot with them about everything, about school, high expectations and goals, and, most of all, about family ties, collaboration and respect.

Keeping a strong link with their (extended) family has been valuable for their children’s education. They shared that they usually have taken them to visit (extended) family in Puerto Rico and El Salvador, which helps in teaching them to value resources in good conditions and, especially, in scarcity conditions.

Angela and Nestor try to keep informed about what happens at the school, not only through the comments of their children but by visiting the school, when there are events and

meetings. Through their visits to schools, they have noted some lack of security in the school's surrounding area, and know that the school has problems disciplining students, which is affecting how much students learn in classes. They have tried to talk to the people of the school but it seems there is no receptivity in this regards, which concerns them. Nestor said that "we have repeatedly suggested that the school needs to make efforts to engage parents and the larger community, to seek ways for solving the problems of security and discipline, which are mostly related with gangs that are recruiting students at the middle school." They mentioned that if the situation becomes worse, they will have to move to a town next to Chelsea, such as Revere, Everett, or East Boston, where schools do not have this problem, but they would prefer to stay in Chelsea because it is close to where they work.

Angela and Nestor said that they are treated well when they visit school, in part, because they do not have problems communicating in English (or Spanish), and because they are respectful parents, other people respect them as persons. They mentioned that throughout the years having contact with several difficulties and overcoming them and helping others, they have learned not to feel intimidated by barriers other people set up just because they are Latinos. This couple considers that visiting the schools has a positive impact on their children's self-esteem, and because it also might encourage other parents to participate.

They list the following factors as encouraging their involvement in their children's education and participation in school-related activities. First, they identified their commitment toward education, which they see as a product of their family background, level of formal education, and involvement in training and other activities related to community concerns. Nestor commented:

[W]e feel thankful we have overcome difficult situations, in my case even survived the civil war in my country, because we have been learning to live with awareness and to understand that the academic and moral knowledge are a privilege many [people] can not have. And if one can have it, one can give it to others, and most of all to children, as we have received from our parents, Angela's and my parents.

A second factor contributing to their involvement is they have time to spend at home, with their family. They refer to this as a part of their fortune for not being immigrants, and having good jobs and an economic situation to be involved in community/political activities such as voter registration, circulating flyers, and other campaigns, without conflicting with their school responsibilities.

Factors that limit or discourage their participation in school-related activities include: the lack of efforts and interest of the school personnel to involve parents and other community members in plans, decisions and actions that concern not only school but also the community in general. They said that they are not participating in the PTO or the school site council at *North Pole Middle School* because of the time meetings are held (2:00-4:00 pm).

4.4. Parents with Children in both Elementary and Middle Schools

4.4.1. Eliseo and Julia Cortez

Eliseo and Julia Cortez, both from Guatemala, have three children: a six year old son in the first grade at *City Elementary School*, a thirteen year old son repeating the seventh grade at *South Pole Middle School*, and an eighteen year old daughter, who in the months before the interview had arrived from Guatemala, enrolled in high school. Eliseo works between forty and forty-five hours a week doing maintenance at a factory in Boston, while Julia works forty hours

per week for a cleaning company also in Boston. Eliseo said that until 2001 they did not have their U.S. residency papers and had to work many hours a week, sixty or more in two or three jobs, doing that from Monday to Saturday and sometimes even on Sundays. They have lived in Chelsea for around ten years, coming directly from Guatemala.

Julia never attended school and had to learn how to write her name when she applied for her social security card and submitted her documents to the U.S. Department of Immigration some years ago. Eliseo went to school but had to stop during the sixth grade of elementary school in Guatemala.⁶²

Julia and Eliseo said they want their children to have an education. They want their children to go as far in school as possible, but added that how far they go is up to them. These parents consider teachers to have the major responsibility for their children's education: "They [the teachers] try to help our children and us." As Eliseo commented, they believe that it is very important for their children to go to school regularly, because "school is the place they can learn what they need, to get good jobs, which is the important thing that teachers teach them." For Julia education is the way that people can be prepared for better future and avoid having to work hard, as she and her husband have had to do, "because persons who are not professionals (means university-educated) do not have good futures; even if they have good ideas, without a diploma they are nothing." Both Julia and Eliseo think that children also learn important things at home, for example, respecting others, behaving well, and obeying parents and other adult family members.

Currently their little son is doing well in first grade and is happy with his teacher and classmates. Their son in middle school is not happy with his teachers, and has been having problems for the last year and a half. He is currently repeating seventh grade, and his teachers

⁶² This is equivalent to first year of Middle School in the United States.

said that, based on his current performance, he could fail again. Julia expressed that she would be satisfied “if at least he passes the grade.” She recalled what her son said: “He is going to be promoted to the next grade, because of his age; if not, he does not care!”

Eliseo complained that their son is not taking advantage of the “great opportunity he has to be in the United States” that many children in Guatemala wish they could have. Also he felt that their son was not considering his parents’ sacrifices, working hard everyday to give him an education – something they themselves did not have. They repeat very often to him they do not want him to have the type of jobs and “slavery” life that they have. Both Julia and Eliseo stated that if things do not change with him, they are thinking to send their older son to Guatemala to spend one year living and working with an uncle who has an auto body repair shop. They think their son is going to start doing better because he does not want to be away from his younger brother and his sister.

Julia expressed regret and guilt regarding her older son, because during his preschool and elementary school years she left him for many hours with other people in the years “he needed more” attention from her:

For many years I did not even see him awake for days because, around 5:30 or 6:00 in the morning, I usually took him [still sleeping] to [the house of] the lady who was taking care of him and bringing him to school. Then I picked him up around 8:00 or 8:30 in the evening, when many times he was already sleeping... [She began to cry, but continued.] ...I think is it my fault that he is failing at school, because he did not see me, he did not have his mama taking care of him in the years he needed me most. He grew up feeling his mom did not love him...[In contrast,] my mom never dared to ‘abandon’ me...[Even though there were strong economic challenges], she was always with me and my brothers

and sisters...always with us...These are the things we miss by not being in our country, by being far away from our (extended) family.

Eliseo and Julia define parental involvement as parents making efforts, directly and indirectly, to make it possible for their children to have an education. They explained that in this country it is very difficult for Latinos to be involved with the education of their children, and that those parents who do it have to overcome many difficulties. For them the most important things is giving the children enough confidence to be able to concentrate on their studies.⁶³ Eliseo and Julia said that it is important for parents to give everything their children need, for instance, materials and books. They mentioned they do not help their children with homework or any type of schoolwork because they do not feel able to do so. They now hope that their daughter, who recently came from Guatemala, will soon be able soon to help her two brothers.

Julia said that she has occasionally visited her sons' schools, for open houses and few other things. At the elementary school she felt that she was well treated; teachers are cordial and some of them speak a little Spanish.⁶⁴ But this has not been the case at *South Pole Middle School*. Eliseo and Julia said that during occasional school visits for open houses and to discuss their son's problems with his teachers, "we have felt isolated by the fact that we cannot speak English and communicate with the teachers and other personnel." For example, two years ago she felt that the receptionist discriminated against her when she visited school to try to talk to her son's teacher; the receptionist ignored her when Julia tried to ask her something. Julia thought it happened because she does not speak English. Eliseo said that a similar problem arises during open houses at the middle school, because the school personnel only speak English and seem to ignore Latino parents like themselves.

⁶³ Also, they do not think that household chores should distract their children's attention from their studies.

⁶⁴ However, she has not needed to speak with them.

Eliseo and Julia have not been involved in non-formal education programs nor in other community organization activities. They do not know about PTO's and other type of official school organizations, but when I mentioned these during the interview, they said that they would not really be interested in participating in these "things." If they had more time to do more things for their children, they would prefer to spend time with them, interacting and showing support, something that they were not able to provide to their children until recent years when their immigration legal status was changed and became "legal resident" of this country. As Eliseo commented that this changed their situation because their priorities changed:

When you do not have papers [meaning an immigrant legal status document], your priorities are different than when you are a legal [immigrant]. You first priority is to at least find a job for our and your family to survive, to pay food and the rent – though if you are lucky you can stay some months with a relative or a friend. Then you need to earn more money with the other job to pay the debts you had for coming here, send money to your [extended] family. Other things [such as visiting school] are not a matter of concern. When you are an immigrant and do not have papers you have to have two or more jobs because you receive miserable wages, then you have to work some hours in some place, other hours in other place and son on... You never see your children because you are always busy working...

Julia and Eliseo identified several factors as encouraging their involvement in their children's education. The first is that they are now able to spend quality, educationally relevant

time with their children, such as shopping at the malls, eating out, going to the cinema, and visiting other entertainment places – “no matter how tired they are.”⁶⁵

In terms of factors that limit their involvement in their children’s education and school-related activities, they mentioned: 1) not speaking English, 2) having only a lower level of formal education, 3) not being familiar with the school system, and 4) encountering school personnel with negative attitudes toward them and other Latin parents.⁶⁶

4.4.2. *Cecilia Guevara*

Cecilia Guevara was born in a small town in the south of Guatemala and moved to Chelsea sixteen years ago, joining many member of her (extended) family, including her mother and father. She is a divorced and works around fifty-two hours a week in a higher education institution a coordinator assistant for an adult education program. Cecilia has been very involved for more than six years in community activities concerned to Latinos in Chelsea and Boston area. She is nearly fluent in English, and completed high school in Guatemala and earned an associate degree in Continuing and Adult Education in Boston. Cecilia has three children, one daughter of fourteen years attending *North Pole Middle School*, a ten-year-old daughter who is in fifth grade at *County Elementary School*, and a son of seven years in first grade at *City Elementary School*.

Cecilia believes that her children’s education is a high priority and that it is very important for them to go to school. For her, education is a process that takes place in two spheres, home and school, and it involves the development of their values, knowledge and independence. At home, parents teach children to be responsible, responsive and respectful, by

⁶⁵ This seems that they are trying to compensate their children the time they could not give to them in the past years. They see that they have more time now for their children because now they have a better immigration status. However, one may question how this type of involvement helps their children educationally?

⁶⁶ For other parents, non-formal education trainings and involvement in community activities is a factor that benefit move to be more involved, these parents indicated they have never had this type of participation.

constantly using “discipline and love.” In school children are taught science, math, literacy, and other academic subjects, which prepare them to enter a university and a professional career.

While Cecilia wants her children to study and graduate from college, and even earn a masters or doctoral level, and to become successful persons, she does not view education primarily in terms of individual social mobility, because she wants her children to serve their community and help others to be better: “[O]ne can get good positions but should never lose one’s roots [and should] feel proud of one’s origin.” In this sense, school achievement is not only reflected in grades but in a person’s knowledge, behavior and maturity.

Cecilia mentioned that her two children in elementary school are doing well in everything, but that her daughter has experienced problems with grades and behavior in the middle school. She learned that these problems stemmed from the influence of some of her daughter’s classmates (one of them is involved in a gang), who were pressing her daughter not to study. Cecilia concluded that the real problem is the lack of strict discipline in the school. Helping her daughter to overcome this situation took a lot of time – investigating the situation and meeting with teachers, a counselor, a social worker and the principal. She also went to talk with the parents of two of her daughter’s classmates. She had to work harder with her daughter than she ever had to do before, not only to overcome the problems with her grades and her behavior, but also to try to remedy the negative effects this had on her self-esteem. Fortunately, as she said, “we were on time to help her.” Now her daughter is doing better and is trying to improve her grades. She has to pass “if she wants the family goes to Guatemala for summer vacation.”

For Cecilia, parental involvement means always supporting the children with everything they need, but most importantly “guid[ing] them with criteria, discipline and love.” Cecilia

describes parental involvement as a process of spending time with children to prepare them to be themselves. In doing that, Cecilia constantly communicates high expectations to her children. At the same time Cecilia demands from her children to do their schoolwork and take care of their responsibilities at home – points that she reinforces by reminding them that she is doing her part as a mother by working hard and making sacrifices for them.

A normal weekday at the Guevara's house includes in the morning Cecilia (or occasionally her mother, father or young sister) dropping the children off at school, and going to work. Cecilia takes turns with one of her cousins to pick up the youngest child from school, and then they meet the older daughter at home. This cousin, who lives next door to Cecilia, also has two children in elementary school. After the children eat something they do their homework, which is followed by straightening and cleaning the house, washing the dishes, and doing laundry. After doing the chores, they are allowed to watch television for a short period of time. A strict rule for them is that nothing comes before schoolwork.

Doing all these things ensures the family entertainment for the weekend, which starts Friday afternoon. Depending on the weather, weekend and vacation activities include: skating, shopping, going to relatives' parties, and visiting the aquarium, the Children's Museum, the Zoo, parks, lakes, etc. Cecilia says that she uses the weekend to learn about her children's week while interacting with them in a pleasant environment. Cecilia mentioned that she also tries to insure that her children can participate in extracurricular activities and field trips, such as visiting the library.

This mother usually attends meeting concerned with her children's academic performance and she makes direct contact with teachers and principals by visiting and calling them. She does not participate in the PTO or other official school organizations. She commented

that she was not interested in getting involved in such until she sees changes happening at the School Committee level. She prefers to be focused on other aspects of her children's education at home and elsewhere.

For more than seven years Cecilia has been active in many Latino community activities related to education and politics. Currently, she is involved in a group that is seeking changes that would benefit the Chelsea Latino students. She also has been involved in many non-formal education programs, and actually she teaches an English class for adults.

Cecilia thinks that the following factors encourage her involvement in her children education and school-related activities: her positive attitude towards education in general, the help she gets from her mother and father and many relatives who live in Chelsea, and her socioeconomic situation. She also mentioned as factors favoring her involvement her being bilingual, her level of formal education, her participation in non-formal education programs, and her strong experience in community/political activities.

Cecilia indicated that the major factor discouraging her participation in the PTO and other official school bodies is the attitude and behavior of the School Committee, which signal that the ideas and needs of Latino parents like her are not important. She also identified the attitudes of school personnel, especially in the middle school, that led them to schedule meetings at times parents can not attend, and the "they fault parents for not participating, they say parents do not care about their children's education." Cecilia commented, "we [parents] have never been consulted about scheduling meetings at the schools; in the middle school meetings are held at 2:00 pm - the teachers have finished teaching then but parents are still working."

4.4.3. *Sulma and Valiente Torres*

Sulma and Valiente and their two children were born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. They came to Chelsea two years before I conducted the interview, having been “forced” to leave Honduras for political reasons. Their daughter is nine years old and enrolled in fourth grade at *Town Elementary School*, while their son is thirteen years old and in the eighth grade at the *South Pole Middle School*. Sulma completed a bachelor degree in Social Science as well as earned a certificate specializing in Social and Political Development of Women. After graduating she became a college professor and founded an organization for the defense of the women’s rights in Honduras. Valiente completed high school, and helped his father with a transportation business (buses and taxis). Due to their current immigration status, neither of them has a permanent job and they are doing “anything they can get to survive,” until they get Canadian residency papers, probably in two years. Since last year, both of them have been taking English classes in the evenings and during weekends. Sulma works around sixty hours a week, while Valiente works around forty (including some not specified works done at home).

Sulma and Valiente both said that their children’s education is one their main concerns, and “it is the best legacy” they can leave to them. They said they constantly encourage their children to do well in school. Sulma, who spends more time with their children, encourages them by helping them with their homework and with almost everything related to their schoolwork, despite her limitations in English. They taught their children from an early age to follow a schedule, to do extracurricular activities, and to avoid watching a lot of television.⁶⁷ They also “instill courage to them to help building their self-esteem.”

⁶⁷ I noted at their very modest apartment things such as a shelf full of books, a desktop computer, and recognitions held on most of the walls.

Sulma indicated that they have to pay more attention to the education their children receive in Chelsea, because she has noted that “here schooling is even more alienating than in Honduras and it does not prepare children for their reality.” Sulma compares her experience taking care of their children’s education with her father’s efforts educating her and her siblings:

As it was in my case, my children are lucky to have somebody to help them to get a solid understanding of reality through contrasting what they learn at school with what happens in the community and in the general society. As my papa always told me and my siblings, “you have to see academic knowledge as being of great value to open your eyes and you mind and your heart.

Valiente indicated that their children are doing excellent work at school, always getting the first places in their classes, and recognitions. He said that their children adapted very fast to Chelsea’s schools and learned English very quickly. Valiente said that he and Sulma were very concerned that all the changes that they have been going through could affect their children, but he said they have learned to be prepared for good or for bad.⁶⁸

Sulma and Valiente reported that they only visit the schools for open houses and on occasions when they attend meetings related to their children’s academic performance. Both of them attend at these times, but they avoid bothering teachers or other school personnel by frequently visiting. As parents they are doing their part, and they expect the teachers do their part as they are suppose to do. Sulma commented:

Valiente and I visit school just when necessary, and both of us attend, but we try to avoid bothering teachers and other school people...because as parents we are doing our part preparing our children to go to school and helping them with their school-work and

⁶⁸ For example I observed when Sulma and Valiente’s children were helping at the Episcopal Church the instructor of the “Escuela Dominical” with the development of a biblical activity for other children 8-10 years old.

guiding them to success; we expect the teachers do their part as they are suppose to do, teaching our children the knowledge they need in each area and subjects in each academic level.

Sulma and Valiente are aware about PTOs and other official school bodies, but explain that they do not have time for these activities, although they do not underestimate the importance of participating in them. Moreover, they said they have learned no much can be done to change things in school by being involved in PTOs or school organizations.

Sulma and Valiente noted the following factors as encouraging their involvement in their children's education and school-related activities: a) their level of consciousness about education as one of the key instruments for their children's development and success;⁶⁹ b) the fact that Sulma is able to do some of her work at home; c) their level of education, particularly Sulma's academic and professional experience; and d) their previous experience of being involved in very important community activities concerned with promoting women empowerment in Honduras to defense their rights.

In terms of factors that limit their involvement in their children's education and school-related activities, they mentioned: 1) Their limited knowledge of English Language, 2) the middle school schedule for meetings, and 3) not being familiar with the school system.

4.4.4. Maribel and Julio Ortega

Maribel and Julio have six children, ranging from nine to eighteen years old. Four of them are enrolled at Chelsea High School. The oldest, a son of eighteen, is in 12th grade; another son of seventeen is in 11th grade; a daughter of sixteen is in the 10th grade; and a son of fifteen is

⁶⁹ According to Sulma, this high level of awareness came from their different family processes that exposed them to good and bad experiences (which their children also know).

in the 9th grade. They also have two daughters: one who is thirteen and is in seventh grade at *North Pole Middle School* and the other who is nine years old and in the fourth grade at *County Elementary School*. Both Maribel and Julio were born in a small town in the region of Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. She stopped studying when she was enrolled in the tenth grade, while he completed his high school. They have no problems with English. Julio and Maribel moved to Chelsea in 1989. Currently, Julio is working forty hours per week in a glass factory, but Maribel is not working outside the home, being dedicated to caring for their children.

For Maribel and Julio education is all the children receive to get ready to go to the university. At school, children learn methods and theories, things they are going to use in their jobs and adult lives. Education at home involves all the things they, particularly Maribel, teach to their children to get well educated, such as to be respectful, to share with others, not to steal, to be good persons.

Maribel and Julio are very proud of their children's achievement at school and also because they are good children. According to Maribel, they have never had a single problem with academic performance or behavior of their six children, because "their children have always been very interested in going to school and they have high aspirations regarding going to university and complete professional careers."⁷⁰

These parents help and encourage their children with their schoolwork, insisting that they be responsible for completing their homework. Maribel also explained that "it is a family tradition of children working together and helping each other. As Julio and I learned from our [extended] family, the oldest always helped the youngest."

⁷⁰ Julio expressed some concerns in regard to security issues at the middle school.

Maribel and Julio want their children to have better experiences than they had. For instance, Maribel reported that she never had someone with a higher level of formal education who provided her with guidelines and constant support for studying. She also noted that her children are living in a better economic situation than she experienced when she was growing up:

My parents' education and situation was so poor They did not even finish elementary school, so I never felt motivation from them to succeed. I remember I did not want to go to school, I felt forced to do that. My father was always very busy, working outside the home most the time; it was my mom who was pushing us to study, but we had many limitation. For example, my brother had to work from the time he was very young... I stopped studying because I had to take care of my first baby when I was sixteen.

What Maribel and Julio hope for is that all of their “children graduate from university, get good jobs, form good families, become happy as good persons, good spouses, and good parents.”

Both Maribel and Julio have high expectations for their children's future and they work for this to happen by doing many things related to their education. According to what they described, a weekly routine usually includes: Maribel dropping the children off at school, cooking and preparing things for them when they and their father return, picking them up after school and dropping them at the “Chelsea Boy & Girls Club”, picking them up at 5:30, eating and talking with them about things that happened during the day, finding out if they have any problem, and then insuring that they take showers and go to sleep. Everyone has individual activities, such as reading, listening to music, and watching TV. The two younger girls have to go to bed by 9:00 pm. Maribel reported: “When I note something is wrong with any of them, I try to approach the situation while doing something like making the bed, brushing our teeth together, you know,

trying to not complicate their situation and not to make them feel ashamed.” Julio intervenes only when necessary.

In addition, at the Boys and Girls Club the children receive supervision in doing their homework. For this and other reasons Maribel and Julio viewed the Club as being a great help for the family, especially in a place like Chelsea that has a lot of social problems, high level of delinquency, violence, drugs, etc. As Maribel stated: “with a big family, as a dedicated mother, for me their being there [at the Boys and Girls Club] is a blessing.” Maribel and Julio also stated that they value the fact their children are getting a good sense of diversity because they make friends with all types of children at the Boy and Girls Club.

Maribel and Julio also view family and community activities as a very important component for their children’s education. These are activities such as going to church for the services on Sundays or participating in social activities organized by the church or the other two community-based organizations in which all member of the family participate. Maribel explained: “[We] sometimes participate in trips organized for low-income families like us, which are so interesting to put in practice many things and learn more.” All these experiences have enabled this family to compare their own experiences and to see that there are many points of views and ways to solve problems or to anticipate them. For Maribel and Julio the good thing is that their children learn to be focused and busy doing useful and educational things, such as swimming, computing, cooking, gardening, reading newspapers, doing art and many others.

Entertainment activities for this family include in winter, renting movies, making popcorn, being mostly at home, and occasionally going skating. In summer, they usually go to parks, children’s, science, and art museums, the aquarium, and, when money allows, they visit [their family in] Puerto Rico.

For Maribel, parents doing things with and for children out of school, at home and in other places is not enough to guarantee children's schooling success and personal development. For both of these parents, at least one parent must take time to visit the school, to know and talk with the teachers, to get informed about meetings and other things happening at the school, and to meet their children's classmates and their parents. According to Maribel, lack of time must not be an excuse for parents not participating; the issue is how to organize one's time. She observed that Julio makes arrangement at his work to attend some of the meetings and he never misses an open house. She point out the fact that she is a young mother with six children, and always 'makes' time for things related to them, and even did in the years when she worked outside the home. Julio indicated that they were not aware of the PTO, and both indicated they were not very interested in participating in such organizational meetings, because they try to concentrate the efforts on things that directly affect her children education and personal development.

Maribel, who admitted to be more involved in school-related activities, described her role in relation to the school:

I always make contact with the teachers, I introduce myself to them, giving them our phone number and contact information and, asking to them their telephones numbers. I always call them, I do not wait for them to call me, and most important I try to be a friend to my children's teachers.

She believes that this way the teachers will pay more attention to their children because they know they "are always caring about anything of the[ir] children"

The family's low income has not prevented them from being involved with the school and from giving their children the possibility of doing useful and educational activities: "On the contrary, our disadvantaged economic situation has been the reason we are eligible for

membership in the Boy and Girls [Club].” Nevertheless, Maribel recognizes that things are very difficult for many of their friends, not only because of economic disadvantage but also because they do not speak English and are not citizens of this country; this situation makes them feel unable to participate, being intimidated because of their situation. She emphatically commented:

I do not know how we could make all the things we do for our children’s education and well-being if we were in a situation like that of several of our Honduran and Salvadoran friends; also if we did not speak English. Even having all of these advantages, and the friendly way I am, two years ago I had a bad experience at the middle school – I have never had such in my children’s elementary school. It happened with the new receptionist and a counselor – who unfortunately has a reputation for treating badly Latinos, apparently poor, people who do not speak English. [People said] he yells at them. This situation happened when I was trying to address a problem because some children were bothering one of our sons who was in eighth grade, now in high [school.] The receptionist was ignoring me and did not want to pass me to the counselor. When I finally was about to talk to the counselor, he – talking in English -- said bad things about Latinos; he did not expect I understood, and became upset when I [confronted him about this]...He just yelled at me saying that I needed to correct my son, accusing him of lying. ... I had to speak to the superintendent [to fix the problem] because the principal was not available.

4.4.5. *Rosibel Rivas*

Rosibel Rivas was born in a rural area of Siguatepeque, Honduras. She and her children came to the U.S. in 1999, directly to Chelsea, seeking a better economic situation. She works in

two jobs from Monday to Saturday, totaling between twelve to fourteen hours per day mainly in cleaning activities.⁷¹ She is separated and lives with a seven-year-old son who is in the second grade and an eight-year-old son who is in the third grade (both at the *Town Elementary School*), as well as a twelve-year-old daughter who is in seventh grade at the *South Pole Middle School*. Ms. Rivas did not go to school, saying that she came from a very poor and big family. She has five brothers and three sisters. She is the oldest of her siblings, and, as it was for many families of her former town in the days of her childhood, only the youngest sibling were sent to school when the school came to town; the oldest were limited just to work. She does not speak English.

Rosibel considers it important for her children to get an education, defining education in terms of getting a good preparation for good jobs for a better future. She sees it is the only way they can escape from poverty. As she comments: “at least they get an education that can give them a modest life.” She has relatively low expectations for her children’s education. She commented that her two sons in elementary school have not had problems at the elementary school, or at least she has not gone to see their teachers for any problems. However, she has received several reports about her daughter’s bad behavior and grades at the middle school, and she had to see her teachers several times. She reports:

I have wasted my time visiting the school to talk to her teachers because she constantly has problems. They explained to me that she is “at-risk” of not passing the grade if she continues getting low grades; she is not paying attention, and she is missing many classes. I did not know what was happening. I just noted some changing in the way she has been dressing in the last few months, with very strange clothes, big clothes... But I

⁷¹ Since she came to Chelsea she has worked many hours due to the restrictions she has related to her immigration status, which in some ways made it difficult to register her children in school when they arrived to Chelsea and the U.S. She said that problems were related to some papers were missing due to her and her children’s illegality as immigrants.

did not see anything [wrong with that]...I thought these were what [all] young people are doing! But no they were not! I don't know what happened to her. I give her everything she asks me, but she does not consider the sacrifices I make for her, for her education. Since October of last year, she also does not want to talk in Spanish at home. When I talk to her, she just says "aha, aha" or shakes her head yes. One of my sons says that she is speaking bad words in English...Even my sons said she does not want to help them to warm the food I left for them...It is the only thing I ask her to do...My sons said that she is only on the phone and that sometimes she leaves them watching television home alone for hours.

This mother is not really informed about her daughter's life and she is also not really aware about her sons' education. She is almost never at home and she relies on her daughter (who has problems with her performance and behavior at school) to look after her brothers. This is a case of a parent totally concentrated on labor activity, working numerous hours (between 72 and 84) from Monday to Saturday. Although she expresses interest and concern about her children's education, she is not doing things that other parents in this study are doing to prepare their children for school and life. Rosibel laments "abandoning" her old daughter and rarely seeing her children during the week, leaving the house for work at 6 am and returning home around 9 pm or later.

Her definition of parental involvement is "like a wish", an ideal definition, because she "came to this country to give her children the best, an education that she never had." She really has no idea what is going on with the schooling of her three children, their homework, the materials they need, etc. She does not find time to do things like taking them to the library and chaperoning on school trips. In trying "to give the best to her children with her sacrifices,"

Rosibel is not able to realize that she is even losing opportunities to be with her children, to talk to their children, to teach them things at home. Even Sundays, Rosibel spend little time with her children because she has to do household chores and “at least go to church.” Going to church is not something that always happens, because sometimes Rosibel is extremely exhausted and she stays at home resting and watching some Spanish movies with her children.

Moreover, Rosibel has not been involved in school-related activities, such as visiting school for regular talks to teachers, attending meetings, or other events. She said that she has attended open house and met (when it was requested) with her daughter’s teachers and a social worker. She related that she felt very uncomfortable being there, at the middle school, and even though she was helped by an interpreter, a well-educated lady, she felt ... very ashamed and afraid.

Rosibel does not know about PTO’s or other official school organizations. And when I explained about PTOs, she said that if she had some free time, she would prefer to use it to be with her children. She has never been involved in community activities, neither in Chelsea nor in Honduras. When it is possible, she and her children attend the Mass at the San Lucas Episcopal Church.

The case of Rosibel Ruiz is one of a mother who is almost completely uninvolved in her children’s education and school-related activities, because she is always working. This lack of involvement is related to her economic situation, which is also connected with her current immigration status. Although she expressed that she wants her children not to repeat the experience she had in Honduras, she just does not have the time to talk with her children regarding that; just she is trying to give them all [the material things] they ask for.

This interview was conducted in the early evening on Sunday. When I came, around 6:30 pm, the children were in the living room watching “The Simpsons.” After introducing me to her two sons, she sent them to continue watching television. She introduced me to her daughter as a “university-person,” a professional. She told her I was also from Central American like them and that she can also study like me. Her daughter reacted with sarcasm, making jokes and asking me if I was not bored with studying and why I was visiting her mom at home. She wondered why if my visit was related to her school, her mom did not go to the school to talk to me.

5. PARENTS' GENERAL CONCEPTIONS OF THEIR CHILDREN'S "EDUCATION" AND PARENTAL ROLES

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses how Latino parents in Chelsea conceive of education in relation to their children, how parents perceive of their involvement in their children's education, and what factors parents identified that encourage or discourage their participation.

For most parents interviewed in this study education is associated with the process of preparation of their children for life, which starts at home (personal education) to inculcate family/cultural values. This is extended to school (formal education) to academically prepare children, and always continues at home as a family tradition for the reproduction of its patterns. All of these parents identified this process of education as occurring in two distinct (and, sometimes, interrelated) spheres - home and school.

Thus, parental involvement in education can occur in two different places, both of which shape the educational experiences of students. These two spheres provide different sources of social and cultural patterns. Depending on their conceptions of the two places for education, parents devote their energies in both spheres or only become involved in one - normally the sphere of home leaving what happens at school as the responsibility of teachers and other school staff.

Forms and degrees of parents' involvement in each sphere also depend on their own [and their extended] family's situation and dynamics as well as on how school personnel promote and respond to parents' involvement. As we will see in the next sections, parents identified factors of

their own situation (such as parents' level of formal education, parents' knowledge of English, etc.) as well as other factors related to school personnel's attitudes and behaviors (such as schedules for school meetings and other activities, language discrimination, etc.) that help to explain their forms and degrees of involvement. These points are summarized in *Figure 1*, which portrays that parents' perceptions of how they should be (or are) involved in their children's education and school-related activities are rooted in their ideas about the nature, purposes and consequences of education.

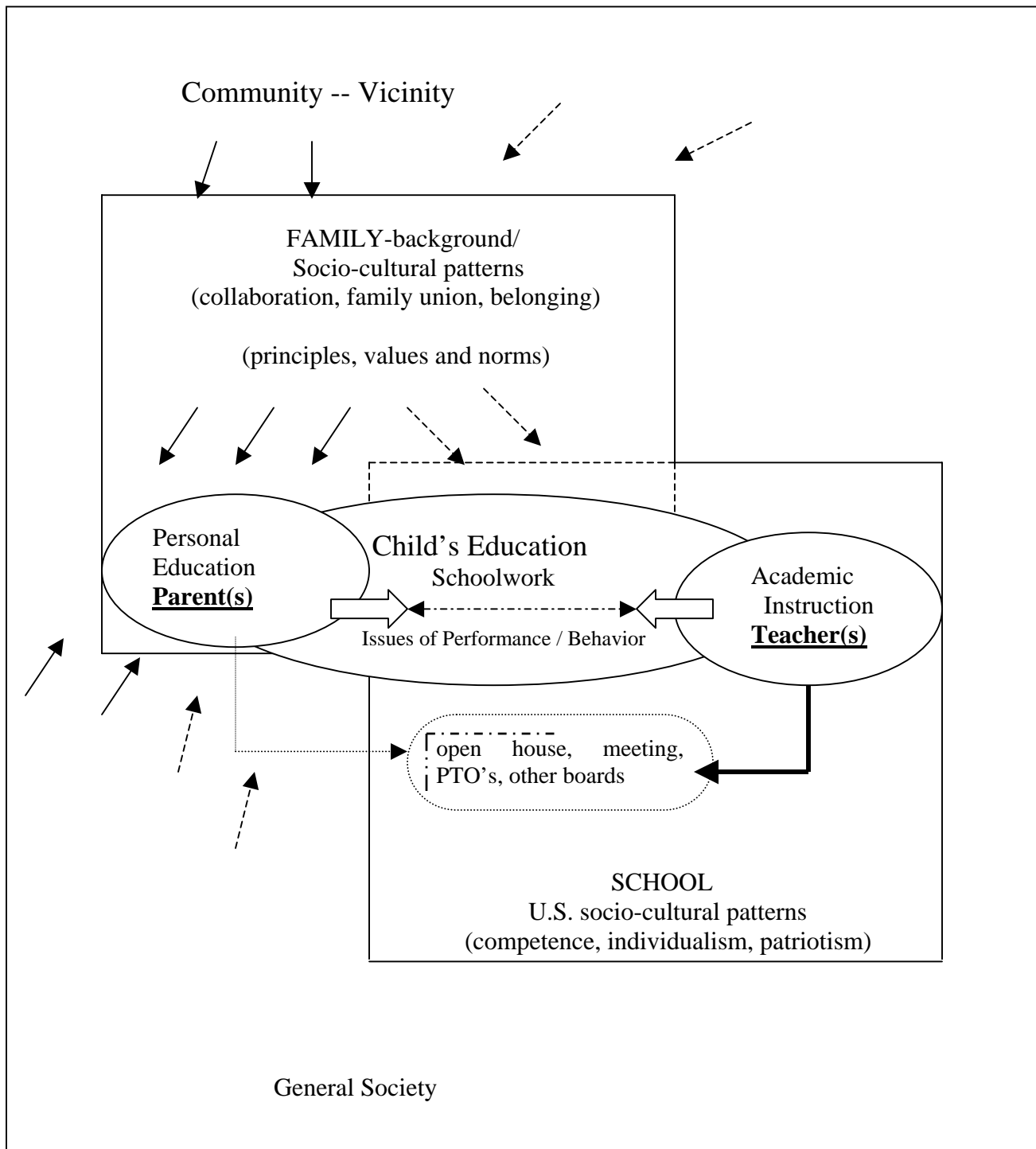


Figure 1. Parents' Conceptions of Their Children's Education and the Roles that Parents and Teachers Play or Should Play

5.2. Situating Participants' Views on the Nature, Purposes and Consequences of Education

The majority of parents view home or personal education as the first component of children's education and agree it inculcates principles, values, and norms to guide their children's choices as they play different roles in life. This means preparing them from an early age "to behave appropriately" and to observe "good manners" in order to learn how "to be a good, well-educated person." Collaboration, family ties, and belonging are concepts that parents reported that they emphasized with their children at home. Most of the parents participating in the study conceive of these concepts as the foundation of how children should be educated (at home) both to socialize them for life in general and to prepare them to receive instruction at school.

As most of the parents described, they try to teach their children to be responsible and respectful. Parents, particularly mothers, are expected to take good care of their children and to instill in them this family tradition and responsibility. "Family" seems to be the most important concept on which education at home is based, and it also has a strong link to a sense of community - their community, the Latino community. Most of the parents interviewed, report that their past and present experiences in their families, their communities, and the general society influence the concepts and categories, principles and norms they emphasize emphasized in educating their own children. Many of the parents drew attention to cultural differences, not only in regard to different educational processes at home and at school, but also in relation to their being Latino parents living in an Anglo-dominated cultural environment.

Parents view the involvement of teachers and principles such as competence, individualism, and patriotism as part of school or formal education. For the majority of these parents, school or formal education will allow their children to become highly educated (i.e., a

university graduate) and more autonomous and relatively well paid workers. For a few of them, however, this education simply means their children will have a job giving them a better situation than themselves. For most of the parents, formal education or schooling should prepare their children for further academic training thus find good jobs and have a good quality of life for themselves and their own (future) families. A few of them (a couple and a mother), however, view formal education as an “alienating” experience that “does not prepare children for good jobs and does not promote collaboration and equality.” The latter parents see education at home as playing an important role in order for children to encounter formal education in a way that does not alienate them from their family’s and their (ethnic) community’s beliefs system.

All parents interviewed indicated that they care about their children’s education at home and at school and that, with one exception, they are at least generally aware of their children’s performance at school. All parents with children in elementary schools indicated that they were satisfied with what their children are taught, though no details were given about what they mean by their satisfaction. Two mothers mentioned they were informed about curricular improvements in their children’s schools.

In contrast, parents with children in middle schools were generally not satisfied. Two mothers were unhappy that the math that their children were being taught was equivalent to what students were being taught in lower grades at other schools. Also, most of the middle school parents agreed with the view expressed by one of them that “discipline problems are taking a lot of the teachers’ time” that should be devoted to instruction.

Children’s school attendance was considered important and necessary, because it is the way children can continue developing a “pattern of success.” Most of the parents emphasized that ensuring student attendance and establishing good home-school communication were among

the most important roles that parents and teachers could play in contributing to the educational success of a child. With two exceptions, specifically Juana and Ernesto Santiago, parents interviewed indicated that they considered as acceptable the nature and frequency of communication between themselves and teachers in elementary schools. For example, Maribel Ortega and Lucia Tapia take the initiative to introduce themselves to their children's teachers and have frequent talks with them (in person or by phone) regarding their children's academic performance and behavior.

In contrast, some parents with middle school children indicated that they had major communication problems with their children's teachers. The majority of these complaints were about the language used (English versus Spanish) and the school staff's attitudes. Moreover, one area of complaints regarding communication was related to *North Pole Middle School's* public relations: "on one occasion the receptionist treated me rudely when I asked her for an urgent appointment with the principal, and the principal gave me the appointment three weeks later." (Cecilia Guevara).

For most parents, school success is related to obtaining good grades and exhibiting good behavior, both of which are necessary for continuing education and eventually finding good jobs. Most parents, particularly those with elementary school children, believed their children were succeeding in school because most of them received A's and B's or received recognition from school principals.⁷² However, three parents with middle school children, Cecilia Guevara, Eliseo and Julia Cortez, reported their children were not making "passing grades" and blamed this on the "lack of discipline in the middle school."

⁷² This was the case of Tomas and Teresa Valladares, Lucia and Alejandro Tapia, Maribel and Julio Ortega, and Sulma and Valiente Torres.

Though the emphasis on education at home, most of the parents in this study view schools as providing an opportunity for their children to obtain a formal education and pursue a professional career that provides them with a better situation than they (their parents) have had and to improve their quality of life⁷³. Most of these parents, even those having attended higher education, had difficult school experiences and had to join the labor force at an early age, leading to a hard life. In other words, education is also considered a privilege that their children (and the family) can have.

As mentioned before, *Figure 1* summarizes the way the parents of this study conceive of education, in relation to home, school, and community. Children's education is conceived to be the connection between home and school, parents/family and educators, and directly and indirectly affected by a variety of contextual factors. As most of the parents described them, community/family factors are strong and direct influences to home/personal education, while community/family factors are not viewed as having a direct and strong influence on formal education. This is represented by the small dotted and bold arrows. The filled shaded lines represent direct influence while the engrave lines represent indirect influence. In the case of the arrows connecting the oval of personal education/parents, the oval of academic instruction/teachers, and the space of open house, meetings, PTO's, and other boards, the bold line represents a strong influence while the dotted line represents a very weak influence or lack of influence.

⁷³ Most of the parents participating in this study showed their gratitude for the opportunity their children have to study in this country, particularly those who for different reasons had to immigrate to this country for the opportunities they did not have in their place of origin. As is shown with more detail in Chapter Four, this is also valid for some of the parents that who born United States citizens - their families did not have the opportunities other families had.

5.3. Situating Parents' Perspectives on Parental Involvement and their Practices

Without exception, interviewees approached parental involvement in their children's education in light of their ideas about families and their conception of education at home (*Figure 1*). As one of the parents noted, parental involvement "is a part of parents' being since one has decided to have children" (Lucia.) Furthermore, they see it as a moral responsibility and a general condition "in order to be good parents." They view the key aspect of their role as inculcating "family principles, values, and norms." Parents explained that in order for their children to succeed in school and later in life, they needed to develop in them a "sense of belonging, a sense of responsibility, a sense of collaboration," and (above all) a sense of respect. Two mothers went beyond the latter aspect relating parental involvement as a process of "accompanying, escorting or serving as guides for their children" – figuratively being with their children both physically and spiritually. As one of these two mothers put it: "[We] parents have to always 'give guidance' to our children, [always] be with them in everything, if we want them to succeed."

Although they emphasized their role as parents in a general sense, the interviewees mentioned different forms of involvement: monitoring schoolwork at home; visiting teachers when requested by school personnel to talk about their children's academic achievement and/or behavior, and attending open houses. Twelve of the twenty-two parents interviewed stated that they help their children with homework or at least check with them to make sure they do it correctly, while a few of these parents mentioned the importance of having an appropriate place and environment to study. Most of the parents said their children follow weekly schedules, usually monitored by one adult or an older sibling. Of the six parents who do not help their children with homework, most of them said they "at least ask" their children if they have done it.

These parents mentioned the importance of their children following and respecting a schedule, noting that it was their children's responsibility to do their homework.⁷⁴ The majority of parents mentioned that they allow their children to watch television almost everyday, although eight parents said that they tried to control the amount of time and two mothers try to control the content of the programs their children watch.

With regard to their involvement in school-related activities, most parents mentioned "participation" in meetings or other activities organized by the school, such as open houses. They reported that they were most likely to "visit school" when teachers requested their presence due to their children's academic performance and/or behavioral problems. This type of relation is shown as a formal process of direct contact between parents and teachers usually in teacher-parent conferences. *Figure 1* also shows another type of contact between parents and educators as a semi-open connection, which was described as affected by the institutional environment and occurring in open houses, meetings, PTO's, and other board meetings. The bold line in *Figure 1* that connects teachers with parents (open houses, meetings, PTO's, other board meetings) represents the way most parents see teachers as responsible for the formal education and having a strong influence in the sphere of school. The light dotted line, on the other hand, represents the limited influence most parents see in terms of their role in children's education at school. Only three mothers indicated they have participated in elementary classroom activities, as the consequence of an initiative on the part of three teachers. These parents saw this as beneficial for their children and the other students, believing that it would be better "if more Latino parents could do the same."

⁷⁴ Some of the reasons of parents who do not help their children with their homework include language or knowledge problems as well as "time constraints" related to their work.

In terms of their participation at open houses and other such school-organized events, most parents indicated they usually participated without problems (normally just attending and listening, though in a very few cases actively interacting). However, some parents, especially those with children in middle school, indicated that they encountered communication problems as well as negative attitudes toward them by school personnel. This and other types of participation in school-related activities, as represented in *Figure 1*, are viewed by almost all the parents as space of the school domain and a type of “problematic space” for parents (a semi-closed/semi-open space). Some parents, such as Sulma and Valiente Torres, viewed their roles as not trying to interfere with the role of teachers.

Other parents (Cecilia Guevara, Silvia Ramirez, Lucia and Alejandro Tapia, Carlota Fernandez, for example) suggested teachers and other school staff sometimes intentionally discouraged parents’ participation in school activities. An example of this was scheduling meetings at the South Middle School during times when many parents were at work. Similarly, Carlota Fernandez indicated that she became discouraged from participating in PTOs because she felt a type of manipulation, explaining: “[T]hey do whatever they want to do and just ask opinions [from parents] to apparently show they want to involve parents.”

None of the parents reported they were currently attending, let alone actively participating in, formal school organizational meetings, such as those associated with the school-level parent teacher organization or the district-level school board. Only one mother indicated she was involved in the PTO when her two older daughters (now in high school) were attending elementary school. Most of the parents, including three parents of children currently or previously having academic performance problems in middle school, expressed a lack of interest

in participating in any school-organized meetings, and some were skeptical about whether such involvement was worthwhile, since it was unlikely that any changes would happen.

Among the ten parents reporting interest in participation in school-related activities, six of them have been very involved in broader, political activities, including one who was involved in a court case against the City of Chelsea.⁷⁵ All of these parents see this type of involvement and community engagement in education as something that can positively affect their children's success in school, the quality of education in Chelsea (for Latino students, in particular), and the Latino community in general.

5.4. Gender Differences in Perspectives on Parental Involvement and their Practices

Gender plays an important role in relation to most parents' perspectives on being involved in their children's education; this is especially clear in the families with two parents.⁷⁶ Gender roles and mothers' and fathers' attitudes and values seemed to be a factor that influences their views, the amount of time they spend with their children, and the amount of they participate in their children's education and school-related activities.

Traditional roles dominate most of the families' dynamics of the parents participating in this study: while the fathers are or should be the (main) providers, mothers are expected to be taking care of the children and exercising a housekeeper role whether or not mothers work out of home. As it was expected, with the exception of one couple (Nestor and Angela), where the father follows a non-traditional role and who is very involved in everything related to his

⁷⁵ This case seeks to modify Chelsea's electoral system to increase the amount of Latino political representation.

⁷⁶ This study, similar to most of the studies on parental involvement, did not purposely collect information separately from fathers or mothers; however, there were some methods of the inquiry process that allowed the researcher to detect some differences in perceptions of mothers and fathers regarding parental involvement. There were some opinions expressly shared. Parental involvement (or lack thereof) in the two-parent families studied is associated with the involvement of the more involved parent.

children, the other eight families (involving sixteen parents), reflect traditional roles. The mothers are more involved in their children's education and in school-related activities than the fathers; a situation that happens independently of the mothers' labor status. In most of the cases, the father's involvement in his children's education and school-related activities was mainly associated with the idea of husbands having some type of 'consideration for the spouses' needs; as a kind of "help" or "support" to wives when it is necessary and not as a "shared family-responsibility" (as Nestor commented). Although the fathers continued to follow traditional patterns, there were three cases where the influence of family made parents view attending open-houses, parents conferences, and other school-related activities as something that contributed not only to their children's school success but also to the family's well-being. Thus, the presence of fathers in open-house or other activities that are "typically" in the mother's domain can be viewed as some type of change in social patterns in relation to typical Latino male.

There are several aspects that can be associated with more or less involvement of the Latino fathers participating in this study. The following table summarizes the type of involvement of the fathers mentioned they did or were observed to be doing during the study.

Fathers	Involvement at home		Involvement at school			
	Parenting/ pattern	Schoolwork (e.g., home- work, library)	Teacher- Parent conferences	Open house	Volunteering (classroom/ bakery, etc)	Meetings & other events*
Tomas Valladares	Traditional	Yes, very	Yes, very	Yes	Not mentioned	Yes
Alejandro Tapia	Traditional	Some	If necessary	Yes	Not mentioned	none
Ernesto Santiago	Traditional	None	None	Occas.	Not mentioned	Occasionally
Abdon Fernandez	Traditional	Some	If necessary	Yes	Not mentioned	Occasionally
Milton Rosario	Traditional	None	None	None	Not mentioned	None

Nestor Mejia	Non-tradit.	Yes, very	Yes, very	Yes	Not mentioned	Yes
Eliseo Cortez	Traditional	None	Yes	Yes	Not mentioned	None
Valiente Torres	Traditional	Some	None	Yes	Not mentioned	None
Julio Ortega	Traditional	Some	None	Yes	Not mentioned	Some

5.5. Situating Possibilities for Parental Involvement

In considering factors that encourage or discourage their participation in their children's education, parents interviewed mentioned two categories. The first involves aspects of their own situation such as their level of formal education, level of English proficiency, their family/cultural background, familiarity with the school system, labor status and economic situation, their immigration status as well as their training and/or involvement in non-formal education and community-based programs/activities or political activism. A second category of factors identified concerned school personnel's attitudes and behavior, which includes scheduling meeting and other activities when parents are working; prejudice and discrimination (based on language, race, and/or socioeconomic status); and lack of effort/interest to encourage parental involvement.

5.5.1. *Factors Related to Parents' Own Situation*

5.5.1.1. **Parents' Level of Formal Education**

Parents with more formal education seem to be more actively and effectively involved in their children's education (i.e., helping them with or guiding them to independently do their

homework) and school-related activities. Parents with higher levels of formal education (i.e., at least the mother has attended/completed high school) seem more likely to participate in school activities (meetings, open houses, events, etc.).⁷⁷ They perceive their participation in school-related activities as greatly beneficial to their children's academic success, though none of them currently participate in PTOs. In this regard, while many of the parents with more formal education showed some interest in participating in PTOs, most of the parents with the highest level of formal education do not want to be involved in them unless changes happen at the level of the Chelsea School Committee.

Among parents with more formal education, there is a married mother (Sulma) with the highest level of education of the group (college plus) who is very involved in her children's schoolwork at home but is not involved in PTOs or any other formal school organizations. While she attends open houses and participates in activities directly related to her children's academic performance, she has not become more active because she believes that "teachers and school people have to do their part without interference."

Parents who have no formal education or a low level of formal education tend not to help their children with their schoolwork because they do not think they are able to do so. These parents also do not participate in most of the school-related activities, unless "the school requires them to attend," i.e., when a teacher or administrator contacts them to discuss their children's academic or behavioral problems. Some of them occasionally attend the school's open houses and are aware of formal school organizations (e.g., PTO's) but are not interested in participating

⁷⁷ There is one exception of a couple (the wife has certificate in nursing and the husband completed high school) who has been not able to help their middle school-aged son with his schoolwork and also has not been involved in school-related activities. Their involvement in their children's education and school-related activities is reduced because of time constraints resulting from their work schedules and, in the case of the mother, broader community political involvement.

in them. Other less-educated parents are not aware of the existence of PTOs (etc.), and do not believe they need to become involved in them.

5.5.1.2. Parents' Knowledge of English

English language fluency also plays an important role in parental involvement in their children's education and school-related activities. Most of the Latino parents interviewed who speak English (whether they have elementary or middle school-aged children) think that their language skills have enabled them to help their children with homework, for instance. It also has helped them to stay informed of school events and to interact with school personnel. English provides them with confidence and also seems to have positive psychological effect on their children. Similar to the first factor, the level of formal education, competence in English is important but does not seem to be sufficient to motivate parents to participate in PTOs or other school organization meetings. For instance, four of the parents who speak English visit schools only for meetings that are directly related to their children's academic performance.⁷⁸

However, for two mothers who hold secondary education (college and associate degrees), the lack of English preparation has not prevented them from helping their children with their schoolwork. Both mothers say that "it is a matter of finding the way." In terms of participation in school activities, the mother holding a college degree does not participate in school activities but this is not for language reasons. Through help from interpreters and (bilingual) parents, the mother with an associate degree has been able to be very involved in many activities at the Ville Elementary School.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Some parents with children at the *North Pole and South Pole Middle Schools* indicated that attending open houses for them is a matter of just "attending" and not have a chance to interact because open houses are always held in English, and there is not a single interpreter to provide help for them.

⁷⁹ Except with PTOs or boards for other reasons.

5.5.1.3. Family/Cultural Background

According to all parents interviewed, family/cultural background plays an important role in terms of their views and practices regarding involvement in their children's education.⁸⁰ However, this factor interacts with other factors, meaning that one cannot directly predict parents' levels and forms of participation in their children's education and school-related activities simply by knowing their family/cultural background.

Because of their family/cultural background, which positively values education, Latino parents are generally oriented to assist their children with their homework since such actions are understood as part of their role as parents. Also, in general, their family/cultural background orients them to visit their children's schools, talk to their teachers, be informed about what goes on in the classroom and in other school activities.⁸¹

Those parents who are not involved because of other factors (e.g., work demands) wish they were and express remorse that they are not living up to the cultural norms of parenthood. For example, some of the parents with children having academic and/or behavioral problems state that they feel guilty because they cannot – or at least think they can not – be more active in helping their child or in eliciting help from school personnel. For example, a grandmother expressed concern that she was not able to do more to help in her adopted granddaughter's education, even as she explained that she had not experienced such parental involvement while growing up and that she had not been so involved with her own children.

⁸⁰ With few exceptions, most of the parents have relatives in Chelsea who support their children's education as it has been tradition in family. When all of these parents talked about their families, they were referring to both their close circle and also extended family, many of whom are living in Chelsea.

⁸¹ The issue of participation in PTOs or other official school organizations, however, is not the same, because they perceive this as not directly related to their children's academic performance.

***5.5.1.4. Familiarity with Chelsea School System*⁸²**

Familiarity with the Chelsea school system plays an important role in the perception and practices of parents' involvement in their children's education and school-related activities. Although the Chelsea school district may have invested time and resources in trying to inform parents and other residents about the school system, parents had varying amounts of knowledge about it. I found several cases of parents who indicated they have very little knowledge about the school and the school district and how they function, citing this as one of the reasons they have felt insecure and confused about how they can participate. Four parents who are not active in school-related activities said they feel afraid to participate in a system they do not know.

Other parents, who are more engaged in school-related activities, also expressed some concerns in regard to their limited familiarity with the system, but contrary to feeling intimidated, they expressed that since Chelsea school system "is not their system," they feel more 'obligated' to learn more about it and participate in its activities. They mentioned that because of their participation in school-related activities, they feel more confident interacting with teachers and school staff.

A few parents, who are very involved in their children's education and in some school-related activities (but not with PTOs or other school bodies),⁸³ stated that they are very familiar with the Chelsea school system, know a lot about their children's school, and are well informed about opportunities for parental participation.

Length of Residence in Chelsea

⁸² Because its nature, this can be also considered a school personal factor. It was classified primarily as "parental" factor due to most of the parents interviewed considered this factor to be more attached with aspects of their own responsibility and situation.

⁸³ This group of parents includes Silvia Ramirez who was born and went to school in Brooklyn, New York.

At some point in this research I thought the length time of living of Chelsea could be a strong determinant of parents' familiarity with Chelsea schools and/or their level of involvement. However, this factor seems not to be very influential, at least among the small sample who were interviewed.. At the time of this study, parents interviewed had lived in Chelsea from approximately three to more than twenty-five years. First, the parents who are very involved in school-related activities are not necessarily those who have lived in Chelsea the longest.⁸⁴ Second, familiarity with the system seems to depend on other aspects of both their own situation and the school. Parents who indicated they are more familiar with the school system (and are more active in school-related activities) exhibit characteristics such as more formal education, being fluent in or are studying English, being involved in some other activities related to education with community-based organizations, and having relatively good communication with teachers or other school personnel.

5.5.1.5. Family Economic Situation and Parent Labor Status

Family economic situation and parents' labor status seem to have an important influence on perceptions of parental involvement in their children's education and in school-related activities. In fact, these two aspects were found to be very interrelated. Although there was no specific question about household income, all parents commented that their economic situation has influenced their involvement in their children's education or school-related activities. Some parents indicated that their relatively positive economic situation has facilitated their helping their children with school-work (directly or indirectly) or taking part in school-related activities.

⁸⁴ Some parents who have lived three years in Chelsea, for example, know more than other parents with ten or more years in there.

With the exception of two mothers, one who does not work and the other who works between 30 and 36 hours a week,⁸⁵ the other fourteen parents of this group work forty or more hours a week.

However, six parents indicated that their difficult economic situation has limited their possibilities to be involved in school-related activities and their children's education. Three of them, a couple (Eliseo and Julia Cortez) and a mother (Rosibel Rivas), indicated that their economic situation has forced them to work many hours a week since they came to Chelsea.⁸⁶ The other three parents, a couple (Juana and Ernesto Santiago) and an adoptive grandmother (Mirna Barraza), also experience economic limitations since they do not work.⁸⁷ For them, it seems as though the economic situation and labor status do not directly relate to their lack of involvement in school-related activities. Some additional characteristics of the six parents with economic problems are low level of formal education and no-to-limited knowledge of English.

5.5.1.6. Parents' Immigration Status and Possible Differences in Views and Practices⁸⁸

Parents' immigration status was mentioned as an important factor affecting those parents who identified themselves as immigrants holding different statuses other than the "green card".⁸⁹ Parents' immigration status was considered a factor (that in combination with other aspects of the parents' situation) has shaped the perceptions and practices regarding their involvement in their children's education and school-related activities of the Central American parents of this study. For most of them, this is a factor that affects their perceptions about teachers' and other

⁸⁵ Teresa Valladares and Maribel Ortega, who commented that that they and their husbands decided that in order for the two mothers to take care of their children only the husbands would work.

⁸⁶ These parents are not involved in their children's education or in school-related activities, and were not aware of the existence of PTOs. They indicated if they had not to work many hours they would prefer to spend the free time with their children. These parents also related other aspects of their own situation as affecting their type and level of involvement.

⁸⁷ Both receive income from welfare and live in Section 8 housing.

⁸⁸ This category excludes the Puerto Rican parents participating in the study.

⁸⁹ Some of these parents (who are U.S. citizens) emphatically commented about immigrants' parents in relation to their possible involvement in school-related activities in particular.

school personnel's views and expectations of them.⁹⁰ Several of the immigrant parents commented how being immigrants has made them “feel insecurity and intimidation” when they had to visit the school for any reason.⁹¹

Immigration status is also related to other aspects of these parents' situation (e.g., employment, socio-economic status, language barrier, formal education level) that have prevented them from being involved not only in school-related activities, but also their children's education in many senses. Some immigrant parents observed how their priorities have changed as their situation has changed “from being illegal to be legal”.

This study did not find relevant elements to portray a distinction between parents with Puerto Rican background and parents with Central American background. On the contrary, there were more similarities than differences between some Puerto Rican and Central American parents. Other factors such as economic status, English knowledge of English, were among other more important aspects that marked differences and/or similarities among and between parents in this study. Signs of possible resistance or assimilation were shown from some parents identified as Puerto Rican (involuntary minority) as well as for some parents identified as Central American (voluntary minority).

5.5.1.7. Parents' Participation in Non-formal Education Programs and/or Community-based Organizations Activities/Political Activism

Parents' motivation and ability to interact with teachers and other school personnel seem to increase when they have been involved in other types of these activities.⁹² For instance,

⁹⁰ This factor can be also connected to school factor.

⁹¹ Rosibel said “you think people of the school can report you to Immigration [meaning the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service.] Two of the parents interviewed commented that some relatives registered their children at school because they were afraid to do that.

⁹² Some parents commented that participating in non-formal education program and/or community-based organizations activities/political activism has also allowed them to become engaged in other activities such as taking English classes, etc. that have helped them improve their own situation. However, an exception was found that show

parents who showed interest in participating in PTOs or other school organizations tended to be involved in activities of community-based organizations or political activism, either in Chelsea or in the other places they used to live. Moreover, with few exceptions, the parents of children reported to be doing well in school are likely to have been involved in the courses and/or campaigns of community organizations, including those directly related with education, such as Parents' School <Escuela para Padres>, Chelsea Education Group and "Padres Unidos" (a group of Latino parents working for their rights in the Chelsea Schools.)

Four interviewees, three mothers (Lucia Tapia, Cecilia Guevara, and Maribel Ortega) and one father (Tomas Valladares), reported that their involvement in education-related activities/programs has helped them to become generally familiar with the school system as well as to learn about other parents' viewpoints. This has shown them the importance of being involved in their children's education and school-related activities. They also view their engagement in other community and political activities as helping them to develop knowledge of the community's needs, identify themselves as a member of the community, establish contacts with other people who have similar needs and develop their level of awareness.

Also, some parents who have been involved in education-related activities/programs or political activism, but do not participate in PTOs or other school organizations, tend to believe that "not much can be done from there [PTOs or other school organizations] to change things in a school system that teaches their children to become alienated and not face the reality of the majority of Chelsea," meaning Latinos. In this sense, for some of those parents participating in political activities that are related to changes in the Chelsea School Committee and which seeks

how it is a mistake generalize that there is direct relation between political activism and parental involvement in their children's education and school-related activities. This was the case of a mother interviewed, Yadiria Rosario, who her participation in political activities is affecting her involvement in her children's education and school-related activities.

to mainly benefit Latinos, aspects related to family background (e.g., the Latino identity) become source of inspiration in a space of contradictions, where the majority (non-white) have not representation but the minority (non-Latino) make the decision. As such, parents' participation in these activities becomes a way to search for some of the answers and hopefully to bring about change.

All but four of the parents who have been involved in these types of programs/activities indicated that they help their children with their schoolwork and that that their children are doing well in (elementary and at middle) school.⁹³ All of the community/political activist parents visit their children's schools, though only four (of ten) only do so for open houses and scheduled meetings with teachers to learn about their children's performance. The other five of the nine activist parents say that they also take initiative to visit or call teachers.

All of the activist parents viewed their community/political involvement as influencing their children's confidence and self-esteem. They also suggested that if other parents became more involved in these types of activities, all Latinos in Chelsea would benefit.

In contrast, the six parents who have never participated in non-formal education programs and/or community/political activities tend not to help their children with their schoolwork.⁹⁴ These parents rarely visit the children's schools, and most of them prefer to go only when it is really necessary. None of them have an interest in or participate in PTOs or other formal school organizations; indeed, four of them were not even aware about PTOs and the School Committee.

⁹³ One case was a single mother whose daughter was having problems in middle school, though the mother stated that she is expecting her daughter to "at least pass the grade" and to work harder next year and thus earn higher grades.

⁹⁴ This includes two parents and a grandmother with children in elementary school and three parents with children in middle schools.

5.5.2. *Factors Related to School Personnel's Attitudes and Behaviors*⁹⁵

Many parents of the elementary schools mentioned certain positive attitudes and behaviors on the part of their children's teachers and other school staff that encourage their involvement in school-related activities. Thus, while issues related to these factors were rarely mentioned in relation to elementary schools,⁹⁶ all parents of middle school students mentioned problems in their interaction with middle school teachers, principals and/or other staff members.⁹⁷ According to these parents, the attitudes and behavior of school personnel had a strong influence on their level and forms of participation in school-related activities. When asked the question, what do you think school personnel do (or do not do) that encourages/discourages or facilitates/inhibits your involvement in open house events, the PTO, or other official school organizational meetings?, they identified several things: scheduling for meetings and other activities during parents' work hours, exhibiting prejudice and discrimination (based on language, race, and socioeconomic status) and not showing interest or making efforts to motivate parental involvement.

5.5.2.1. *Schedules for School Meetings and Other Activities*

Parents who were interviewed highlighted the scheduling of meetings and other events as an indication of whether school personnel really desired parental participation. At the middle school, for example, PTO and other meetings were held on weekdays between 2:00 and 4:00 pm, which Cecilia Guevara and many other parents interpreted to mean that "they do not want parents in general to participate, particularly Latino parents." In contrast, several working parents

⁹⁵ We have to keep in mind that there are some elements of connection between these and the prior "parental" factors.

⁹⁶ As shown later, three parents indicated problems regarding English and issues of racial and appearance discrimination.

⁹⁷ Interestingly, six parents with children in either elementary and high school or middle and high school, expressed positive comments related to the high school.

with children in elementary schools indicated that they were encouraged and able to attend meetings because these are held from 6:00 to 8:00 pm.

5.5.2.2. *Language Discrimination*

As was indicated above, English complicates several parents' interaction with school personnel,⁹⁸ This limitation of parents' own situation becomes an issue of perceived discrimination in the Chelsea Schools, particularly in the middle school. While the participation of parents of elementary school students was facilitated because some staff spoke or communicated in writing in Spanish, most of the parents with children in middle school interpret that staff's "English-only" approach as limiting parents' participation. Three mothers and two fathers with middle school children who occasionally visit school expressed that they have been treated badly by middle school staff because they do not speak English. A parent said that this happens because schools do not have Latino teachers and have a few people who speak a little Spanish but don't want to speak it badly to the parents. Two parents who speak limited English have felt somewhat intimidated by teachers and counselors; as Valiente expressed "they make feel us as ignorant."⁹⁹

5.5.2.3. *Race Discrimination*

Most parents interviewed indicated how they perceived race to influence school personnel's desire for and encouragement of parental participation in school activities and organizations. For example, some parents perceived teachers who interacted more with non-Latino parents during open houses and other meetings as a sign of racial discrimination. Some

⁹⁸ Two bilingual mothers related experiences helping others parents with limited English, noting that on more than one occasion they had observed teachers and other staff members ignoring parents who do not speak English.

⁹⁹ The two bilingual mothers in the last footnote related their experiences when helping other parents as interpreters also commented on them here.

of the parents, who showed interest in participating in PTOs, alluded to racial on the part of the school staff as a factor that discouraged them to be involved in this and other types of school organizations. This factor was more prevalent at the middle school. In addition, most elementary school site councils have Latino board members, while this is not the case of the middle schools.

A mother (Rosibel) with children in both elementary and middle schools, who has not been involved in her children's education and has occasionally visited the school for some open houses and other reasons, commented that she felt unwelcome at the middle school. She said that she experienced aggressive and unfriendly behavior by school staff, simply because of the fact that she is Latina. This issue was also mentioned by parents who have not been directly affected by such discrimination but believe they observed other parents having this type of experience.

5.5.2.4. Discrimination Based on Socioeconomic Status

Some parents (Julia and Eliseo Cortez, Ernesto and Juana Santiago, Rosibel Rivas and Maribel Ortega) perceived that their low socioeconomic status (i.e., as indicated by their physical appearance and the clothes they wore) led them to be treated differently by school personnel, who did not appear to encourage or welcome their participation in school-related activities. Other parents (Cecilia Guevara and Lucia Tapia,) commented that, although they haven't had this type of discrimination, they have observed in open house and other school events how some school personnel (particularly in the two middle schools) had showed some sort of discrimination against Latino parents looking poor. School personnel have paid less attention to poor-looking Latino parents or even have ignored them.

5.5.2.5. Schools' Lack of Efforts/Interest to Motivate Involvement of Latino Parents

Participation not only seems to be discouraged by the scheduling of meetings and discrimination issues, but also by a lack of commitment and capability on the part of school personnel and authorities to deal with Latino parents. In particular, teachers and others were seen as not recognizing that “they are dealing with a predominantly Latino community.” The majority of parents perceived they are not important for school personnel “since they [school personnel] never organize workshops or other activities that make [Latino] parents, particularly those of new children at school, situate themselves as part of the system.” Most parents with children at both the elementary and middle schools have made this conclusion.

Although most of the parents provided examples of being discouraged by school personnel's attitudes and behavior, several of them reported signs of encouragement when schools have acknowledged the work they have done with their children. Tomas and Teresa Valladares mentioned recognition they and their son received from the principal of the school. A similar situation was cited by Carlota and Abdon Fernandez as well as Sulma and Valiente Torres, whose work with their children has been publicly recognized by the schools more than once.¹⁰⁰

5.5.2.6. Lack of Efficiency of Participation

Obstacles for participating in PTOs and other school organizations was the major concern raised by many of the parents in this study. This is something not only interpreted as being discouraging, as in the case of the middle school with schedules and English obstacles, but in general rather as a systematic barrier. This is related to the comments of several of the parents

¹⁰⁰ Though in regard to their participation in meetings and events, the first couple has attended events only rarely and the third couple has only attended those activities directly related to their children's school performance. Carlota has been very active in meetings and activities/events organized by her children's school - in the past she was even a member of an elementary school's PTO.

who said that they see a “loss of time participating in PTOs unless changes happen at the level of school committee.” Carlota Fernandez, the only parent interviewed who, years ago, was involved in an elementary school PTO, commented that she became discouraged to participate on this board because at some point she realized that there was a type of manipulation of the decisions made by it. She said that “many of the things implemented were never discussed and principals and teachers always apologized how there was no time for discussing them.” Yadira Rosario, another mother who is not currently involved in any school-related activity.¹⁰¹ commented she became discouraged to attend meetings at her son’s elementary school after she had several fights regarding the way the meetings were conducted and decisions were made.

¹⁰¹ She is not even involved in her son’s education, although she is very involved in political activism.

6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This study's goal was to provide an examination of Latino perceptions of the nature, purposes, and consequences of their involvement (or lack thereof) in the Chelsea (Massachusetts) elementary and middle schools and in their children's education. Parents provided their conceptualization and understanding of theirs and others' people roles regarding children's education, and the positive and negative factors affecting their involvement. These factors were grouped in two categories: aspects of parents' own situation and those intentional and unintentional behaviors and actions of school personnel.

To frame the study theoretically, I drew upon Functional and Conflict perspectives on schooling and society as well as on participation. In addition, the concepts of "community" and "Latinos" were critically examined, giving particular attention to diversity among members of the Latino community.

This case study was focused on the views and experiences of parents of the two major Latino groups (Puerto Ricans and Central Americans) with children in different grades in the four regular elementary schools and the two regular middle schools of Chelsea, Massachusetts. This study employed ethnographic methods including interviewing, observation and collection of documents and other materials. Limited participant observation focused on informal conversations, home visits, and interactions with community members (e.g., in churches, recreational/sport facilities, community organizations). The thirteen families, including nine

couples, three single mothers, and a grandmother, participated in the interviews, reflecting the characteristics of the majority of the Latino population in Chelsea. The selection of the participants was guided by my prior involvement in the community and by advice elicited from key members of the Chelsea community. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the data collected.

6.2. Summary and Conclusions for Questions 1 and 2

How do various Latino parents in Chelsea, Massachusetts conceptualize “education”? and What do various Latino parents in Chelsea understand by “parental involvement? Parents’ dual conception of education (formal and personal) was fundamental in order to situate and understand parents’ perceptions on parental involvement. Parents’ views and practices are also related to how they value education and how they value their interventions as parents in the education of their children.

All parents participating in the study conceptualized education as an integrated process that includes both learning at school (formal education) and “learning” at home (personal education). In this way, for most of these Latino parents, parental involvement has two dimensions. In first place, parental involvement is referred to as a process of inculcating family principles, values and norms (e.g., the importance of family ties, collaboration, respect and belonging).¹⁰² Through education at home and by exercising part of their “natural” role as parents, most were trying to prepare their children “to be a good, well-educated person.” Providing an appropriate home environment and material things needed as well as helping (directly or indirectly) their children to do their homework is also seen, by the majority of the parents, as part of their involvement at home.

¹⁰² Home education was not referred to home schooling but is related to a process of inculcating family principles and values.

The “learning” process happening at home is viewed as combined with the other part of the process, which prepares their children for further academic training. This other part is based on the principles of competition, individualism, and patriotism) that allows them to find good jobs and thus be able to have a good quality of life for themselves and their own (future) families. However, for the majority of the parents, particularly for those with children in the middle school, this formal educational space is for the most part seen as one to be occupied by teachers and administrators, thus limiting these parents’ involvement in PTO’s and other school government organizations.

Parents’ views on education and parental involvement are generally filtered through past and present aspects of their Latino identity, a connected to their own cultures and the United States culture. In this way, this study suggests that, several of the parents (including Central American and Puerto Rican) are found to be dealing with problems of cultural differences. For example, teachers can associate some levels of respect and formality with good discipline and behavior, though in an extreme level they could associate respect and formality with shyness and/or lack of confidence. In the same way, team work at school (and in work) requires collaboration, though bringing collaboration to an extreme point could prevent children to develop some necessary healthy competition skills to survive and have a good performance in school and in their future career life. Thus, though the parents identified home education as a base and complement for formal education, the way they emphasize home education may have some effects on their children to succeed in their formal education and their future.

This emphasis also explains, in part, why the majority of parents referred to a cultural clash when describing parents’ and teachers’ roles. Roles that are exercised around an education based on what are considered traditional Latino value systems and around an education based on

the United States value system. In other words, we can see two dimensions portrayed by the majority of the parents as two domains. Two domains, parents' domain that for most of the parents has not influence over schooling, and teachers' domain that is viewed by the majority of the parents as exercising the major influence in the formal education of their children and parents' actions in relation to their involvement in school-related activities.

The study shows that, for most of the parents, parental involvement is part of their roles as parents and also that cultural differences affect their views and their involvement. In this sense, and considering the discussion above, we can conclude that there is a need for approaching the gap of the cultural differences between parents like the ones participating in the study and educators.

Most of the parents participating in the study viewed a close association between education, school success and social (non)mobility. The link of these three categories is defined in terms of positive (or negative) consequences as a result of a constant academic (and career) success on the part of their children reflected in good grades and behavior. Parents see that both a continuing attendance to school and good home-school communication are indispensable to achieve success in school and life.

The majority of the parents showed to have high expectations on their children's education and future life, and view themselves as doing sacrifices on behalf of their children to have better situations than the ones they had. Three parents (two families); however, did not show high expectations about their children's education expectations and future (which was more related to problems in the middle schools and not to their children).

These parents reported that they were willing to do anything they could do to see their children were successful in school and professionally. Although all of the participants showed

they want the best for their children and most of them showed they are making great efforts for their children's educational success (and life), we cannot put them thinking homogeneously regarding purposes and consequences of education. Though most of them viewed education in the school of Chelsea (and in general in the United States) as preparing their children in terms of integration to the general society, three parents (two couple) were critic in this regard. They viewed education as an instrument of alienation and as a means to prepare children just for secondary jobs. Though these critics, all parents participating in the study in general value education and schooling positively because they see it as the means for their children to be prepared for their future, and an opportunity to take advantage. Moreover, all the Central American and most of the Puerto Rican parents see education and school as a privilege because then their children do not need to enter in the labor force at early ages.¹⁰³

6.3. Implications for Theory and Research and Policy Practice for Questions 1 and 2

This study suggests that despite recent research on Latinos' role in education, (e.g. Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995), Latino parents' perspectives on parental involvement is still relatively little untapped as a source to inform knowledge, research and policymaking. I agree with the works of scholars such as Concha Delgado-Gaitan (2001) and Gerardo Lopez (2001) that the category "parental involvement" as it applies to research and theoretical studies needs to be redefined in a broader and non-exclusive way.

Supporting few other studies on Latino parental involvement (including Delgado-Gaitan, 1991 and Inger, 1992), this study also suggests the importance of examining Latino

¹⁰³ Contrary to what most of these parents experienced in their places of origin and what their children's cousins or other children in Latin American countries experience.

parental involvement from a “parental” perspective. The conversations with the thirteen Latino families (including twenty-two parents) provided us with broader concepts of education and parental involvement than the conventional concepts most people use in the United States. From such an “institutional” perspective, education is referred to schooling and parental involvement is associated mostly with formal education and parents participating in school-related activities. From a “parental, for example,” participants of this study conceived of parental involvement as a notion that is related to moral dimension (see also Delgado-Gaitan, and Inger, 2001) related to parents/families’ ways of being.

Moving ahead in this way can also have other implications for research such as examining parental involvement from a broader perspective that opens the spectrum of types and degrees of parental involvements in children’s education and school-related activities. In this sense, this study reinforces the works of Scribner, Young, and Pedroza (1999) and Lopez (2001) that Latino parents’ ways to value education and the way they are involved in their children’s education are hidden because of the assumption that parental involvement occurs only through school-related activities. Parents participating in this study showed they have high expectations about their children’s education. The highest priorities for most of the parents were for their children to attend school and gain all [material] things. This study also reinforces the conclusions reached by other scholars (e.g., Chavkin and Gonzalez, 1995; Chavkin and Williams, 1987; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, Greenfield, and Quiroz, 2001) that Latino parents care very much about their children’s education. Thus, most of them see their involvement as beneficial for their children and for the family.

Most of the parents in this study perceived the purposes and consequences of parental involvement positively, a finding that is similar to that of Bigler (1999); Castañeda (1974);

Gonzalez et al. (1998); Valdes (1996); Darder et al. (1997); Garcia (2001); and Delgado-Gaitan, (2001). In this study, it was found although some parents have similar conceptions of education and parental involvement, there were important differences as well. For example, most of the parents' views can be associated with the functionalist perspective that seems centered around the idea of education preparing children to develop a sense of compatibility with the context and its surroundings. However, there were three parents among the thirteen families interviewed (twenty-two parents in total) whose views can be associated with the conflict perspective, in that they viewed education as preparing their children to gain awareness of issues such as racism, discrimination, privilege and inequality. One of these three parents saw education as contradictory and in part harmful to home education, particularly as it relates to her values and principles about collaboration and respect.

Chelsea educators must consider that, most parents highly valued education and have high expectations for their children's future careers and lives. Also that they consider that success is something that depends not only on what teachers and students do, but also what they as parents do.¹⁰⁴ Chelsea schools need to approach these parents with a clear sense of respecting and encouraging their differences. For example, schools can create multicultural events where parents show their culture and begin feeling an important and valuable part of the school community.

¹⁰⁴ Some exceptions suggested a clear separation of responsibilities - home and school - where teachers do their part and assume the responsibility of teaching necessary subjects for the appropriate level of education, while parents assume the responsibility of doing their part at home preparing their children for school.

6.4. Summary and Conclusions for Questions 3 and 4

How are various Latino parents in Chelsea involved in activities connected to their children's schooling? and What kind of factors/experiences have shaped/are shaping various Latino parents' conceptualizations of education, their forms/degrees of activity, and the perceived consequences of such? It was found that all the parents believe that their children's attendance is important to their school success. More important is that, with the exceptions of some parents with children in the middle schools, interviewees believe the teachers care about their children. This was very important evidence in order to understand the nature of (non)involvement of parents in school-related activities.

The parents interviewed identified most types of parental involvement that are generally defined in the U.S. context.¹⁰⁵ Besides the roles played in terms of home education (taking care in all things related to rearing which include instilling family Latino cultural traditions), most of them prioritized involvement in those activities or things that they considered are related to the children's school performance and achievement. The following were mentioned as forms of involvement: monitoring school-work at home (helping or monitoring homework) and providing all material and environment children need for that, visiting teachers to talk about children's grades and behavior (their own initiative or because school requests it), and attending open-houses. Participating in PTO's and other school government was also mentioned as a way parents participate but none of the parents showed they participate in this or even a wish for participating in PTO's.

¹⁰⁵ Epstein's typology of six level of parental involvement is one of the most common: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making and Collaborating with Community (Epstein, J. 1995)

I use Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement to summarize parents' understandings of their practices about parental involvement in their children's education and school-related activities:

1. Parenting. This category includes all parents/families actions to establish a home environment to support children as students. All parents participating in this study showed they are very involved in regards to parenting. They varied from those that can be situated in a higher level of this category as "accompanying" their children to those that minimally mentioned to provide the all material things needed for their children's schoolwork.

2. Communication. This refers to the communication between school and home about school programs and children's progress. While most parents with children in the elementary school said they have good communication with their children's teachers, parents with children in the middle school said the contrary that communication (in most of the forms and degrees) between them and teachers (and other school staff) is problematic.

3. Volunteering. This refers to parents participating as volunteers in classrooms or other school matters including efforts to involve parents. Few parents reported to have experience in classroom involvement, while none of them mentioned being involved in other volunteer activities.

4. Learning at home. This involves families with their children in learning activities at home, including homework and other curriculum-linked activities and decisions. Several of the parents participating in this study mentioned that they help their children in different ways with their schoolwork at home. Few of the parents were not involved in this form mentioned they don't feel able because they do not have the knowledge or they are not usually at home at time of homework. No parents mentioned that their child's school provided assistance in this way.

5. Decision Making. This includes parents participation in making school decisions, developing parent leaders and representatives. None of the parents participate in PTO's or any other school body.

6. Collaborating with community. This involves identifying and integrating resources and services from the community to strengthen school programs, family practices, and student learning and development. None of the twenty-two parents mentioned being engaged in any of these types of school-related activities.

Parents see several factors that encourage them to be involved or not to be involved, including factors of their own situation (family and cultural background, formal education, knowledge of English, familiarity with Chelsea School System, length of residence in Chelsea, family economic situation and parents labor status, citizenship/immigration status, and participation in non-formal education/community based organizations), and/or institutional and contextual factors (schedules for school meetings and other activities, language discrimination, race discrimination, discrimination based on socioeconomic status, schools' lack of effort/interest to motivate Latino participation, and lack of efficiency of participation in Chelsea School District).

Several other factors were also mentioned, such as knowledge of English, which relates to parents' confidence not only to help their children in their schoolwork but also to interact with teachers and school-personnel. The study included parents with different level of formal education, from no education to university-level. Higher level of education was associated with more involvement or possibilities to be involved, though none of these or the other parents were involved in PTO's or expressed interest in being involved. A structural/political factor was mostly referred as the impediment to be involved in PTO's and not any other factor.

Familiarity with the Chelsea education system was also considered as a factor that directly affect parents to be more or less-none involved. Parents economic situation and labor status was another important factor affecting their parental involvement. For those that experienced little involvement in their children's education and almost not involvement in school-related activities observed they have too many responsibilities. Parents often work two jobs, which interferes with their attendance at school meetings. Several of the parents have very physically demanding jobs and may be too tired to attend school functions. Thus, working parents confront special challenges that interfere with their involvement in their children's education and school-related activities. Several of them confront a type of conflict of priorities, and for some of them, the need for survival represents a highest goal.

The second group of factors, the institutional/contextual factors, include the school environment, aspects of school's logistic and operation. These parents described the elementary school as a "welcoming" environment, though few described it as "unwelcoming." On the contrary, the environment of the middle school was mostly described as "unwelcoming". Language discrimination, racial discrimination, and discrimination based on socioeconomic status were mentioned as elements of the unwelcoming environment. The conclusion here is that an unwelcoming school environment discourages parents from getting involved. Besides that, negative or positive experience with school affects parents' willingness to become involved. Parents that are called to receive good news and are greeted nicely or with respect at school have the potential to be involved. The contrary tends to happen with parents that besides being called for problems and are treated disrespectfully, they lose any type of encouragement to be involved in school-related activities. Moreover, as parents have perceived that school personnel have negative or condescending attitudes; these have discouraged their possibilities to be involved.

The other institutional/contextual factors mentioned by parents are those related to the school's logistic and have to do with schedules for school meetings and other activities as well as school personnel's lack of effort and interest of school to motivate Latino parents' participation. An important aspect around these factors is that for parents that face economic constraints, limited knowledge of English, and other aspects of their own situation, feel that the institutional and contextual dynamics around the schools of Chelsea do not favored the majority of them in relation to their involvement, particularly in school-related activities. This situation is more evident among middle school parents and in few cases for parents with children in elementary schools.

6.5. Implications for Theory and Research and Policy Practice for Questions 3 and 4

Trumbull et al. (2001) emphasize that the views of Latino parents are cultural variable. This idea is consistent to the present study. When I asked these parents what has influenced their views and practices on parental involvement, most of them referred to their family background and their own experience as a child/growing up and their situation in a new societal context.

In other regards, factors apply differently to every parent, they have significant influence on their type and levels of involvement. Traditionally, parents' level of involvement is directly linked to the specific practices of the school that encourage involvement at school and guide parents in how to help at home. This idea base on an institutional perspective emphasizes that the schools' practices to inform and involve parents are more important than other factors like parent education, economic situation, English knowledge, etc.

Factors related to the culture of parenthood need to be considered when examining parent-school relationships. According to Erickson (1995), culture is "seen as learned and

transmitted...” (p. 15). When Latino parents, as it can be several of cases of the parents interviewed, take their children to a school in the United States, both parents and children are facing a dramatic new reality. Most likely parents are trying to understand the new culture while being forced to make important educational decisions for their children.

Research on parental involvement has shown that there are many factors that impact the confidence of Latino parents to help (directly or indirectly) their children in regards to their schoolwork and in regards to their possibilities to be involved in school-related activities. This study echoes the works of Floyd (1998) and Moles (1993) in the sense of that parents’ level of formal education is one of the factors that has strong effect on their confidence which directly affect their involvement in school-related activities. These scholars also found that confidence was also associated with parents’ ability to interact with school staff or participate in schools’ events and activities; which also has to do with English and other aspects of the parents’ own situations such parents

Parents with a higher level of formal education and a good knowledge of English language showed more confidence in becoming involved in children’s education and school-related activities but they were not interested in participating in PTOs or any other school organization. It is also a fact that various Latino parents have “at least attended/completed high school” which put them in a disadvantage situation, as has been the case of some of the parents in this study.

This issue of confidence was also related to parents’ familiarity with the Chelsea school system. Several of the parents do not believe in their own effectiveness and capabilities. Swick (1988) stated that parents’ beliefs in their own abilities affect the extent to which they are involved. Some of the parents situated themselves as being outside the cultural mainstream,

which make them feel that they are not capable of contributing to their children's education. Thus, they feel there were less prepare to become involved in school activities.

Several of the Latino parents' interactions with the Chelsea school system also showed a type of confrontational attitude. Parents with more formal education, good English, and familiarity with the school system exhibited a confrontational attitude. All of these parents were found to be very involved in their children's education, though not all emphasized school activities as part of their involvement priorities.

One factor contributing to their children's school success is the quality and frequency of the communication between parents and school personnel. Parents of elementary school children (who commented they have an acceptable form of communication with teachers) had better communication with teachers/schools than middle school parents.

It is seems that there is a need in Chelsea for cultural sensitivity in planning school activities. Encouraging school involvement among Latino parents with school-aged children presents a challenge for Chelsea school's personnel. This study highlights the need for school personnel to understand the cultural perspectives of parents they wish to involve at the school. The necessary conditions to elicit participation from Spanish-speaking parents were examined in a four-year study (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). In terms of parental participation at school, results showed differences between conventional and non-conventional activities. Specific cultural knowledge is not required in order to involve parents in conventional activities (e.g., "open-house," parent-teacher conferences.) Non-conventional activities (i.e., parents as co-teachers, shared decision-making regarding curriculum), on the other hand, encourage parents to participate in their children's education when communication is culturally responsive.

Schools therefore need to use strategies that are responsive to the unique cultural characteristics of parents. Latino parents are often perceived as being quiet, non-assertive and reserved during discussions with teachers or school administrators, or in participating in other institutional activities. In Chelsea's, middle and elementary schools, teachers and school administrators face the challenge of how to increase parent involvement and how to capitalize on their own cultural backgrounds in dealings with parents such as those Latino parents in this study. As a result, parents and families of the participants may become less isolated and distanced from the school. Chelsea educators, such as those elsewhere, need training in order to learn and incorporate strategies that will involve families in their children's education; particularly in dealing with multicultural environments. This type of training should be included in teacher training pre-service programs.

To finalize this section, this study suggested that parental involvement must be meaningful and practical for the parents, based on an understanding of their situation and responding to their needs. Parents confronted with socio-economic pressures, limited or parents can respond in positive or negative ways to school demands. Conversations with parents indicated that to increase parental involvement the school of Chelsea must have a clear vision of the socioeconomic realities of the Latino families and other aspects that help school to define and implement ways for better involve parents.

The schools must understand the skills and resources parents have and encourage parents' participation in a climate of confidence and trust between home and school. If parents do not see positive reasons to get involved, they will continue to stay away from school activities, particularly from PTOs. If parents do not feel their culture is properly understood and respected,

there cannot be a climate of confidence and trust. If parents and teachers do not have a common language to communicate with each other, effective parental involvement is only a dream.

6.6. Summary and Conclusion for Question 5

Are there similarities or differences between Central American and Puerto Rican parents with respect to their conceptualizations of education, their forms/degrees of activity, and the perceived consequences of such “involvement? For most of the parents in this study, parental involvement in their children’s education is highly valued (particularly as relates to children’s performance); for others parental involvement particularly in school-related activities is valued as a lower priority. There is not a uniform pattern to their participation at school, though none of the parents participate in PTOs or other decision-making organizations. Both types of factors (of their own situation or institutional/contextual) influence in different ways every family and parents. One of the important evidence of this study in terms of possible similarities or differences is that parents’ cultural differences associated with the process of integration to a new society have strong influence in the way they view and interact with school.

Independent of their time in the U.S. and Chelsea¹⁰⁶ and their immigrant status, all parents participating in this study showed strong ties with their Latino and family traditions. This similarity may help us to get an understanding of their emphasis of parental involvement at home; and that differences within all parents and particular between Central American and Puerto Rican parents have to do with other factors and not exclusively with the differences of citizenship and immigration status. In other words, being part of a voluntary or an involuntary

¹⁰⁶ At the time of interviews, parents of the study had lived in Chelsea between three and more than twenty-five years including one mother who was born in New York.

minority does not reflect, at least among and between the parents of the study, significant element to compare similarities or differences.

Non US resident status from Parents identified as Central American origin show that somewhat affected their views and practices regarding parental involvement. it have caused some of them feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence and timidity that prevented them from participating in school-related activities—Sentence rewritten. Although there were also several Puerto Ricans who reported feeling a type of insecurity, lack of confidence and timidity because of them being treated as Latinos, such was more likely among Central American interviewees.¹⁰⁷ However, in terms of how one or other factor affect parental involvement, this study showed that other aspects (such as level of formal education, knowledge of English, family/cultural background, limitations in economic situation) have stronger influence on parents' views and practices on parental involvement, particularly in school-related activities.

6.7. Implications for Theory and Research and Policy Practice for Question 5

A simplistic generalization of the ideas of Gibson and Ogbu (1991) can provide an invalid prediction regarding the experience of Puerto Rican (classify as involuntary minority) and Central American parents. The category of cultural differences is not easy applicable among these two groups that, although having many differences, they also observe several similarities. Several Puerto Ricans held similar ways of involvement in their children's education. It was not only the case of the more active parents, but also in the case of some of the less active parents.

Further research seeking to compare these two groups should consider ideas of Erickson (1997), avoiding easy or obvious ways to generalize about voluntary or involuntary groups. In

¹⁰⁷ An anecdotic comment of a Puerto Rican mother was that she sometimes feels as illegal immigrant in the way teachers and other school personnel have treated her, with not respect.

these sense, futures research can consider ideas of Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco (1992 and 1995) in the sense that cultural construction in new settings is always based on individual and/or groups' previous background, which apply not only to Central American but also to other groups that try to maintain their Latino traditions, including the Puerto Rican groups.

APPENDIX A

Nota de Consentimiento para Participar en le Investigación (Informed Consent Notice for Participant of the Study -Spanish version)

Mi nombre es Victor R. Córdova, estudiante de doctorado en la Facultad de Educación, Universidad de Pittsburgh, actualmente realizando mi investigación de tesis doctoral. El tema de mi tesis es: "El Involucramiento de Padres de familia en la Educación". Este estudio tiene por propósito analizar las percepciones que tienen padres de familia Latinos de Chelsea sobre la naturaleza, los propósitos y las consecuencias del involucramiento de padres de familia en la educación de sus hijos y en las actividades relacionadas con las escuelas.

La realización de esta investigación incluye la entrevista de 24 padres de familia Latinos de Chelsea. Cada entrevista tiene una duración aproximada de entre una hora y hora y media. Para asegurarnos de no perder ninguno de los datos de la entrevista, me gustaría grabar nuestra conversación, la cual será totalmente confidencial; y además nadie más que yo podrá tener acceso para identificar nombres o información contenidos en la cinta grabada. Para generar la tesis doctoral o cualquier otro documento que se publique y que esté relacionado con la investigación, los nombres de los participantes serán sustituidos por seudónimos.

Son varias las contribuciones que de esta investigación se pueden derivar. Una importante es el de proveer a las autoridades y personal de las escuelas de Chelsea y de otros lugares con alta población de Latinos contar con mas elementos para interactuar mas efectivamente con padres de familia Latinos. Unas mejores relaciones entre maestros y padres de

familia, en consecuencia, puede crear impactos positivos en el rendimiento escolar de su hijo, y en su educación en general.

Esta investigación es personalmente conducida por Victor Córdova, bajo la dirección del Dr. Mark Ginsburg, profesor en el Departamento de Políticas y Estudios Administrativos de la Facultad de Educación de la Universidad de Pittsburgh. Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta puede comunicarse en cualquier momento conmigo al xxx-xxx-xxxx o con el Dr. Mark Ginsburg al xxx-xxx-xxxx.

Si usted está de acuerdo en participar en esta entrevista de investigación, favor firmar la hoja adjunta a esta nota. Es importante hacerle notar que usted no esta obligada/o a participar en esta entrevista, y que si usted inicia esta entrevista, puede detener su participacion en el momento que lo desee; asi mismo, usted no esta obligada/o a contestar preguntas especificas. Muchas gracias!

Formulario Consentimiento del Participante.

(Participant Consent Form – Spanish version)

Doy mi consentimiento para participar en la investigación de la tesis doctoral de Victor Córdova: El involucramiento de Padres en Educación: Percepciones y práctica de padres Latinos de Chelsea, Massachusetts. Se me ha explicado la naturaleza de este estudio y he tenido la oportunidad de hacer cualquier tipo de preguntas que pueda yo tener.

Nombre del participante _____

Firma _____

Fecha _____

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Notice for Participant of the Study

My name is Victor R. Cordova, a Ph.D. student in the School of Education at the University of Pittsburgh. I am currently working on my Dissertation Research, focused on the parents' perceptions of the nature, purposes, and consequences of parental involvement with the schools of Chelsea, Massachusetts.

To conduct my study, I am interviewing 24 Latino parents of Chelsea. The interview will take around one and a half hours.

I would like to tape record our conversation to insure accuracy. Neither your name nor the data you provide will be identifiable by anyone but me, and confidentiality will be strictly maintained. In my dissertation and any future publications I will not identify personally you nor any member of your family.

This research has the potential to contribute positively in several respects. It can inform school officials regarding how they could relate more effectively with Latino Parents. Better educator-parent relations, in turn, can have a positive impact on your children's school performance and education.

This research is being conducted by me, Victor Cordova, under the direction of Dr. Mark Ginsburg, Professor in the Department of Administrative and Policy Studies, School of Education, University of Pittsburgh. Should you have any question at any time you may contact either me (at xxx-xxx-xxxx) or Dr. Ginsburg (at xxx-xxx-xxxx). Many thanks!

If you agree to participate in this interview study, please sign the attached consent form. Please note that you are not obligated to participate in this study, and also that if you being to

participate, you can stop your participation at any time, and you are not obligated to answer any specific question. Thanks.

Participant Consent form

I give my consent to take part in Victor Cordova's dissertation study: El Involucramiento de Padres en la Educación/Parental Involvement in Education: Perceptions and Practice of Latino Parents of Chelsea, Massachusetts. The nature of the study has been explained to me and I have had an opportunity to ask any questions that I may have.

Print name_____

Signature_____

Date:_____

APPENDIX C

Interview General Guide (Spanish Version)

I. Preguntas generales del participante:

-¿A que se dedican usted y su esposa/o? y los demás miembros de la familia?

[qué, dónde, cuantas horas, etc.]

-¿Cuanto tiempo han vivido en Chelsea? Donde vivían antes de venir a Chelsea?

-¿Cuántos hijos tienen? Cuántos van a la escuela? A que escuela y que grado?

-¿Viven todos sus hijos con usted? Si no, cuántos viven con usted?

-¿Quiénes mas viven en casa, además de usted, su esposo/a sus hijos?

II. Conceptualizando Educación

1. ¿Qué significa para usted que una persona tenga educación/sea educada?

¿Cree usted que es lo mismo ir a la escuela que educarse?

2. ¿Qué importancia tiene para la educación de su hija/o(s) asistir a la escuela?

3. ¿Con que otras cosas o actividades se relaciona la educación de su(s) hija(s)/o(s)?

4. Dígame ¿Cómo identifica o define usted el éxito de su(s) hija/o(s) en su rendimiento escolar?

¿Con qué se relaciona?

5. ¿Qué consecuencias mira usted del éxito de su(s) hija/o(s) en su rendimiento escolar?

¿Mientras está en la escuela?

¿Cuando termine su “high school”?

¿Cuando termine su universidad?

6. ¿Qué consecuencias futuras ve usted del éxito en el rendimiento escolar de sus hijo(s), en relación el futuro de la familia, a ellos mismos, y a los demás? ¿Qué desea usted para el futuro de su(s) hija/o(s) en relación con su escuela y educación y a otras cosas?

III. Percepciones sobre Involucramiento de Padres en Educación.

1. ¿Qué o quiénes contribuyen con el éxito en el rendimiento escolar de su(s) hija/s(s)?

¿Qué papel deben jugar los maestros, padres y otras personas en ayudar con el rendimiento escolar de su hijo?

2. Podría usted por favor describirme un día en la vida de su(s) hijo/a(s), por ejemplo el *Lunes* pasado [incluyendo comportamientos, procesos/actividades familiares y de otras personas involucradas con la educación de su(s) hijo(s)?

[prueba: qué, quiénes, cómo, dónde, por cuánto tiempo, por qué, etc.?]

Además de estas actividades, cuénteme ¿que otro tipo de actividades diferentes pasan durante la semana?

3. Podría usted decirme ¿que cosas hacen durante el fin de semana? ¿Donde van? ¿Quienes van? ¿Con quienes usted, su esposo/a, sus hijos y los demás de la casa usualmente comparten los fines de semana? (Y en vacaciones de verano?)

[lugares, actividades en familia, tiempo, etc.]

4. ¿Sabe usted si a su hija(o) le(s) gusta la escuela, ir a clases?...¿está su hijo/a contento/a de lo que esta aprendiendo? ¿y con su(s) maestro/a(s)? ¿y con sus compañeros y compañeras?

¿Cómo usted lo sabe o lo nota...por ejemplo?

¿Y usted, está contento/a con lo que a su hijo/a le están enseñando en la escuela?

5. ¿Qué cosas cree usted que un papá o una mamá tienen que hacer para que se pueda decir, ah! Este señor o esta señora está involucrada/o o participa en la educación de su(s) hija/o(s)? ¿Qué quiere decir esto para usted?

[ejemplo de: actitudes, comportamientos, actividades/procesos/tipos/grados en la escuela, en casa y otros lugares, personas, tiempos/frecuencia]

¿Qué viene primero a su pensamiento cuando usted escucha o lee la expresión “involucramiento de padres en la educación”? ¿Qué es para usted que una madre o padre esté o no esté involucrado en la educación de sus hijos/as?

6. ¿En qué cosas es lo que usted más ayuda a su hijo/a en relación a su escuela y en a su educación? ¿Cuál es la cosa más importante que usted hace para esto?

Tarea? Biblioteca? ¿De qué conversa más con su hijo/a? ¿Que sabe de sus compañeros? Y de los papas de sus compañeros? Conoce a alguno de ellos? Se frecuenta con ellos?

7. Cuénteme un poco de la última vez que usted o su esposa/o habló con el maestro/a de su hija/o. ¿Cuando fue la última vez que usted o su esposa/o visitó la escuela de su hija/o? ¿Como se sintió? ¿Como fue el trato? Fue en Español? ¿Como han sido las otras veces? Dígame, ¿como es que me dijo que se llama el profesor(a) mr(s).....? ¿Conoce usted alguna experiencia de otro padre latino y no latino?

[pruebas sobre: que, cuando, frecuencia, quien, donde, etc.]

8. ¿Recuerda cuantas veces durante este año usted o su esposa/o ha visitado la escuela de su hijo/a? Dígame ¿que es lo que ha hecho en la visita? ¿Cual fue el motivo de la visita? (o por que no ha visitado la escuela durante este año?)

lugar (la escuela, salón de clases, etc.)

personas (profesores, director, consejeros, etc.),

trato a su hijo, usted, los padres, respeto e igualdad, etc.

9. Dígame, ¿alguna vez el personal de la escuela le ha pedido a usted o a su esposa/o participar en sus actividades?

[PTOS, Comité Escolar, Juntas comunitarias, etc.)

Si si...¿como cree que esto influye en la educación de su hija/o? ¿en usted? ¿en su familia?

¿En los otros Latinos?

Si no..¿Cree que si usted participara esto ayudaría o afectaría negativamente a su hijo?

Si no...Dígame, si le invitaran a participar, ¿le gustaría hacerlo?

[Pruebas sobre: por que, por que no, como, que, con quienes, etc.]

10. ¿Ha asistido usted a las reuniones de padres de familia y maestros; u otro tipo de reunión de padres?

Si si...Cuénteme, ¿que le han parecido? ...¿que ha aprendido de ellas? ¿Cual ha sido su mejor experiencia en estas reuniones? ¿Por qué?

Si no...¿Por que no?

[limitaciones: tiempo, lenguaje, etc.]

[motivaciones, desmotivaciones, situación personal/familiar, personal de la escuela, etc.]

11. ¿Cree usted que su participación o la su esposo/a podría en este tipo de actividades o de otro puede tener algunos efectos en la educación de su hijo? En la escuela? En usted misma/o? en su familia? otros miembros de la comunidad Latina? O en otros?

[pruebas sobre: que, por que, como, a quien, cuando, etc.]

12. ¿De que manera(s) piensa usted que el personal de la escuela podría ayudar a usted y su esposo/a en sus actividades como padres de familia relacionadas con la escuela?

III. Participación en programas informales o no-formales de educación, actividades comunitarias y de otro tipo.

1. Cuénteme un poco sobre los programas de capacitación, talleres, y otros tipos de programas de educación formal o no-formal que usted o su esposo hayan participado En Chelsea? En el lugar donde ustedes vivían antes?

Si es si...

¿Cual de todas estas experiencias ha sido la más impactante en su forma de pensar sobre la educación de sus hijos? Cuénteme más...

[pruebas sobre: cuando, en que, donde, quienes, organización/grupos, propósitos, por cuanto tiempo]

Si no...

¿por que no?

¿Cree usted que este tipo de programas tienen alguna repercusión en los padres de familia en relación a su papel en la educación de sus hijos?

2. ¿En que actividades comunitarias le ha gustado participar? Comunitarias, de adultos, de la juventud, etc.? Tomó usted algunos cursos capacitación para el trabajo o de algunos aspectos comunitarios?

¿Ha asistido a alguna “escuela para padres” realizada por organizaciones comunitarias de Chelsea?

¿ A algún otro tipo de actividad de organización comunitaria/política/social?

¿Que acerca de algún involucramiento en activismo laboral o político? Esta inscrito usted en el registro electoral?

SI..Por que? Cuando? Quienes? La enseñanza?

NO..Por que?. en que le gustaría participar? Por que?

¿Le gustaría que sus hijos y otros miembros de la familia tomaran parte de esto? ¿Por que?

3. ¿Que tan útil considera usted que ha sido este tipo de participación? ¿Cree usted que estos involucramiento han impactado en su forma pensar respecto a la educación y futuro de sus hijos? Ha afectado esto en su forma de pensar respecto a su involucramiento en actividades de la escuela o relacionadas con educación? En relación a su situación y a la de su familia?

IV. El pasado y su impacto en el presente y percepciones.

1. ¿Ahora bien, cuénteme un poco sobre cosas del pasado de usted y de su familia?

-¿Asistió usted a la escuela?

Si si... ¿Cuando/donde? ¿Grado o titulo obtenido? ¿Cuénteme un poco de esos

años cuando iba a la escuela? ¿Como fue su experiencia?

Quien le ayudaba a usted? Cuales fueron las mejores y las peores situaciones o cosas que a usted le pasaron en los años de su escuela?

Que recuerda usted de su familia en esos años? Reuniones de padres de familia en la escuela?

Que cosas se parecen y que cosas no entre su experiencia como estudiante y la de su(s) hijo/a(s)?

(si su hijo/a inicio sus estudios en el lugar donde antes vivía, que diferencia/similitud ve en relación a sus estudios y la escuela donde estudia? (o de los hijos mayores)

[personas, situación familiar, problemas, etc.]

Y ahora de papa/mama como compara lo que pasa con su hijo? Que cosas son similares o diferentes?

2. ¿Que aspectos de su pasado o del de otras personas cree usted que afectan su vida actual? Y como esto influye en su actitud de participar (o no participar) en los asuntos relacionados con la escuela y en general con la educación de sus hijos?
3. ¿Que aspectos de la situación de su país o del lugar donde anteriormente vivía cree que han afectado su vida y la de su familia?

[como, cuan intensivo, examples..]

4. ¿Cuales son los mayores cambios experimentados por usted y su familia con el vivir ahora en Chelsea? Como estos afectan o como cree afecten el éxito de su hijo en la escuela y en su futuro? Y ustedes? Y los otros miembros de la familia?

Y el cambio a Chelsea, como ha sido? Que tan difícil fue venir a Chelsea/The US o juntarse con su familia?

V.-¿Tiene algún consejo o ideas que quiera compartir con otros padres? Con padres Latinos?

-Tiene usted alguna pregunta, o algo mas que crea usted es importante agregar en esta entrevista?

Muchas gracias!

APPENDIX D

Interview General Guide (English Version)

I. Participant's general information

-What is your occupation? Other members of your household?

[work + how many hours study, etc.]

-How long have you lived in Chelsea? What place(s) did you live before coming to Chelsea?

-How many children do you have? How many at school? Which school, grade?

-Do all of your children live with you? If not, how many do?

-Are there other people living in your home besides you, your spouse, and your children?

II. Conceptualizing Education

1. How important is it for your child(ren) to go to school? Why do you say this? In what ways could schooling be changed to make it better for your child(ren), family, community, society?

2. Do you think your child(ren) like school, taking classes, her/his teacher(s)? How do you know this? Could you please give one or two examples? Is s/he happy? Are you happy about what your child(ren) are being taught?

3. What do you think are the main purposes of schooling? What are the consequences of going to school for: a) children, b) families, c) the community, d) the society? Are some of these outcomes of schooling positive, while others may have negative effects on one or more of these groups?

4. Are there other forms of education in which your child is involved? How are such forms of education similar to or different from schooling (in terms of content, processes, outcomes)?

5. What does it mean to you for your child(ren) to be successful in school? To what extent do you think that your child(ren) has/have been successful in school? Why or why not?

6. What are the immediate and future consequences of your child(ren)'s academic success (or non-success):

- While in school?

- After finishing school?

- After finishing college?

7. How is school success related to her/his(their) future? What do you want for your child(ren)'s future in terms of education and other things?

Who or what contributes to your child(ren)'s success in school?

III. Family Life and Perceptions of Parental Involvement/Participation

1. Could you please describe one day in your child(ren)'s life, for example the past *Monday*? (including behaviors and processes/activities of family members and other involved)

[probe: what, who, how, where, how long, why, etc?]

Are there different types of activities (besides these) that regularly occur on other days during the week?

2. Tell me what you and members of your family do during the weekend? Where do you usually go? With whom do you and members of your family spend time during the weekend? What about during summer vacations?

[activities and places: at home, visiting relatives, friends, museums, malls, , etc]

3. What roles should educators (teachers, administrators, etc.) and parents play in helping children succeed in school? How do you think these roles should be connected?

4. How do you think a father or mother should be involved/participate in their children's education. What does it mean for you? Tell me more...

[example of attitudes, behaviors, activities/processes/actions, types/degrees of that, at school, home and other places, frequency, times]

5. What are the most important things that you do to help your child(ren) with school and in general with their education?

How often do you talk to your child(ren) about homework, school? about his/her plan for the future? your expectations about her/him?

Tell me about home rules? discipline? Tell me more...

6. Tell me about the last time you (or your spouse) talked with your child's teacher? When was the last time you or your spouse visited your child's school?

[probe for: what, when, how often, who, where, feelings, etc]

7. Do you recall how many times have you or your spouse visited your child's school this year? Last year? Tell me what you did when you visited. Why did you visit? Why didn't you visit the school?

Place (the school, class-rooms, etc)

People (Teachers, director, councilors, etc..)

Help, respect, equal treatment for everyone, etc.

8. Has the school asked you (or your spouse) to participate in their activities? (parent's workshops/conferences, PTO'S, school boards meetings, fundraising activities, etc.) Why do you think they invited you?

If yes, when the school does that, what do you think they want you to do (and what don't they want you to do) when you participate?

If you were invited to participate, would you like to be more involved in school activities (in what ways)?

[probe for: why, why not, what, how, who, with whom, where, when, etc.]

9. Have you or your spouse attended PTO or other parent's meetings?

If yes...

[probe for: how often, how important, what, how, who, with whom, where, when, etc.]

If not... Why not?

[probe for: limitations: time, language, etc.]

[probe for: what encourages/discourages, e.g. personal/family situation, school, etc.]

10. Do you think your or your spouse's participation in any of these or other activities could impact your child(en)'s education? the school? yourself? your family? other members of the Latino community? Others in general?

[probe for: what, why, how, to whom, when, etc.]

11. Are there ways that you feel the school could better assist you and your spouse as parents in terms of helping your child(ren) with homework, your child(ren) concerns, behaviors, etc.?

III. Participation in non-formal, informal education and community and other activities

1. Tell me about your or your spouse' participation in trainings, workshops, or other type of non-formal programs here in Chelsea or in the place(s) where you used to live before coming to Chelsea.

If yes...

What it has been the most important of these experiences that you see impact on your beliefs about your children's education?, and about how/why parents can/should be involved in school-related matters? Tell me more...

[probe for: when, what, where, who, organizations/groups, purposes, how long] [probe for: why, how beneficial, etc.]

2. What about your participation in community events/activities? What about involvement in projects, campaigns, or other forms of activism (e.g., labor, religious, or civic)...Are you registered to vote (why or why not)?

If yes...

[probe for: when, where, who, why, what, with whom, how, etc]

If not...Why not?

3. In what ways have these types of participation been useful or useless with respect to your involvement in school-related matters? ? How, if at all, have these forms of participation influenced your beliefs or thinking about your child(ren)'s education and future? reasons and strategies for your involvement in your children's education and other school-related activities? What about your personal and family situation affecting your way you see education and parental involvement?

IV. The impact of past experiences on perceptions of education and parental involvement in education.

1. Could you please now tell me about some of your and your family's past experience?

-Did you attend school?

If yes... When/where it? Final grade/degree? Tell me, how was it?

What do you see is similar or different your own experience at school and your child(ren)'s school experience?

[probe for where, when, how, what, why, etc.]

If not...Why not?

2. What about yours and your spouse's experience with school(s) as parents before coming to Chelsea? How do you compare these with your current experience?

3. What are the major changes you and your family have experienced since moving to Chelsea, and how have these affected or how will they affect the education and the future of your child(ren)?

How was your family's situation before coming to Chelsea? How it has changed?

Do you see changes in your expectations about your child(ren)'s education and their future in general? What about yourself and other members of the family?

Is there any advice you could share with parents today? With Latino parents?

Do you have any questions for me, or is there anything that you think is important that I have not asked?

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