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How we help our children : Mexican immigrant parents of high-achieving students

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HOW WE HELP OUR CHILDREN: MEXICAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS OF HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The immigrant parents of high-achieving Mexican American students have several characteristics in common. Although their own formal education is often limited, they place great importance on education. They communicate with their children. They are oriented towards the future. They have strong moral values and impart them to their children. They see their own sacrifices as worthwhile if they enable their children to have a better future. These parents through their own intelligence and hard work have managed to transcend difficult circumstances and help their children to achieve their dreams.

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Chapter One

Introduction and Rationale for Study

Background

During the school year 1987-88, there was a little boy I'll call Francisco, the youngest child in my kindergarten class. His father had a history of being in and out of jail and was in jail during the year Francisco was my student; his mother worked full-time for the county and used to pick up Francisco on her lunch hour. Yet, Francisco was a successful student. He was fully bilingual. In addition to his mother, he had two grandparents and a much older brother and sister who all doted on him. Despite the fact that Francisco's father was in his life only sporadically, his family appeared to be doing the right things to help him succeed. At first, I was interested in the topic of resiliency, how some students do well despite overwhelming obstacles. As I continued to teach, my interest shifted to those families whose obstacles are more common-place—poverty, lack of fluency in English, lack of knowledge of the U.S. educational system—yet whose children succeed in school.

For the past seventeen years, since I began teaching in the Central Coast area, I have had a question about why some of my students (all Mexican or Mexican-American, primarily from farmworker families) come to school primed to succeed from the time they enter kindergarten. Their families do not appear to have more education or more financial resources than the families of my other students (although this is something I surmise rather than know). These children do not come to school with so-called middle-class or upper-middle-class "advantages," yet once in school they learn to read and write quickly in Spanish and generally do quite well throughout their school years, often

carrying that success with them into college. Their parents seem to be doing something which enables their children to do well. These children are of normal, lively intelligence and may or may not be gifted. Every year as a K-2 teacher of bilingual children, I see some of them in my class.

Statement of Problem and Purpose

There has been a great amount of research into the causes of Mexican-American students' failures, their high dropout rates, and the alienation they experience when they feel caught between the traditional culture of their parents, which they may or may not feel a part of, and the culture of the U.S., which they often do not feel a part of either (Gándara, 1995; Valdés, 1996).

Yet few researchers have studied Mexican-American students' successes (Patricia Gándara [1995] and Concha Delgado-Gaitán [1990; 2001] are notable exceptions). I wanted to explore the factors which contribute to the academic achievement of those students, children of Mexican immigrants, who do well in school.

I believe this is an important issue because it appears that so much has been written about the Mexican-American children who fail. The public perception is that such failure is inevitable and yet somehow might be changed if only the Mexican parents were "more involved" or if the children would just "become more American" (Delgado-Gaitán, 2001; Valdés, 1996). Often Mexican-Americans are compared unfavorably with Asian-Americans (Bempechat, 1999). Some teachers have low expectations for Mexican students; sometimes they equate limited English with lack of intelligence or lack of initiative (Valdés, 1996). They often interpret parents' respect for school personnel and reluctance to interject themselves into school affairs as a lack of interest in education

(Valdés, 1996). Many studies and programs look at this issue from a deficit perspective, assuming that the immigrant parents need to change. The suggested changes usually come from people outside the community, the "experts." Their recommendations often involve getting Mexican families to look and act more like middle-class European-American families, as if what they are is not good enough (Valdés, 1996).

Yet there are Spanish-speaking children who thrive in school from the time they enter kindergarten. Apparently their parents have equipped them somehow to navigate the tasks and the culture of school in the United States while retaining a sense of themselves as Mexicans. As they become successful students, these children become bilingual and bicultural, rather than abandoning their own culture for that of the U.S. (Gándara, 1995). As I see it, their parents are the true experts on how to increase parent involvement and school success in the Mexican-American community.

My question is: what do these parents do differently? How can their experiences benefit parents who are struggling with their children's lack of success in school? For this study, I interviewed parents of ten of my former students to answer these questions with the hope of disseminating their answers to others in the community. In addition, I spoke with some of my Mexican-American colleagues about their own experiences with school and how their parents helped them to become successful students. I wanted to explore what factors were significant in determining children's achievement. Therefore, the questions for this study included: Did the parents of students who entered school well-prepared have a higher level of education than most families in the school neighborhood? Had they done anything to prepare their children for school? How did they support their children once they started school, and how did that support change as

students progressed through the grades? What was their advice to their children? What hopes and dreams did the parents harbor for their sons and daughters? How did they plan to help their children realize their dreams?

Limitations

This thesis details the experiences of ten families of successful students, who may or may not be representative of other families with immigrant parents. It does not include the experiences of families whose children are not successful students, except in the cases of families whose children included both high-achieving and low-achieving students.

Rationale

Since I have spent the past seventeen years living in this community and teaching kindergarten, first and second grade in the district, I still have contact with many of the students I have taught in the past, and with their parents. In general, I have had good relationships with the parents of my students, and I anticipated that many of them might enjoy collaborating in a project such as this. It is often valuable to reflect on one's own life and why something one has done works well. I thought that for them working on this task would be an affirmation of themselves as parents. Raising children involves lots of choices, many of which are not clear-cut. Society offers these parents very little recognition of the important job they are doing. All of us will benefit in the future because they are raising children who will make a positive contribution to their communities. At some time in the future, I would like to make a video based on what I learned from the parents of my former students. The video would be for other parents in the community. Parents would be shown interacting with their children and talking about their own philosophies of child rearing and education. Making a video about these

parents' struggles and victories would be a way of valuing these parents' efforts and of educating others.

A video in which parents are speaking from the heart in the language of the community is likely to be highly accessible and believable to others in the same circumstances. It could be a tool to help parents help their children and also a guide to help other immigrant parents navigate an often perplexing school system. The video could also be helpful to teachers who do not always understand the culture of the community in which they are working. This thesis will serve as the groundwork for the video. I plan to write a grant proposal which, if funded, will allow me to create a more polished video than I would be able to do otherwise.

Chapter Two

Professional Literature Review

Introduction

In researching the question of how Mexican immigrant parents help their children to succeed in school, I read in several areas for background knowledge and then read books and articles by authors who focused on the specific topic I had chosen. I chose to avoid material about the high failure rate of Mexican-American students; instead, I was interested in reading material which dealt with the academic success of children of Mexican immigrants and how that had been achieved. The background information included works on immigration, education of high-achieving children living in poverty, and the theories of Lev Vygotsky, who believed that learning is socially and culturally constructed. While looking for literature dealing specifically with the topic of how Mexican immigrant parents support and influence their children to do well in school, I was particularly interested in reading the accounts of researchers who developed close ties with the communities in which they were working. Concha Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 2001) and Guadalupe Valdés (1996) each seemed to go beyond the traditional role of the "objective researcher." Their admiration and affection for their subjects is evident in their work. Since I would be interviewing parents of my former students, with whom I already had a warm relationship, their approach to research seemed especially relevant.

The Mexican Immigrant Experience

In establishing a context for studies of the education of children of immigrant parents, some of the authors provide a study of immigration patterns. Much of what has been written about "the immigrant experience" is based on European immigrants of the

early 1900's. It is commonly believed today that the European immigrants of a hundred years ago were easily assimilated into mainstream culture, including schools, without being given any special consideration of their circumstances. On the contrary, many immigrants, particularly Irish, Italians, and Poles, but also some Jewish children (and many native-born Americans) did not even enter high school (Valdés, 1996). This failure to complete a formal education was attributed, at different times and by different people, to racial inferiority, culturally inspired fatalism, or irresponsibility.

What may have been the experience of some immigrants early in the last century (or what is commonly accepted as having been true) is not necessarily true today. Since 1965, the U.S. has absorbed over 20,000,000 legally admitted immigrants; there are also an estimated two to four million undocumented immigrants in this country. The vast majority of these newer immigrants are non-English-speaking people of color from the Caribbean, Asia, and Latin America (Suárez-Orozco, 2000). In addition to facing language and economic barriers, they are entering a job market in which high-paying manufacturing jobs requiring little formal education no longer exist (Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

My research centers on families in which the parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico as adults. Today's Mexican immigrants differ from those from Europe who arrived in the early 1900's. The European immigrants of ninety or a hundred years ago left their homelands, often never to return. Entering the U.S. drew a clear demarcation between the old life and the new. Many families who have immigrated from Mexico in recent years have settled relatively close to the border and maintain close contact with their family members in Mexico (Valdés, 1996). They may in fact cross the

border frequently. Even those who live at a distance from the border often return annually to Mexico. In language and in culture, they remain closely linked to their homeland, although they usually see themselves as permanent residents of the U.S. (Valdés, 1996). In the next section of the literature review, the different ways schools in the U.S. respond to these families are explored.

Parent Involvement Programs

In order to integrate immigrants into the mainstream of school culture, schools in the U.S. have instituted various types of programs to encourage "parent involvement," although what is meant by the term varies widely. There are several kinds of parent involvement programs in existence that are based on totally different philosophies. These are, to categorize them briefly: the deficit model, which attempts to change parents to make them "better;" the separate-spheres-of-influence model, in which the school takes care of academics and the parents transmit their own culture and values; the parent-as-education-consumer model, which assumes that parents are savvy users of schools; and the parent-school partnership model, which is based on the precept that it is the responsibility of parents and schools working together to educate children (Romo, 1999).

Some programs incorporate the life experiences of parents to provide literacy experiences for parents and children, having them create family-authored books which may be shared. Some have parents read books to their children. Champions of these programs see them as a way to develop skills while at the same time strengthening family bonds (Ada, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Quintero & Huerta-Macías, 1995). Critics of these programs see them as an attempt to "fix" something "wrong" with the family (Valdés, 1996). Utilizing parents' areas of strength and capitalizing on children's skills in

their first language is supported by the theories of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky believed strongly in the aims of the Russian revolution, thinking that society needed to be transformed in order to redistribute wealth and improve the lives of the common Russian people. He thought that all psychological phenomena had a social basis, that language, memory, personality, reason, and emotions were all cultural constructs. Contrary to Piaget, he believed that biologically determined development occurred only during a child's first few years and that all subsequent development was a result of the cultural forces in the child's life, including attitudes and cultural artifacts such as utensils and furniture (Ratner, 1998).

According to Vygotsky's theory, social interactions shape the way that we experience the world. Children's caretakers guide them as they learn what is useful and what is appropriate, what brings approval and what brings disapproval, how to pay attention, and how to structure language (Vygotsky, cited in Ratner, 1998; Oscarsson, 2001; Quintero & Huerta-Macías, 1995).

Vygotsky's theory is clearly relevant to the issue of parent involvement in the schools and to the way in which school personnel see immigrant parents and children. "Particular social values structure perception in a manner that highlights certain characteristics and precludes noticing other aspects of self and other people" (Ratner, 1998, p.4). Children come to school having learned from their families to view certain ways of being as desirable, respectful, and normal; teachers often have different expectations of what "normal" means. This difference in experience and perceptions contributes to a lot of frustration on the part of children, parents, and teachers. Teachers look for the hallmarks of "reading readiness" as if all children could be expected to arrive

at school with these particular skills in place, yet parents may have participated in other kinds of activities with their children which build skills which are invisible, because they are not looked for in school (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Valdés, 1996). Schools often stress individual achievement, yet many immigrant students enter school with the ability to engage in cooperative or collaborative work already in place(Trueba & Delgado-Gaitán, 1985).

Vygotsky's theories support still another type of parent involvement program, one about which Concha Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 2001) has written extensively. This is a program in which parent groups take the initiative to reach out to other parents, to educate themselves and each other about their children's schools. Parents learn to become advocates for their children through their interactions with other parents, receiving help and support in dealing with school issues. They also can ask for and receive help from school personnel about academic matters and activities in Spanish. In addition, the parents' group can be a conduit for information about available community services and programs (Delgado-Gaitán, 1987, 1990; Delgado-Gaitán, 1993; Delgado-Gaitán, 2001;Delgado-Gaitán & Ruiz, 1992).

Difficulties and Differences

In establishing the socio-political context of their work, many of the authors describe the problems faced by Mexican immigrant children (or the U.S. born children of Mexican immigrants) as they enter U.S. schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gándara, 1995; Romo, 1999; Valdes, 1996). Mexican parents often are baffled and at times angered by the expectations placed upon them by those in the U.S. educational system. Parents transmit to their children those competencies and expectations of success that are the

norms in their own culture (Ogbu, 1981, cited by Delgado-Gaitán, 1987). In Mexican schools, home is not expected to be an extension of school; parents are expected to teach their children responsibility and proper behavior, not to act as tutors. Parents may offer their children a great deal of guidance in matters of integrity, values, and discipline, and yet they may not know what specifically will help their children to achieve academically (Delgado-Gaitan, 1987).

Mexican immigrant parents and their children also have to deal with a great number of other issues, any of which may be obstacles to children's academic achievement. Among these are poverty, lack of legal status, frequent moves, the parents' own level of formal education, and language differences between home and school.

In many schools, teachers and administrators speak no Spanish, and these parents speak little or no English. Numerous researchers cite studies which show that children who maintain the language of their parents while adding English usually do better in school than children who lose the ability to communicate in their first language (Ada, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gándara, 1995; Quintero & Huerta-Macías, 1995; Quintero, 1995; Romo, 1999). Parents are better able to involve themselves in their children's education if they are able to communicate, both with their children and with school personnel, in the language in which they feel comfortable.

Gándara cites her findings that her subjects, Hispanic recipients of graduate degrees, benefited from what Cummins (1981, cited in Gándara, 1995) refers to as "additive bilingualism," contrary to earlier studies which indicated that "bilingualism" was an impediment to academic success (Gándara, 1995). Bilingual education is currently a hotly disputed topic in many areas of the country. Yet, if educators truly wish

parents to become involved in their children's education, does it not make sense to develop and maintain the child's first language, which is often the parents' only language, while adding English? Mexican immigrant parents can support their children's early literacy by reading, storytelling, and passing on family lore in Spanish, but many schools totally negate the value of the first language (Gándara, 1995). In addition to not being able to communicate with school personnel, immigrant parents also suffer from being regarded as inferior parents by those connected with the school (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Valdes, 1996). Those attributes which are these parents' strengths are often not valued. Yet, many of the immigrant parents do provide, or have the potential to provide, a great deal of support for their children. By examining how the parents of successful Mexican-American students help their children do well in school, it should be possible for schools to develop a cooperative relationship with parents.

Parental Support of Successful Students

The Mexican immigrant parents whose children are successful in school make available a variety of support for their children, whether or not they are able to help them with specific assignments. Some of this support consists of providing home literacy experiences through conversation, reading stories, maintaining ties with family members in Mexico through letters, orienting children towards future goals and aspirations, and challenging them to persevere through difficulties (Ada, 1993; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gándara, 1995). Parents convey the message that education is important: "Homework comes before visiting with friends" (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Some parents who have little formal schooling themselves nevertheless repeatedly stress the importance of

staying in school to their children, do not ask that the children contribute to the family financially while they are in school, and provide moral support by their very presence (one mother, although she could not help her high-school son with his homework, sat at the table with him until 2 a.m. while he finished) (Romo, 1996).

Some research that has been done on groups other than Mexican-Americans also is relevant. Bempechat (1998, 2003) studied children of poor families from various cultural backgrounds. She writes that those children who were successful in school came from families where education was *the* priority and the parents had great faith in their children's ability, which the children in turn absorbed. Clark (1983), who studied poor Black children in Chicago, writes of the interactions among family members of successful students. His findings are corroborated by many of the findings of those who studied the families of successful Mexican students (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gándara, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Romo, 1996; Valdes, 1996). Clark states that these families show a high degree of cohesiveness; respect and values are more important than short-term material rewards to them. The parents encourage their children to succeed and to explore the wider world. Siblings support each other and push each other to excel. These families have certain customs such as conversational patterns or singing together which Clark refers to as "educational rituals;" Delgado-Gaitán calls these family habits "socialization to literacy"(Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). Families of successful students stress loyalty to the family, self-discipline, responsibility, and perseverance (Azmitia & Brown, 2000; Clark, 1983; Gándara, 1985; Scheurich, Fineman, Guajardo, Colón, & Sánchez, 1999). Lopez (2001) cites the experience of one of the five migrant families he studied. The Padilla children all excelled in school; their parents had had only a few years of

formal education but had set an example of hard work. The parents had intentionally set out to impart several lessons about work: they wanted their children to acquire manual skills, to recognize that field work is strenuous and poorly compensated, and to realize that if they did not work hard in school they would end up working hard in the fields. This emphasis on hard work and perseverance is a common theme mentioned by many of the authors (Azmitia, 2000; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Gándara, 1995; Lopez, 2001; Romo, 1996).

Gándara (1995) refutes earlier studies of parental teaching strategies, school success, and parental involvement that tied Mexican-American students' achievement in school to a higher level of family economic resources, and which claimed that Mexican parents tended to be uninvolved in their children's education. The parents of her subjects were poor and had had little formal schooling. She cites her interviews with the fifty high-achieving participants in her study, reporting that their families emphasized hard work, mastery, siblings' support of one another, and interest and immersion in language and ideas (Gándara, 1995). Her subjects' parents also told stories about their families that had a legend-like quality to them, cultivating a sense of family pride and of pride in themselves as Mexicans. This sense of history, of pride in family and cultural heritage, was something mentioned by many of the authors (Clark, 1983; Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Gándara, 1995; Scheurich et al., 1999; Suárez-Orozco, 2001) as being characteristic of the families of high-achieving students.

Immigrant parents whose children are successful students often have several additional characteristics in common. They tend to be more authoritarian than middle-class Anglo parents aim to be (Gándara, 1995; Romo, 1996). These parents have a firm idea of how a moral person behaves, and they strive to convey this to their children. This may take the form of "consejos," or advice, which, while they may not have a direct bearing on academics, greatly influence children to take school seriously (Azmitia, 2000; Clark, 1983; Lopez, 2001)

Contrasting Views

The researchers whose work has been most helpful in giving direction to my research have backgrounds in anthropology (Concha Delgado-Gaitán), Spanish language

(Guadalupe Valdés), and sociology and psychology (Patricia Gándara), as well as in education. All of them have written extensively about the ways in which Mexican-immigrant parents support their children's education. All of these authors, in contrast to the authors of many earlier studies, approach their investigations of parent involvement from a cultural-difference rather than a deficit perspective. They report the experiences of the Mexican immigrant parents as they deal with a new language and a new set of expectations of them as parents. Gándara's work was described above. She uses the results of an extensive survey about the family backgrounds of her fifty subjects and the interviews she conducted with each of them as the basis for her book.

Two of the most noted scholars and authors in the field of Mexican parent involvement are Concha Delgado-Gaitán and Guadalupe Valdés. The two have some aspects of personal history in common and share a phenomenological approach to ethnographic research. Both became personally involved with the subjects of their investigations, and both changed the focus of their studies in light of what they discovered as their research developed. Both of them exhibit a profound respect for the Mexican immigrant parents and children who are the subjects of their studies. Yet, the two of them reach significantly different conclusions about the best way to help these parents help their children (or whether the costs of such help may be too great). Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 1993, 2001) is an advocate for parent empowerment and parents helping other parents. Guadalupe Valdés (1996) believes that any such programs tamper with the essential family dynamic of Mexican families and may have unforeseen negative consequences.

It is probably no coincidence that the two researchers who have done the most significant work in this area are women. While research has traditionally been regarded as "objective, "relationships between people always involve subjectivity. Men have dominated the academy and have been largely responsible for determining the criteria for educational research; this is changing as more women are entering the field and bringing their own experience to their research (Neumann & Peterson, 1997). Both Delgado-Gaitán (1990, 1993, 2001) and Valdés (1996) write about the relationships they formed with their subjects, the ways they were able to be of use to those in their studies, and how their work changed the researchers themselves.

Concha Delgado-Gaitán was born in Mexico and immigrated to Los Angeles with her family when she was in the second grade (Delgado-Gaitan, 1997). She began studying the ways in which parents were involved in their children's acquisition of literacy in the Carpinteria, California, schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990). As her study progressed, she spoke several times with a migrant parents' group about her findings regarding literacy. As she received their comments and answered their questions, she realized how estranged many of the parents felt from their children's schools and how strong were their feelings of inferiority and powerlessness. Her own attitudes about her work began to shift. In her article "Researching Change and Changing the Researcher" (1993), Delgado-Gaitán writes about reaching her decision to serve as a resource person with the parents' group and coming to terms with how this might affect the results of her research while being the ethical thing to do. This article describes a process which had a tremendous effect on the way Delgado-Gaitán saw her work and her life as a researcher.

She had to question what she had always been taught about a researcher remaining "objective," and to decide whether that objectivity was in fact necessary and desirable.

Like Concha Delgado-Gaitán, Guadalupe Valdés was born and raised in northern Mexico. During the eleven years preceding her work with parents and schools, she studied bilingualism in general and the difficulties faced by monolingual Spanish speakers who found themselves in U.S. courtrooms. As she began to work with schools, her focus changed.

> As I became more involved with schools and with language within institutions, I found myself caring less about the study of language phenomena as such than about the ways in which Mexican-origin individuals used their two languages in order to survive (Valdés, 1996, p.6).

Valdés began to see the incongruities between the mainstream view of "involved parents" which the school promoted and the Mexican parents' conception of their role. The parents saw the schools' role as providing academic instruction and their own role as providing *educación*, instruction in living a moral life and growing up to be a responsible, contributing member of the family and of society. Valdés writes about her work with the ten families she chose for her study in her book *Con Respeto*. During the three years of her study she developed close relationships with many of the families and with one woman in particular, attending baptisms, graduations, and other family celebrations, as well as occasionally accompanying family members to medical or social-services appointments. As she observed and interacted with the families, Valdés was impressed by the parents' strength, courage, love for their children, and dedication to raising their children to be hard-working, responsible people. The involvement of these parents with their children often went unrecognized by school personnel, who interpreted their lack of contact with the school as indifference (Valdes, 1996).

Despite having observed similar phenomena in their research and despite a shared respect for the people involved in their studies, Delgado-Gaitán and Valdés reach different conclusions as to what should be done to improve the situation of Mexican-origin students and parents. Delgado-Gaitán writes about the ways in which parents empowered themselves as they came together to learn from and support each other in their dealings with the schools. She describes the successful Family Literacy Project which resulted from the concerns raised by the Comité de Padres Latinos parent group (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; Delgado-Gaitán, 1993). She does not see this kind of organization either as a cure-all or as something which can be created by outsiders. Not all of its effects can be measured quantitatively.

> While the language spoken, the numbers attending meetings, the books read, or the jobs obtained are visible forms of cultural participation in a community, the invisible meaning of those activities is what drives the cultural changes from the inside out. How these people changed their perception about their lives from being one of deficit to one of empowerment led to the cultural changes in the family, the community, and in their personal lives (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p. 10).

Delgado-Gaitán sees the parents' process as overwhelmingly positive.

Guadalupe Valdés, on the other hand, questions the usefulness of any intervention in the lives of Mexican families, suggesting that any kind of program can have unintended and unknowable consequences, upsetting the delicate equilibrium of families. Valdés distrusts family literacy programs, family math programs, and any other schemes "really designed to change the cultural practices of these very able and very strong families" (Valdes, 1996). Changes at the classroom or institutional level will make little difference when it is the inequality in society that needs to change. Valdés points to the double bind faced by those who want to help Mexican-origin children achieve

academically and yet fear that the human cost of a focus on individual success will be too great. She believes that the kind of upbringing, which Mexican immigrant families strive to give to their children, is what will protect those children in the long run. Still, she feels somewhat torn.

> . . . I am not advocating that Mexican-origin families be left alone. What I am trying to suggest is that ideals about success are perhaps not incompatible with other values. I believe that it should be possible to move into a new world without completely giving up the old (Valdes, 1996, p. 205).

While I read the work of both Delgado-Gaitán and Valdés with interest, I see Delgado-Gaitán's approach as being ultimately more beneficial to immigrant families than that of Valdés. Despite their strong cultural ties to Mexico, the families will have to deal with U.S. schools as long as they remain in this country. Delgado-Gaitán's work in Carpintería provides a model for an organization which serves as the strong voice of these immigrant families in the schools. I believe that Valdés is right when she says that one should not have to give up the old world completely in order to embrace the new, but she does not provide suggestions for helping families to negotiate the U.S. school system.

Implications for Changes in School Policy

There is room for improvement in the way most schools encourage the involvement of Mexican parents in their children's education. We can learn a lot from those parents who, without "parent education" or many years of formal schooling, do a superb job of preparing their children for school and supporting them once they are in school.

Many schools already have teachers and office staff who are bilingual; this would seem to be a prerequisite in areas where there are many Mexican immigrant families, but it is not always so. One of the most basic ways to make parents welcome in schools is to be able to communicate with them; school personnel should not give the impression that having to speak Spanish is an inconvenience or an imposition. Schools need to emphasize parents' areas of strength and experience rather than their perceived shortcomings (Ada, 1993; Romo, 1999).

In addition to making parents feel welcome in the schools, it is important that their children be welcomed also, that schools offer educational challenges to all students, rather than creating a caste system within the school in which students in one tier are offered thought-provoking curriculum while those in another are taught uninspired material (Delgado-Gaitán, 1997; Gándara, 1995). Singling out certain students as "gifted" from an early age eliminates those who develop their interest or motivation later. It is also important to provide opportunity to those who willing to work hard and persevere (Gándara, 1995).

If those of us who work in the schools want all parents to be involved in their children's education, we may have to change our vision of what "parent involvement" looks like. Teachers and other school personnel must be aware of elements of their students' culture which may differ from their own. Much of the direction of parent involvement programs needs to come from the parents themselves. As Patricia Gándara (1995) reminds us, in matters of school reform, what we "know" may not be true.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The purpose of my study was to determine whether there were some common practices in which parents of some of my former students encouraged and helped their children to succeed in school. I chose families of children who had started first grade either already able to read or who began reading shortly thereafter. In conducting this study of the ways in which Mexican parents support their children in academic achievement, I took a phenomenological approach, eliciting parents' accounts of their own experiences with schooling in Mexico and their experiences with their children's schooling in this country.

Selection of Participants

I contacted by phone the parents of some of my former first grade students, who entered first grade reading or ready to read, whom I taught from 1989 to 2003, and who now range from second grade to high school age. The first graders at the time attended an elementary school in a mid to low socioeconomic area in a school district on the Central Coast of California. The families were selected based on the following criteria: immigrant parents, a balance of male and female students, distribution throughout the grades, and current residence in the neighborhood. I was interested in learning how parents who had completed their schooling in Mexico learned to deal with U.S. schools. I wanted to know in what ways they continued to support their children's academic achievement as the children began having classes mostly or entirely in English. I chose families who still lived in the neighborhood for ease of contact and scheduling appointments. Since I had a prior relationship with the parents, those whom I asked

agreed to take part in the study. A total of ten families participated. At least one child and parent from each family were interviewed. The parents chose whether to be interviewed at home or at the school. Before the interviews began, participants were asked to sign a consent letter (see Appendix A) seeking their agreement to participate and assuring them of confidentiality.

The following is a brief biographical sketch of the target children and the families interviewed. Names have been replaced by pseudonyms in all cases.

The Guijarra family: Catalina at the time of the interview was in fifth grade and continuing to do well in school. She lived with her mother, younger brother, stepfather, maternal grandparents, and several uncles. I met with Catalina and her mother in their home. Her mother was the only adult of all the families interviewed who had completed *preparatoria*, or high school, in Mexico. She worked in a floral nursery. Catalina detailed for me all that she had learned from her various family members about cooking, music, carpentry, and swimming.

The Mariscal family: Sara was in the second grade at the time of the interview. She lived with her mother, father, and baby brother. I met with Sara's mother in her home and interviewed Sara at school. I was touched that Mrs. Mariscal had arranged to leave her toddler with a friend while we talked; she had never left him before. Sara's father worked in construction; Mrs. Mariscal was at home full time, although she had been trained as an accountant in Mexico and had worked in that occupation until she had children.

The Moreno family: Cecilio was in third grade at the time of the interview. He was the fifth of six children; all were living at home with their parents except the eldest,

who was living in Monterey and attending college there. I interviewed both Cecilio and his mother at school. Mr. Moreno was a distributor for a tortilla factory; Mrs. Moreno ran a dressmaking business out of their home.

The Paredes family: Alfonso was the third of four children. He was my student in first and second grade; he could read both Spanish and English when he entered first grade. He was in the sixth grade at the time of the interview. His oldest brother was planning to attend CSUMB the following year. Mr. Paredes worked at a golf course; Mrs. Paredes cleaned offices at night. I interviewed her at her home and Alfonso at school. Her five-year-old daughter sat in on the interview.

The Gonzaga family: Marta was my student in both first and second grade, an accomplished reader and writer in both Spanish and English. She was in sixth grade at the time of the interview. I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Gonzaga, Marta, and her twenty-year-old sister in their home. Marta's sister planned to attend CSU the following year.

The Lara family: Mariela was a fourth grader at the time of the interview. She lived with her parents and three-year-old brother. Her father worked in the lettuce fields; her mother was a homemaker. I spoke with Mariela and with Mrs. Lara at school. Mariela's mother told me that Mariela read stories to her brother and then helped him take tests on the computer in her classroom.

The Guzmán family: Manuela was in the second grade at the time of the interview. She lived with her parents and her two-year-old sister. Her father worked in the fields; her mother was a homemaker. I interviewed Manuela and her mother at school.

The Mejía family: Dolores was my student in kindergarten, first, and second grades. She was a junior in high school at the time of the interview. Her brother was also my student for a year in the second grade. She lived with her parents and two younger brothers. Her father drove a garbage truck for the city; her mother worked part-time in an office. I interviewed Mr. and Mrs. Mejía and Dolores in their home. Dolores had just finished track practice and was home long enough to eat her dinner and talk with me before going to her biweekly AP Physics study group.

The Dimas family: José was my student in the first and second grades; he was in the sixth grade at the time of the interview. He had a sister in seventh grade and a brother in kindergarten. Mrs. Dimas visited the school frequently; I interviewed her there. The family moved to the Central Valley a few years ago, but Mrs. Dimas told me that they had moved back because the children were miserable in their school there, and once they were back in the Central Coast area they were happy to return to their former school. Mr. Dimas worked in the fields; Mrs. Dimas took care of several other children besides her own.

The Manríquez family: Tony was in the fourth grade at the time of the interview. He lived with his parents, two older sisters, and a baby sister. He no longer was attending the school because his parents had bought a house about a mile away. I interviewed Mrs. Manríquez in her home. She had been an active parent volunteer in my classroom during the year her son was in first grade. At the time of the interview, she was a participant in the program "Parents As Teachers" through the city's Adult School. Her husband worked in construction; she had worked in a packing shed until her baby, eight months old, was born.

Procedure

Since all of the parents were acquaintances of mine, and some of them had volunteered in my classroom, we spent a few minutes catching up before starting the formal interview. Prior to the actual interview, the interviewees were asked if our conversation could be recorded. Because the parents already knew me, they were not uncomfortable about being tape-recorded (or if they were initially self-conscious, they quickly forgot about the recorder once they began to speak about their experiences).

The questions, many of them based on research from the literature review, dealt with the parents' own history and their practices with regard to their children's education. Listed below are the questions asked to the adults in the study:

> Where in Mexico are you from? Was it a town, a "rancho," or was it located away from other houses? Can you tell me a little about it?
>
> How many children do you have? How old are they?
>
> How long have you been in this country? Were your children born in Mexico, or here?
>
> Did any of them go to school in Mexico? If so, can you tell me a little about the school?
>
> Can you tell me about your own schooling (where, what level)?
>
> What are some of the activities that you and your child, or the whole family, do together?
>
> From having your child _____ as one of my students, I know that he/she started school ready to learn to read and was a successful student in my class. Can you tell me what kinds of things you have done to support your child's learning? Is that different from the way you support your children as they get older and go further in school?
>
> What guidance or advice do you give your child?

What is it important that your child learn?

What are your child's responsibilities?

What do you consider to be your responsibilities as a parent?

What has been your experience with the schools your children have attended here?

Have you or your children experienced any obstacles to their education? If so, could you tell me about them?

What dreams and aspirations do you have for your children? How do you plan to help them realize those dreams?

I had intended to conduct at least two interviews with each family, but I decided against this for two reasons. First, the time involved in interviewing ten families was already considerable, and I realized that scheduling another ten interviews would be difficult. Secondly, the factual questions generally took only a few minutes to answer, and I did not want to interrupt the flow of the interview by cutting it off and making a second appointment. The subsequent questions were more open-ended, but parents seemed to answer them easily despite not having had much time to think about them. The duration of the interviews with parents varied. The interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour and a half.

The interviews with my former students took place primarily at the school, although three were conducted in the home. Listed below are the questions asked to students:

How do your parents help you to do a good job in school?

What do your parents expect of you?

Please tell me about something you like to do with your family.

Is there something you have learned how to do from your mother or your father? Tell me about it.

What do you like best about school?

Is there something you find difficult about school? What is it?

What do you do if there is something in your homework that you don't understand?

Interviews with the students took between ten and twenty minutes each.

Once the interviews were completed, I invited anyone who wished to meet as a group to an informal gathering to discuss the findings, although all taped conversations remained individual and confidential. I also interviewed some of my colleagues who came from a background similar to my students', including my principal and her mother, to determine whether the factors contributing to educational success had changed over time.

The analysis of the collected data will determine what direction the video will take when it is made. Some of the data was quantifiable: number of children in the family, their ages, rural or urban background, number of years in school, and number of years in the U.S. Other data was not quantifiable but indicated what avenues should be pursued in writing the grant proposal and making the video.

Chapter 4

Results

This project was a study of ten families of my former first grade students who were particularly successful in first grade. It involved interviews with parents of these students and the students themselves, who now range in age from seven to seventeen. In conducting this study, I wanted to learn what, if anything, these families had in common in the ways they supported their children's education and communicated their own values to their children. I wanted to examine the ways that parental support changed as students progressed in school. I also interviewed several of my colleagues, my principal, and her mother, whose family backgrounds were similar to those of my students, to see whether this pattern of academic achievement was due to comparable factors.

This chapter is organized into the following themes, based on the subthemes that emerged from the interviews:

1. Demographic data
2. Parents' educational experiences
3. Value of education, the importance of effort, and responsibility
4. Respect and moral development
5. Future orientation and the desire for a better life
6. The value of family

Demographic data

With the exception of one mother who was born in a border town in Texas and grew up in a Mexican border town, the parents were all from the central Mexican states of Michoacán, Aguascalientes, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Querétaro. There were nine fathers and ten mothers included because one mother had been divorced and had recently remarried. Most of the parents were from villages or small towns. Several had grown up in cities; several were from "ranchitos," small communities of a few houses in rural areas (See Table 1).

Table 1

Places of Origin

State	Father	Mother
Michoacán	2	3
Aguascalientes	1	
Jalisco	4	4
Guanajuato	1	1
Querétaro	1	1
Texas		1
City	1	2
Small town	6	6
"Ranchito"	2	2

At the time of this study, the participating families had been in this country for widely varying lengths of time. One family had been in this country for less than five years. Three families had been here 5-10 years, another three families 10-15 years, one family for 15-20 years, and two families for more than twenty years. In five of the families, all of the children had been born in the U.S. The other five families had children born in both Mexico and the U.S.

The families also exhibited a range in numbers of children and ages of their children, as seen in the following table. The age of the target child in the family, my former student, is in bold type. Six of the target students were girls; four were boys.

Table 2

Number of Children in Family and Their Ages

Family Surname	# of children	Age
Guijarra	2	4, **10**
Mariscal	2	1,**7**
Morales	6	5, **8,** 13, 18, 20, 21
Paredes	4	5, **12,** 14, 17
Gonzaga	2	**12**, 20
Lares	2	4, **10**
Guzmán	2	2, **8**
Mejía	3	9, 15, **17**
Dimas	3	6, **12**, 13
Manríquez	4	1, **9**, 10, 12

Note: age in bold type is age of former student at the time of this study.

One striking piece of information which this table confirms is that all of the target children except Dolores Mejía and Cecilio Morales were either only children or youngest children for a minimum of five or six years. Of course, this factor alone does not guarantee that children will do well in school, and many of the target children's siblings were also good students, according to their parents. Nevertheless, the long periods as either the only or the youngest child may have provided the target students with a great deal of one-on-one attention and conversation with parents and siblings. Birth order did not appear to be a factor in academic success, since some of the students were the oldest, others the youngest, and still others middle children. None of the target students was an only child. Half of the families had two children, the others three or more.

Only one of the target children had attended school in Mexico, although the siblings of several of the children had attended Mexican schools. While parents' own schooling had in all cases occurred in Mexico, their children's schooling for the most part took place in the U.S.

Since the parents of all of these families seemed to put such high value on education, I was interested in learning about their own educational backgrounds.

Parents' Educational Experiences

Most of the parents in our school population at the time of this study had completed the sixth grade. Many had gone through at least a year of *secundaria* (middle school) in Mexico. This was also typical of the parents I interviewed, although several of the parents had attended primary school for only a few years. As a group, the women had completed more years of schooling than the men; two mothers had completed coursework at a trade school after finishing *secundaria* (one woman had studied dressmaking, the other accounting). Some of the parents described the hardships they had encountered in trying to get an education. Others had fond memories of their times in their little village schools. Table 3 shows the educational levels attained by the parents in the study.

Table 3

Parents' educational level	**Father**	**Mother**
Little or no school		1
1-5 years of school	4	
Finished 6th grade		3
7-8 years of school	2	
Finished 9th grade	3	2
10-11 years of school		3
Finished high school (Prepa)		1

Many parents thought that it was important to share their own stories with their children. One mother who had completed sixth grade said

Yo—luego les digo a los niños, ustedes tienen que ser muy inteligentes, porque yo ni un año lo reprobé. Mi infancia no fue muy bonito que digamos, porque estuve con unos tíos; no estuve con mis padres. Yo estuve con unos tíos, a un lado de la casa de mis papás. A mi tía, a la hermana de mi papá, se le murió su hija. Ella era mi madrina; entonces yo estuve con ella porque se murió y entonces me pidió a mi papá que si le prestaba con ellos. Entonces, yo estuve con ellos. Entonces, no me dejaban salir a nada. Yo la atendía, y así fue mi niñez. No me dejaban ir a una fiesta, a nada, ¿verdad? De la escuela, nada más llegué a primaria, porque para ellos, la secundaria estaba en otro pueblito. En el pueblo, ellos tienen la mentalidad de que las mujeres—pues, cómo se van a ir, son mujeres, y todo eso. Pues, no se pudo, verdad, y si no se puede, no se puede. Pero mis estudios—estuvo muy bien. Me acuerdo que, como es pueblo chiquito, yo tenía uno, que ahora es mi cuñado, un maestro, se casó con una hermana mía, y él, estaba dando sexto año. Entonces, no había maestros para tanto niño, tantos grupos. Entonces, escogieron de las más altas, que estaban bien y todo, para enseñarles a los niños para que les ayudaran. Y a mí me escogieron para enseñar. En primero, pues, a los niños chiquitos. Todo fue muy—pues, es un pueblo muy chiquito pero muy bonito.

I tell my children, "You have to be intelligent, because I was never left back a year." My childhood was not a very happy one, because I grew up with my aunt and uncle; I wasn't with my parents. I grew up with my uncle and aunt, next door to my parents. My aunt's daughter had died. She was my godmother; I grew up with her because her daughter had died and she asked my father to lend me to her. So, I lived with them, and they didn't let me go anywhere. I took care of her, and that was my childhood. They didn't let me go to parties or anything. In school, I just finished primary school because the secundaria *was in another town. In small towns, people have the mentality that women—well, they'll just grow up, they'll leave, and all that. It wasn't possible, and if you can't, you can't, right? But I did really well in my studies. I remember, it was a very small town, and in sixth grade I had a teacher who is now my brother-in-law; he married one of my sisters. There were too many kids in the school and not enough teachers. So, they chose some of the most advanced students to teach the children in order to help the teachers. They chose me to teach—I taught the small children, first grade. Everything was—well, it's a very small town, but a beautiful one.*

Among many of the parents I interviewed, there was a consistent theme of regret that it had not been possible for them to go further in school. Yet they seemed to accept philosophically that that was just the way things were at the time, and that rather than complain about their own lack of opportunity, they would see to it that their children received higher education. Another mother described the education in her village this way:

Es un lugar muy chiquito. Serían unas 100 casas. Allí todos nos conocíamos. En ese entonces, cuando yo crecí, estaba chiquita, no había para ir a la escuela. Tenía uno que caminar mucho. Pero allí crecimos. A mí mi ranchito se me hace tan bonito. Mis hermanos—cuando ellos crecieron, ya había escuela allí en el rancho. Me acuerdo que mi mamá, tan pobrecitos que estábamos, tenía gallinas y vendía los huevos para las libretas, los lápices. Pero no teníamos que colorear muchas hojas, porque si no, no nos alcanzaba para el mes la libreta. Pero, gracias a Dios, yo llegué al 6 allí. Ya para el 7 y eso, uuh!, estaba retiradísimo como de aquí a Watsonville, y no había carros, no había nada. La gente que estaba allí usaba las bicicletas, así iban. En ese entonces, se recibieron dos maestros de allí. Yo estaba chiquita, pero me acuerdo. Decía yo, --¿Cómo podrían hacerle?—Se quedaban a veces con sus amigos en el pueblo, donde estaba la escuela.

It's a really small place, about a hundred houses. We all knew each other. At that time, when I was little, there was no way to go to school. One had to walk a long way. But we grew up there. My village seems so beautiful to me. My brothers—by the time they were growing up, there was a school in the village. I remember that my mother, because we were so poor, raised chickens and sold the eggs to buy us notebooks and pencils. We couldn't draw on very many pages, because otherwise the notebook wouldn't last the whole month. Thank God I was able to finish the sixth grade there. To go to seventh grade, wow! It was a long ways away, like from here to Watsonville, and there were no cars or anything. Some people had bicycles and went that way. But at that time, two people from my village became teachers. I asked myself, "How did they do it?"

Two of the mothers had received additional vocational training after finishing *secundaria*, one in accounting and the other in dressmaking (which in Mexico often involves being able to take a piece of clothing and copy it without using a purchased pattern). They had worked in these areas in Mexico before moving to the U.S.

Several of the mothers mentioned that their husbands had had less opportunity to study than they had. Sometimes this was because there was no school for the upper grades; other times because the men had needed to work with their fathers.

Pues, él es de un rancho, y allí nada más había primaria. El es el más grande de la familia, y siempre al más grande le toca trabajar un poco más. El no tuvo la oportunidad del estudio. Sí sabe leer y escribir y todo, pues.

He's from a rancho, *and there was only a grade school there. He's the oldest child in his family, and it's always up to the oldest to work a little more. He didn't have a chance to study. He does know how to read and write, though.*

When asked whether her husband had completed primary school as she had, one mother replied:

> No, él se me hace que hizo hasta tercero, cuarto. Todo el tiempo dice que su papá los mandaba a trabajar y que no tenían tiempo. Como eran mucha familia en su casa de él, a veces no podía ir a la escuela; tenía que ayudarle a su mamá.
>
> *No, I think that he only went through third or fourth grade. He always says that his father sent them to work and that there was no time. Since there were a lot of them in his house, sometimes he couldn't go to school; he had to help his mother.*

Perhaps because many of these parents were denied the opportunity to go very far in school themselves, they made their children's education a priority. Although the ways in which they supported their children changed as the children got older, the parents continued to help their children in any way they could, by their interest and their presence, much as Harriet Romo had observed in her work in Texas with high school students (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

The Value of Education, Effort, and Responsibility

Many of the parents I spoke with, when I asked what they had done to prepare their children for school, replied that it was the children themselves who had always shown an interest in learning. The mother of a sixth grader said,

> No, nada más entró al kinder pero sí, desde que estuvo en el kinder todo el tiempo yo me sentaba con ella y estudiaba, o ella sola. Ella sola se motiva y se agarra dibujando o escribiendo. A veces es floja para escribir, pero sí de que se agarra escribiendo, escribe cosas.

No, [I didn't do anything to prepare her] she just started kindergarten. Ever since she was in kindergarten I'd sit there with her while she studied, or she'd do it by herself. She motivates herself, and she starts drawing or writing. Sometimes she's lazy about writing, but once she starts writing, she writes.

Some of the parents had done some preparation with their children before they went to school, in terms of learning letters and numbers. Only a few of the parents mentioned having read to their children before the children started school. Most of the families, however, exhibited what Clark (1983) referred to as "educational rituals" and Delgado-Gaitán (1990) called "socialization to literacy." These family customs involved a great deal of family conversation, stories of parents' childhoods, and sharing of household activities. The mother of a third grader (and five others), who had read to her children, stated

> Bueno, de hecho que desde chiquitos. . . yo creo que todo el tiempo empiezan a entender desde que están en el vientre. En cuanto . . . desde un año o dos años empiezo a leerles mucho. Y yo creo que es el secreto para que se motiven en la lectura. Por ejemplo, a la edad de dos-tres años o del kinder, uno les lee cuentos, fábulas, y todo eso para que se interesen en la lectura. De acuerdo a como van creciendo, va uno buscando un tema que en su momento les interese más. Les leía cuentos y cosas graciosas pero al mismo tiempo interesantes. Yo siempre les he dicho desde chiquitos que un libro es su mejor amigo. Por medio de un libro, conocen el mundo entero sin tener que viajar. Y aparte usan un vocabulario más correcto.
>
> *Well, it's a fact that from the time they are little . . .I think that they begin to understand from the time they are in the womb. As soon as they are one or two years old, I start to read to them a lot. I think that that is the secret to motivating them to read. For example, at two or three years old, or in kindergarten, one reads them stories, fables, etc., so that they will be interested in reading. As they grow, one can search out whatever topic interests them at the moment. I read them stories and things that were funny but at the same time interesting. I've always told them since they were little that a book is their best friend. Through a book, they can get to know the world without having to travel. Aside from that, they use a more correct vocabulary.*

The parents of a sixth grader, when asked how they had prepared their daughter for school, answered that their other daughter, eight years older, had been the one to teach her little sister.

Nearly all of the parents with whom I talked mentioned wanting to instill a sense of responsibility in their children. All of the children had household chores to do, particularly on weekends, since during the week their primary responsibility was for homework. Many of the parents, as Delgado-Gaitán (1990) had observed, insisted that homework come before play, television, or socializing. While the homework was the children's responsibility, the parents were vigilant about making homework *the* priority. A fifth grader's mother had this to say:

> Es primordial para mí, que haga la tarea. Ya llega, a veces le pregunto que si tiene tarea, qué le dejaron. Casi por lo regular, no me pongo a hacer la tarea con ella. Es responsabilidad de ella, pero sí estoy al pendiente de revisársela, ¿ve? Y de estar –ya hiciste la tarea? y –haz la tarea. Me gusta saber cómo se portó, cómo va en la escuela, y por ejemplo, la otra vez me mandaron una nota, que tenía que firmar el test que hizo. Yo le pregunté por qué, y me dijo –No, todos los papás lo tienen que firmar. Al día siguiente fui a preguntarle a la maestra que si era verdad o que había salido mal. Yo le pregunté y me dijo no, que todos los papás lo tenían que firmar.
>
> *For me, that she do her homework is fundamental. She comes home, and I ask her if she has homework, what she has to do. Usually I don't sit down with her to do the homework. It's her responsibility, but it's my job to check it, to ask her, "Did you do your homework?" and to tell her "Do it!" I like to know how she behaved, how things are going at school. For example, the other day I got a note saying that I needed to sign a test she had taken. I asked her why, and she said, "All of the parents have to sign the test. The next day I went to ask the teacher if that was true or if she hadn't done well. The teacher told me no, that all the parents had had to sign the test.*

Children for the most part appreciated their parents' interest and assistance. One sixth grader described how his parents helped him.

> They give me suggestions and ideas to do better my work. They tell me some stuff about their lives. They tell me about their past and try to help me with all my problems. They really help me to make it up to sixth grade.

Another sixth grader who had been an exceptional student throughout elementary school saw the kind of encouragement that her family gave her as the norm. To her, this was to be expected of parents. "Well, they pretty much just tell me, you know, like keep on doing your best and stuff. Just like every parent does, pretty much." A fourth grader said of her parents, "They help me with my homework. If I don't understand it, they tell Mr. S., so then I won't get busted." Students may have seen their parents as strict, but they also saw them as their champions and protectors. One fifth-grade girl spoke of the support of her extended family:

> They help me by—like, my mom helps me like, she corrects my homework with the calculator. She doesn't actually like to do math. And she helps me—sort of. And my dad—he helps me in, like, improving. He doesn't yell. He helps me a lot, in, like, improving. And my grandpa—my grandpa and my grandma, they always want me, like, to be the best and encourage me to do stuff.

A third grader said of his parents, "They help me do my homework sometimes, and they tell me to don't give up if I don't know something." The idea of perseverance, of not giving up, was mentioned repeatedly by both parents and students, as many researchers had previously noted (Azmitia & Brown, 2000; Clark, 1983; Gándara, 1995; Scheurich, Fineman, Guajardo, Colón, & Sánchez, 1999). The sixth grader mentioned above, who took her parents' encouragement as a matter of course, commented, "They expect me to—again, just do the best I can. Just like—just say I don't try as hard as I am capable of. They just tell me, you know, "You have to!" I'm like (*in a small voice*), "Okay."

Respect and Moral Development

To the parents I interviewed, guiding their children's moral and social development was as important as encouraging their academic development. There are many possible pitfalls along the road to adulthood, and parents emphasized their own responsibility for teaching their children right from wrong and guiding them "por el buen camino," (Azmitia & Brown, 2000).

Parents had various strategies for this kind of moral guidance. One mother of a second grader commented:

> Pues, sacar a mis hijos adelante es una responsabilidad. Sacarlos, ey, y enseñarles el bien y lo que está mal. Hablar abiertamente con ellos para que sepan los peligros que hay ahorita en la actualidad. Pues, como madre uno siempre se preocupa por sus hijos. También es una responsabilidad criar a los hjos.
>
> *Well, bringing up my children is a responsibility. Bringing them up, and teaching them right from wrong. Speaking openly with them so that they know about the dangers that exist nowadays. Well, as a mother, one always worries about her children. It's a real responsibility to raise one's children.*

One mother spoke about the importance of providing for her children without overindulging them:

> Que ellos estén bien y no les falte nada. No siempre cumpliéndoles todo lo que quieran porque si les da uno todos sus caprichos los echa a perder. Ni dándoles mucho, ni poco. Allí más o menos, y si se puede. Ellos saben que si podemos comprar lo que les haga falta, lo hacemos, y si no, ellos saben que se tienen que esperar.
>
> *I want them to be all right, to have everything they need. I don't always give them everything they want because if you give in to all their whims, it spoils them. Not giving them too much, nor too little. Just what's enough,*

and then only if we can. They know that if we can buy them what they need, we will, and if we can't, they know that they will have to wait.

Many parents spoke of the need to keep communicating with their children as they grew older. Several mentioned that it was important to set a good example for their children, such as not using bad language around them if they didn't want the children to start using it too. Parents sought to provide good models for their children in respecting themselves and other people.

A mother of six said:

> Yo creo que son como los dedos de una mano. Uno tiene muchos hijos y ninguno es igual. Cada uno tiene su personalidad. Uno a todos trata de educarlos a todos de la misma manera, pero a veces hacen caso, siguen el ejemplo, y a veces no. Cada quien tiene su criterio propio y decide como ser, y claro que si los ve que se desvían o que no están de acuerdo con lo que uno piensa, de todas maneras de enseñarle lo que está bien y mal. Eso desde chiquitos . . . Yo digo que uno desde chiquitos es como una plantita. . . las personas en general somos como una plantita que si la cultivan crece derechita y saludable, física- y mentalmente hablando, y si la deja uno así pues, que no le presta atención y le proporcione cuidado, a lo mejor va a crecer mal.

> *I think they're like the fingers on a hand. One has a lot of children, and no two are alike. Each has a personality. One tries to teach them the same way, but sometimes they pay attention, follow the example, and sometimes they don't. Each one has his own criterion and decides what to be. Of course, if one sees that they're veering off course or don't agree with what one thinks, it's still important to teach them right from wrong. I say that from the time they're little, they're like a little plant. If you cultivate it, it grows straight and healthy, physically and mentally. But if you neglect it, if you don't give it attention and care, it will probably not grow well.*

In addition to setting an example, parents provided *consejos*, or advice, to their children, as was also observed by Valdés (1996), Azmitia & Brown (2000), Gándara (1995), and Delgdo-Gaitán (1990). The children were reminded to pay attention in school, to use

good manners with their friends, and to work hard. This mother's comment is representative of views expressed by many parents:

> Pues, lo que más quisiera es que Catalina se superara lo más que pudiera, estudiara lo más que pudiera, y que siempre saque buenas calificaciones. En realidad, eso es siempre lo que uno espera de lo hijos. Buenas calificaciones, que se porten bien, que nunca le den quejas a uno, porque ha de ser. Bendito sea, nunca me han dado una queja.
>
> *Well, what I want most is for Catalina to improve herself as much as possible, to study as much as she can, and to get good grades always. Really, that's what one expects from one's children. Good grades, that they behave themselves, that the teacher doesn't send me complaints about them, because that's how it should be. Thank God, I've never received a complaint about her.*

Parents saw it as their responsibility to bring up their children to be hardworking, respectful, and morally upright. They felt that they were working hard to ensure that their children would have opportunities which had been unavailable to them, and that the children needed to do their part to assure a better future for themselves. Yet, they did not want their children to succeed at the expense of other people. One mother expressed her values in this way:

> La mente es como una computadora, que ves que programan para hacer algo. Está programado para cualquier cosa, por lo más difícil que parezca, uno lo puede lograr, pero con perseverancia, persistencia, y obrando de buena fe, yo creo, y sin hacer cosas malas. Enfocarse en lo que quiera. Otra cosa que siempre les digo, que tienen que lograr siempre lo que quieran pero sin dañar a nadie. Pues eso es muy importante. Es que eso de –Yo tengo que lograr tener esto o hacer esto, no me interesa quien caiga, quien dañe. Eso no! Eso lo tienen que descartar desde siempre. Nunca haciéndole el mal a otra persona van a lograr algo bueno para ustedes ni su felicidad. O si logran tener, económicamente hablando, algo, dañando a los demás, tarde otemprano vuelve polvo.
>
> *The mind is like a computer, programmed to do something. It's programmed so that one may achieve even what seems most difficult, with perseverance, persistence, and working in good faith, I think, without doing bad things, by focussing on what one wants. I always tell them, they should try to achieve their goal but without hurting anyone else. This is really*

important. The whole thing of, "I have to have this or have to do this and I don't care who falls or gets hurt." Not that! They have to get rid of that attitude right away. I tell them, "Hurting someone else will never bring you anything good or any happiness." Or if you do get something, economically speaking, by hurting others, sooner or later it will turn to dust.

Future orientation and the desire for a better life

All of the parents I interviewed expressed their willingness to work hard and to sacrifice so that their children's life would not be as hard as theirs had been. These parents had both an appreciation for their past and an orientation towards the future. One mother spoke of how she and her husband talked with their daughter about their own past and their hopes for the future:

> Nosotros todo el tiempo le hemos platicado nuestras experiencias, como fue nuestra vida de niños, muy dura. Le hemos inculcado a ella que ella tiene que estudiar para que ella salga adelante y no pase lo que nosotros hemos pasado, para que ella en un futuro se supere ella misma, que sepa valerse por sí misma.
>
> *We have always talked to her about our experiences, how hard our life was as children. We have impressed on her that she has to study in order to get ahead and not experience what we have experienced, so that in the future she can do better and know how to fend for herself.*

Like the parents quoted by Lopez (2001), the parents in this study accepted the necessity of hard work and expected their children to devote attention and effort to their studies. The parents saw education as the means to a better life for their children. As Gándara (1995) noted, sometimes students attended a school outside their own attendance area in order to go to a more racially and socioeconomically heterogeneous high school (this was true of one family in the study). Parents stressed the necessity of education:

> Yo todo el tiempo les he dicho que necesitan estudiar. Les digo que ahora él que no estudie, ni en McDonald's lo van a querer.No los van a querer si no terminan la high school, y si pueden más, mejor.

I've always told them that they need to study. I tell them that now, the person who doesn't study, they won't even want him at McDonald's. They won't want them if they don't finish high school, and if they can go beyond that, even better.

Parents compared their own experiences to those they hoped their children would have in the future. One mother who works nights cleaning offices said

> Les digo a mis hijos que se porten bien, que miren cómo uno trabaja. Hace uno muchos esfuerzos para que ellos estudien, y que lo aprovechen, porque no todos tienen las oportunidades de ellos. Mira, si yo hubiera tenido una oportunidad en México, les digo, hubiera estudiado más, quizás no anduviera trabajando de noche. Quizás hubiera encontrado un trabajo bueno de día, le digo.
>
> *I tell my children to behave themselves, to look at the way we work. One makes a great effort so that they can study, and they should take advantage of that, because not everyone has the opportunities they have. Look, if I had had an opportunity in Mexico, I tell them, I would have gone farther in school, and maybe I wouldn't be working nights. Maybe I would have found a good day job, I tell them.*

This same mother spoke about her children's career aspirations. At the time of the interview, her oldest child was planning to enter the California State University system in the fall, her second child was a freshman in high school, and her two youngest were in sixth grade and kindergarten. She reported:

> El más grande tiene su anhelo de ser policía. El mediano quiere ser maestro. Alfonso quiere ser de los que venden casas, y luego quiere ser abogado. Tiene tantas metas en su cabeza, que todavía no sabe. A mí me gustaría que salieran adelante.
>
> *The oldest has a dream of being a policeman. The middle one wants to be a teacher. Alfonso wants to sell houses, and then he wants to be a lawyer. He has so many goals in his head, he just doesn't know yet. I'd like to see them get ahead.*

Despite having encountered difficulties and deprivations in their lives, the parents I interviewed did not waste time in self-pity or bemoan their own lack of opportunity. They

were oriented towards the future, towards the possibilities that life might hold for their children. The father of twenty-year-old and twelve-year-old daughters said:

> Lo principal es que estudien lo que ellas quieren. Lo que ellas quieren; en eso las vamos a apoyar. Por ejemplo, Rosa, que es la más grande, y le falta más poco, quiere ser maestra, y es el sueño que nosotros tenemos, verla realizarse con lo que ella quiera. De Marta, ahorita pensamos nada más que estudie y que vaya bien en su estudio, pero todavía ni ella sabe lo que quiere hacer.
>
> *The most important thing is that they study what they want to. Whatever they want, we'll support them in that. For example, Rosa, my older daughter, who is closer to finishing school, wants to be a teacher. That's our dream for her, to see her realize her own dream, what she wants to do. For Marta, right now we're just focussing on her studying and doing well, because she doesn't know yet what she wants to do.*

A mother of six children echoed the importance of doing the work one loves and finds fulfilling. She considered herself fortunate to have decided what she wanted to do at an early age and gotten the training she needed. She wanted that for her children also, and for that reason she was encouraging them to do well in school and to go on to college.

> Algo que les guste hacer. Es el sueño que tengo, porque yo, bendito sea Dios y a mis padres, lo logré. No importa que haya habido otros trabajos más importantes o conocidos, pero yo hago lo que me gusta hacer, que es impartir clases de corte y confección completo, y hacerlo y trabajar en esto es lo que me gusta. Desde que estaba en el kinder soñaba con eso. Yo les digo a mis hijos—A lo mejor a ustedes ser una modista se les hace algo insignificante, algo que no tiene valor. Para mí es lo máximo, porque es lo que me gusta hacer. Yo lo logré; ¿por qué ustedes no? Tienen un ejemplo en mí. . . .Y es lo que les digo, pos: deben de luchar por lo quieren, y no importa la edad que tengan cuando lo logren.
>
> *Something that they like to do. That's the dream I have, because, thank God and my parents, I was able to do it. It doesn't matter that there are more important or glamorous jobs, I do what I enjoy, giving classes in dressmaking and working at that. Ever since I was in kindergarten, that was my dream. I say to my children, "You probably think that being a dressmaker is something insignificant, but it's what I like to do. I achieved that, why not you?" They have an example in me. . . . That's what I say: you should struggle for what you want, and it doesn't matter at what age you achieve it.*

The Value of Family

Throughout the interviews I did, parents and children expressed appreciation for each other and talked of how much they valued their families. In nine of the ten families I interviewed, the children lived with both of their biological parents; in the tenth, the child lived with her mother, stepfather, and a large extended family. Mothers spoke of their husbands' involvement with their children. Parents spoke of how hardworking and helpful their children were. Children spoke of the activities they enjoyed with their families, and of their gratitude for their parents' and siblings' support and love.

Throughout the interviews, there always ran an underlying theme of the sacrifices the parents had made for their children. Parents spoke of these sacrifices in a matter-of-fact manner and without resentment. But all of the families had made sacrifices. In some of the families, the mother was staying home fulltime and the family was doing without a second income. In one family, the mother was working the night shift and the father days so that someone could be home with the kindergarten student. In another family, the parents had encouraged their high-school-age children to apply for an intradistrict transfer to a school which the parents considered better, even though the change in school necessitated three daily round trips to the other high school. One family had moved to a town in the Central Valley where housing was less expensive, only to move back again because of the children:

> Con la escuela aquí no he tenido ningún problema. Fue cuando nos cambiamos a Tulare que tuvimos problemas en la escuela. Los niños la odiaban. No querían ir a la escuela; lloraban. Por fin regresamos aquí, y por suerte los niños pudieron volver a entrar en los mismos salones. Estuvieron tan contentos los niños cuando regresamos.
>
> *We've never had any problem with the school here. It was when we moved that we had problems with the school. The children hated it. They*

didn't want to go to school; they cried. We finally came back here, and luckily the children could return to the same classrooms. The children were so happy when we came back.

Another mother spoke of the way she fit her work hours around her children's needs, finishing her sewing in the wee hours of the night:

> . . . hay días que yo me programo por hacer esto, un vestido, un traje este día. Entonces, surgen imprevistos con la familia, y yo tengo que ir, y ya, pos, ése es el trabajo para más tarde. Tengo que entregarlo, y a veces toda la noche y no duermo, una hora o dos, y a levantarme a mandarlos a la escuela. Yo creo que es, como madre es un trabajo muy sacrificado, cien por ciento, pero creo que cuando uno ve el resultado de la educación académica, espiritual, y mental de sus hijos, con eso le paga todo.
>
> *. . .there are days when I have planned to make something, a dress or a suit that day. Then, something unforeseen comes up with the family, and I have to go deal with it and leave my work for later. I have to deliver my work on time, and sometimes I don't sleep all night, only one or two hours, and then I get up and send them off to school. Being a mother is a labor of sacrifice, one hundred per cent, but when one sees the result of the education of one's children, academic, spiritual, and mental—with that one is repaid for everything.*

All of the parents whom I interviewed seemed to feel that the sacrifices they had made for their children had been worthwhile. Their goal was to see their children grow into strong, morally upright people well-prepared for a career. They supported their children in their efforts, and they felt rewarded when their children did well. They also gave their children credit for their hard work:

> Desde que estaba chiquita, dice usted que iba muy bien preparada. Pero en realidad, no creo que hicimos nada especial. Yo creo que ella era muy lista o—capta las cosas rápido. Prácticamente lo ha hecho ella solita. Pero lo que hacemos con ella, la apoyamos en todo. Desde qué quiere jugar, qué quiere hacer. Desde la primaria, ballet folklórico, entonces ballet folklórico. En secundaria, basquetbol. En la high school, ahorita, está en "track," corriendo. También ha estado en el volibol—todo lo que quiera, la dejamos.

> *Since she was little, you say that she was well-prepared. But really, I don't think we did anything special. I think she was really bright—she catches onto everything quickly. She's practically done it herself. But what we have done, we've supported her in everything. What she wanted to play, what she wanted to do. In grade school, it was folk dancing, so she did folk dancing. In middle school, it was basketball. Now, in high school, she's running track. She's also played volleyball—everything she wants to do, we've let her.*

Children also expressed appreciation for their families' support and for their parents' high expectations and confidence in them. The daughter of the mother quoted directly above said, when asked how her parents supported her in her studies, "They support me in everything they can. Whenever it's school-related, they let me go, and any activities, they always let me participate." When I asked her if that included driving her to all these activities, she said, "They always find time to fit into my schedule." (At the time of the interview, she was eating dinner, having just come from track practice. She was about to go to a study group for her AP Physics class). A sixth grader, when asked what his parents expected of him, replied "To be a lawyer, work in an office, have a family, have a house, live a good life." A fifth grader, when asked if there was something she had learned from her parents, said, "They showed me—my dad is showing me how to play the guitar. My mom helps me crochet, and so does my grandma. And my grandpa showed me how to not, like, get smashed by a hammer." These families worked and played together.

These family members expressed the value they saw in a strong family. One mother put it this way:

> Si toda la gente los rechaza en este mundo, en dado caso que los descriminen, tienen a su papá y a su mamá, a sus hermanos, que sí los vamos a apoyar. . . Todos los pandilleros, la mayoría, es porque se sienten solos. Ellos buscan un refugio y una familia en las gangas, en la calle, porque en su casa no lo tienen. Se sienten ignorados, es la palabra. Todos

los aspectos, ya sea de la escuela, ya sea académico o mental, espiritual, se sienten solos.

If all the people in the world reject them, if they're discriminated against, they still have their father and their mother, their brothers and sisters, who will support them.. . . All the gang members, the majority, it's because they feel alone. They're looking for a refuge and a family in the gangs, in the street, because they don't have it in their homes. They feel ignored, in a word. In all respects, in school, academically, mentally, spiritually, they feel alone.

In addition to love and support for their children, parents expressed pride that their children had worked so hard and done so well in school. The mother of a fifth grader expressed her pride in her daughter and her appreciation for her extended family when she said:

Es un orgullo, pues, que no nació aquí y que habla bien el inglés, y pues va en unas partes en lo gris (en las calificaciones), arriba de donde tiene que ir. La verdad, sí es una satisfacción bien grande, porque ya ve, no cuento con el apoyo de su papá biológico, pero siempre mis papás, mis hermanos, y ahora mi esposo, pues siempre estamos al pendiente de ellos, de los dos.

I feel proud thatshe wasn't born here and she still speaks English well, and that on her report card in some subjects she scored in the gray area (above grade level), beyond where she's expected to be. The truth is, it's a huge satisfaction, because, you see, I can't count on any support from her biological father, but my parents, my brothers, and now my husband, we're always all looking out for both of them Catalina and her brother).

Conclusion

The families in my study were all originally from Central Mexico. Except in one family, all children lived with both of their biological parents. All families had at least two children. The children who had been my students ranged in age from seven to seventeen at the time of the study. The parents had completed between three and twelve years of school themselves, but all placed great value on their children's getting an education. They required their children to put their best effort into learning, and told them not to get

discouraged if they found some tasks difficult. The parents sought to instill in their children self-respect and respect for others. They placed a high value on moral education and good manners as well as on academic achievement.

For these parents, it was very important that their children have the opportunities for further study that they themselves had lacked, and the subsequent chances for better jobs and higher pay. They saw the sacrifices they had made as meaningful and worthwhile because they would enable their children to have a better life than they themselves had had. They looked towards the future and accepted that at times it was necessary to postpone something that one wanted in exchange for something that benefitted the family. They found joy and satisfaction in their children's success.

Chapter Five

Discussion and Action Plan

The purpose of this study was to learn about the ways in which the Mexican immigrant parents of successful students encouraged and contributed to their children's achievement. In my study of familial influence on the scholastic success of Mexican American students, I found that there were some things that the families in my study had in common and also some differences. In the literature dealing with successful Mexican American students, several authors commented on the part that *educación,* or education in manners and morals, plays in the Mexican family (Delgado-Gaitán, 1990; Valdés, 1996). Mexican immigrant parents may see the family's role as provider of *educación* and the school's role as provider of academic instruction. However, in the families of successful students, parents found ways to encourage and support their children's academic achievement regardless of their own educational level. This was true of the families who participated in my study.

My questions as I began this study were the following: Did the parents of students who entered school well-prepared have a higher level of education than most families in the school neighborhood? Had they done anything to prepare their children for school? How did they support their children once they started school, and how did that support change as students progressed through the grades? What was their advice to their children? What hopes and dreams did the parents harbor for their sons and daughters? How did they plan to help their children realize their dreams? What follows is a discussion of the findings elaborated in Chapter Four.

Parents' Educational Experiences

The parents in my study had achieved a level of education similar to the rest of the parent population at the school, according to the results of an all-school survey conducted three years previously. Surprisingly, however, the level of education of the mothers in my study was in many cases higher than that of the fathers. Whereas four of the fathers had not graduated from the sixth grade, only one of the mothers had not reached this milestone. Six of the mothers had completed *secundaria,* while only three of the fathers had achieved this level. Four of the mothers had had additional education beyond *secundaria*; none of the fathers had.

Frequently, in many cultures, it is considered more important to educate boys than girls, since it is assumed that girls will marry, have families, and stay home with the children. In all of the families except one in my study, however, the women either had a level of schooling equal to their husbands' or higher. This could be a reason that the families in my study were so supportive of their daughters' dreams and ambitions, as well as those of their sons.

The Value of Education and Effort

The parents in this study supported their children's learning in many ways. Some of the parents in the study had taught their children letters and numbers before the children entered school. Others gave credit to their older children for having prepared their siblings, or commented that it was the children's own innate abilities and drive that had enabled them to succeed in school, rather than anything they themselves had done. Something which all of these families had in common, however, was the extent to which they valued conversation. Both parents and children mentioned the parents telling stories

about their childhood. Gándara (1995) also mentioned family stories as a common element in the lives of high-achieving Mexican American students. These were the kinds of experiences that Delgado-Gaitán (1990) referred to as "socialization to literacy." I observed that the children of these families maintained their ability to speak Spanish. In contrast, I have seen some families in which communication is possible only at a very basic level because the parents speak mostly Spanish and the children speak mostly English (a phenomenon also noted by Gándara, 1995). The families placed a high value on doing things together: going to parks, visiting relatives, working around the house. In general, the parents seemed to approach child-rearing as a team. The theme of respect was constantly emphasized—respect for parents, respect for teachers, and respect for the feelings of children.

Parents constantly stressed the importance of effort. They did not demand perfection of their children, but they wanted them to do the best work that they were capable of doing. Mistakes were permissible, but laziness was not. They wanted their children to rise to challenges rather than taking the easy way out. One sixth grader mirrored her parents' attitude when she told me that her favorite class was really difficult, but that the teacher made it enjoyable at the same time, and that was the way she liked to learn. As a teacher, I have observed students' satisfaction when they have mastered something really difficult in spite of frustration. These parents, perhaps because of their own efforts to change their lives, wanted their children to aim high and to persevere when they encountered difficulties.

Some parents expressed concern that they would not be able to assist their children with their homework as the children moved into all-English classes. The parents

of older children, however, had found ways to help and support their children even when the children's work was all in English. They reiterated the importance of talking with their children and being aware of changes in mood or attitude. They wanted to help their children deal with any problems with teachers or classmates right at the beginning, before the problems had a chance to grow. One mother said that her seventh-grade daughter would ask her for examples of sentences in Spanish as she did her homework in English. A teenager's parents supported her by making it possible for her to participate in any academic or extracurricular activities she chose. Only two of the families I studied had college-age children, but in both cases their children were indeed attending college. Of the families with children who were presently in high school, all three had plans for their children to attend college. These parents had found ways to extend their support to their older children who had surpassed their own academic experience.

Respect and Moral Development

For the parents in this study, it was important that their children succeed in school, but it was equally important that they become good citizens and moral individuals. Parents spoke of their own responsibility to teach their children right from wrong and to teach them to respect other people. They spoke of the need to cultivate helpfulness and a sense of responsibility in their children. As Gándara (1995) found in her study of high achievers, the parents I interviewed tended to be strict with their children. They greatly valued courtesy and respect, qualities not always reinforced by popular culture in the United States, as Valdés (1996) noted in her study.

Hopes and Dreams

My former students and their siblings had dreams of becoming police officers, teachers, doctors, real estate agents, and lawyers; of owning houses and of seeing the world. Their parents supported them in looking towards the future, encouraging them both to work hard and to seize opportunities. These parents believed that their children could have a different kind of life from their own, and they saw all their own sacrifices as worthwhile if they enabled their children to achieve their goals. I think that one way these parents might differ from the parents of less successful students is in seeing life's possibilities rather than only seeing its obstacles. At the time of the study, the parents did not appear to aspire to further education and advancement for themselves. However, they were willing to pour their energy and resources into giving their children more opportunities than they themselves had had.

The Value of Family

Throughout the study, both parents and children repeatedly stressed the importance of their families. Although families could sometimes be sources of worry and aggravation, adults and children alike saw their families as sources of love, sustenance, help, and advocacy.

I finished my interviews with a profound admiration and respect for the parents in my study. All of them had left their lives in Mexico to start over in this country. Although all of them had returned to their places of origin for visits, California was now their home. Immigration had not been an easy process, but these families were not only surviving, they were thriving. I did not find any magic formula that enabled the children of these families to succeed (and not every child in every family was a successful

student). I did find strong parents who kept communicating with their children even when there were problems, who were not afraid to set limits, and who kept an eye on the long view rather than being focused on immediate benefits. Also, these parents saw raising successful children as an important part of their life's work.

Action Plan

I think that these parents have a lot to contribute, both to other parents who are striving to raise children who succeed in school, and to teachers who may have preconceived ideas about what "parental involvement" looks like. There are three parts to my action plan: a parent meeting to acquaint the participating parents with the results of my study, a video for parent education, and an ongoing group for any interested parents.

When I was interviewing the parents, I told them that I would notify them of a meeting when I finished my research and would let them know my findings. Many of them expressed interest in attending such a meeting. I plan to tell them my results in general terms, without singling out anyone. There are several reasons I want to do this. First, I feel that it is important to share my findings with those who volunteered their experiences and to give them a chance to respond or ask questions. Second, I would like to ask the families if they would be interested in participating in a video when it is made. Third, I would like to talk with parents about what they might find helpful in negotiating the U.S. school system, particularly as their children move beyond elementary school.

When I first conceived of this project, I planned to make a video rather than write a thesis. It became clear that making a video, in addition to doing the necessary research, would not be possible in the time I had available. As a result of this study, I have a

much better idea of what to cover in the video and how to go about doing so. I think that parents such as those I interviewed are the true experts on how to bring up their children. I believe that a video showing parents interacting with their children and speaking to other parents like themselves would be a valuable resource. Their voices would be authentic and believable. I also think that it would be good for teachers and other school personnel to see and hear these parents' eloquence, sincerity, wisdom, and commitment.

I also would like to invite parents to start an ongoing interest group for those who want to meet periodically to talk about education-related issues with other parents. Those who have older children could give the benefit of their experience to those with younger children. There is a great deal of collective wisdom in the community, and child rearing can be a lonely process when parents are far from extended family. Also, such a group could ask for outside expertise if its members felt it was needed. Depending on their interests, parents could find assistance with navigating the school system, finding out about college entrance requirements, filling out forms, or taking advantage of library resources. I don't know at present if a group like this for Spanish-speaking parents exists anywhere in the city. The Adult School presents many informative programs, but they usually meet only for a day, or at most for a few weeks. I envision a group like this as something that could go on for years, given the right circumstances, growing and changing with its members.

Conclusion

As a group, the parents in my study are resourceful, adaptable people. Their desire for a better life for their children has been the impetus for their hard work and their conscientious parenting. There are no guarantees in life as to how one's children will

turn out, but these parents have much more than good intentions. They have vision and a willingness to work to make that vision a reality.

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Appendix A

California State University, Monterey Bay

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects

Human Subjects Consent Form

How We Help Our Children: Mexican Immigrant Parents of High-Achieving Students

Katharine Richman
(831) 753-5750 (Fremont School)

Dr. Irene Nares-Guzicki (supervisor)
(831) 582-5081

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

We are asking you to participate in a research study. We want to make sure that you know all about the project, its possible risk and benefits, safety, privacy and confidentiality issues, and your right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Please read this consent form carefully and ask the researcher any questions before you decide whether to give us your informed and willing consent. Thank you.

This study will be conducted by Katharine Richman, from the Masters of Education Program at California State University Monterey Bay. It will be part of her Masters thesis. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because your child came to her first grade class well-prepared to learn to read. She would like to know what you have done to support your child in his/her studies.

- **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This study is looking at the ways Mexican parents help their children to become successful students. What is it that you do to help them start school with a great desire to learn and a lot of determination? How do you support them so that they continue to succeed in later years? When this study is complete, I would like to make a video about the experiences of parents of successful students, to be used to help other parents whose children are beginning school. I anticipate that the video could be used by parent groups or parent educators in the Salinas-Monterey area, as a basis for discussion of how to help

students succeed in school. The video would be available for 3-5 years, depending on how much interest there is in using it.

- **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, we will ask you to do the following things:

That you speak with the interviewer two or three times, each for an hour or an hour and a half, about your family and your ideas about education and teaching your children. These conversations may take place in your home or at Fremont School, as you prefer. If you give your permission, the researcher will audio-tape-record these conversations. The interviewer would also like to speak with the child who was her student if the child agrees to be interviewed.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

It is possible that you may feel self-conscious about being tape recorded, or that emotions might arise about decisions you have made about your children. You do not have to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable. At any time, you may call a halt to the interview. Likewise, if any topic comes up which might cause conflicts between family members, you may decline to answer.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

Each family who participates in the research will receive a copy of the future video when it is made. Also, you will have the experience to reflect upon the valuable work you have done as a parent. In addition, you have the opportunity to give others in the community the benefit of your experience, which could help others know how to help their children succeed in school.

- ***NATURE OF RECORD KEEPING***

Nobody outside of your family and the investigator will listen to the cassettes. Any identifying information will be kept confidential and used only with permission. You may listen to the cassettes and decide whether or not the material may be used. Later, either you may keep the cassettes, or they will be erased.

- **PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION**

There will be no payment for your participation.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law.

You have the right to listen to the tapes at any time and either permit or deny permission for the investigator to use any of the material.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Katharine Richman at (831) 753-5750 or Dr. Irene Nares-Guzicki at (831) 582-5081.

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, contact the Chair of the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects, Linda Rogers at California State University, Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Bldg 15, Seaside, CA 93966; 831-582-5012.

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH SUBJECT OR LEGAL REPRESENTATIVE

I understand the procedures described above and that I am over 18 (eighteen) years old. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I freely agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

_____
Name of Subject

_____
Signature of Subject

_____
Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Subject or Legal Representative Date

OR

I have read the contents of this consent form, asked questions, and received answers. I give permission for my child to participate in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form for my records and future reference.

_____
Parent/Guardian (if applicable)

_____ _____
Signature of Parent/Guardian Date

SIGNATURE OF INVESTIGATOR

In my judgment the subject is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent and possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research study.

_____ _____
Signature of Investigator Date

Katharine Richman

(831)753-5750 (la Escuela Fremont)

Dra. Irene Nares-Guzicki
(831)582-5081

ACUERDO PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIONES

Como los Padres Mexicanos Promueven el Exito Escolar

Les estamos pidiendo que participen en una investigación. Queremos asegurar que sepa todo tocante al proyecto, los posibles riesgos y beneficios, la seguridad, los asuntos de privacidad y confianza, y su derecho de retirarse del proyecto en cualquier momento sin problema. Favor de leer con cuidado este documento de acuerdo y hacerle cualquier pregunta que tenga a la investigadora.

Este estudio lo va a llevar a cabo Katharine Richman, del departamento de Maestría en Educación de California State University Monterey Bay. Usted fue seleccionado como un posible participante porque la maestra ha notado que su hijo o hija ha tenido éxito en la escuela cuando estuvo en primero o segundo. Quiere saber qué ha hecho para apoyar a su hijo en sus estudios.

PROPOSITO DEL ESTUDIO

Este estudio pretende buscar qué hacen los padres mexicanos para promover los logros académicos de sus hijos. ¿Qué es lo que hacen para que ellos entren a la escuela con mucho empeño y muchas ganas de aprender? ¿Cómo los apoyan para que ellos sobresalgan en la escuela en los años siguientes? El fin de esta investigación es hacer un video sobre las experiencias de unos padres de familia con sus hijos, para otros padres cuyos hijos van a entrar a la escuela. Se supone que este video se usaría grupos de padres o instructores de padres como una base de discusión y reflejo. Está previsto usar el video durante unos 3 a 5 años según el interés que hay en usarlo.

PROCEDIMIENTOS

Si usted acepta participar en este estudio, le vamos a pedir lo siguiente:

Que hable con la investigadora unas dos o tres veces, cada vez por una hora o una hora y media, acerca de su familia y de sus ideas sobre la educación y la enseñanza de sus hijos. Estas conversaciones pueden ocurrir en su casa o en la escuela, como usted quiera. Si le da permiso a la investigadora, ella va a grabar estas conversaciones en un audiocaset. También a la investigadora le gustaría hablar con el niño o la niña que fue su alumno, si el niño está de acuerdo.

Que participe en la filmación de un video, si es que quiere.

POSIBLES RIESGOS

Existe la posibilidad de que a usted le dé pena al ser grabado, o que le surjan emociones al hablar de las decisions que ha tomado acerca de sus hijos. No tiene que contestar ninguna pregunta que le haga sentir incómodo/a. En cualquier momento puede decir que hay que parar.

También, si siente que hay algún tema que va a causar desacuerdo entre miembros de la familia, puede negarse a hablar sobre ese tema.

POSIBLES BENEFICIOS

A cada familia que participe en la investigación, se le va a dar un ejemplar del video en cuanto esté completado. Además, tendrá la oportunidad de reflexionarse sobre el valioso trabajo que uno ha hecho de padre.

Aparte de eso, existe la posibilidad de beneficiar a la comunidad, creando un video que muestra gente de la misma comunidad y su buena labor con sus hijos, que puede servir de ejemplo de cómo ayudar a los niños a progresar en la escuela.

ARCHIVOS

Nadie aparte de usted y la investigadora va a escuchar los casets grabados de usted y su familia. No se usará nada que diga sin el permiso de usted. Se borrarán los cassets o usted se puede quedar con ellos si quiere.

PAGOS

No recibirá ningún pago a cambio de su participación.

CONFIDENCIALIDAD

Cualquier información que usted proporciona que se puede reconocer que es de usted será confidencial y se va a usar solamente con su permiso. Usted puede escuchar los casets y ver el video y permitir o negar que se usen.

PARTICIPACION Y RETIRACION

Usted puede eligir si va a participar en este estudio o no. Si decide participar, en cualquier momento se puede retirar sin pena ninguna. También puede negarse a contestar cualquier pregunta y seguir participando en la investigación. Si hay cambio de circunstancias, la investigadora puede decidir seguir sin su participación.

IDENTIFICACION DE LA INVESTIGADORA

Katharine Richman (831)753-5750
Dr. Irene Nares-Guzicki (831)582-5081 (supervisora)

DERECHOS DE LOS PARTICIPANTES

En cualquier momento, usted tiene el derecho de retirar su permiso y dejar de participar en el proyecto.
Si tiene preguntas acerca de sus derechos como participante de esta investigación, puede llamar a la Directora del Comité por la Protección de los Individuos Participantes, Linda Rogers, CSUMB, 100 Campus Center, Bldg. 15, Seaside, CA 93966. (831)582-5012

FIRMA DEL PARTICIPANTE O DEL REPRESENTANTE LEGAL

Entiendo la información antecedente. Soy mayor de 18 años. Me han contestado mis preguntas, y estoy de acuerdo de participar en esta investigación.

_____
Nombre del participante

_____
Firma del Participante

_____
Nombre del Representante Legal (si es necesario)

_____ _____
Firma del Representante Legal Fecha

O

He leído el contenido de este formulario, y mis preguntas han sido contestadas. Yo doy permiso a que mi hijo/a participe en la investigación. He recibido (o voy a recibir) una copia de este formulario para mis archivos o para uso futuro.

_____
Padre o Guardián

_____ _____
Firma del Padre o Guardián Fecha

FIRMA DE LA INVESTIGADORA

En mi opinion, el participante voluntariamente da su consentimiento informado y posee la capacidad legal de darlo para participar en esta investigación.

_____ _____

Firma Fecha

Appendix B

California State University, Monterey Bay

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
Human Subjects Assent Form

How We Help Our Children: Mexican Immigrant Parents of High-Achieving Students

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

1.My name is Mrs. Richman.

2. We are asking you to take part in a research study because we are trying to learn more about how Mexican parents help their children to do well in school.

3. If you agree to be in this study you will talk with me, and maybe later on you'll be in a video. If you give me permission, I'll use a tape recorder to record our talks.

4. Maybe you'll be embarrassed to talk to me, or to have your words tape-recorded. Or possibly your brothers and sisters might laugh at you if you talk to me.

5. You might enjoy talking to me, or you might like hearing your voice on tape. You might like to be in a video later on. I'll give your family a copy of the video whether or not you're in it.

6. Please talk this over with your parents before you decide whether or not to participate. We will also ask your parents to give their permission for you to take part in this study. But even if your parents say "yes" you can still decide not to do this.

7. If you don't want to be in this study, you don't have to participate. Remember, being in this study is up to you and no one will be upset if you don't want to participate or even if you change your mind later and want to stop.

8. You can ask any questions that you have about the study. If you have a question later that you didn't think of now, you can call me at 753-5750 or ask me next time.
9. Signing your name at the bottom means that you agree to be in this study.

Please mark one of the choices below to tell us what you want to do:

____ No, I do not want to be in this project.

____ Yes, I do want to be in this project.

Study subject _____ **PRINT NAME**

Study subject _____ **SIGNATURE**

_____ **DATE**

PERSON OBTAINING ASSENT

I have read this form to the subject and/or the subject has read this form. I have provided (or will provide) the subject with a copy of the form. An explanation of the research was given and questions from the subject were solicited and answered to the subject's satisfaction. In my judgement, the subject has demonstrated comprehension of the information.

_____ **PRINT NAME AND TITLE**

_____ **SIGNATURE**

_____ **DATE**

Appendix D

California State University, Monterey Bay

Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects
Human Subjects Assent Form

ACUERDO PARA PARTICIPAR EN INVESTIGACIONES

1. Me llamo Mrs. Richman.

2. Te estoy pidiendo que participes en una investigación porque queremos aprender más sobre como los padres mexicanos ayudan a sus hijos a hacer buen trabajo en la escuela.

3. Si estás de acuerdo en participar, vas a hablar conmigo y tal vez luego vas a participar en hacer un video. Si me das permiso, voy a usar una grabadora para grabar lo que platicamos.

4. Tal vez te puede dar pena hablar conmigo, o tal vez te da vergüenza que te grabe tus palabras. O tal vez tus hermanos se van a reir de ti. No tienes que contestar nada que te dé pena.

5. Puede ser que te guste hablar conmigo, o que te guste oír tus palabras en la grabadora. Es posible que te gustaría salir en un video. Le voy a dar un video a tu familia de toda manera, si decides salir o no.

6. Favor de hablar con tu mamá y tu papá de esto antes de decidir si vas a participar o no. También les voy a pedir a tus papás que te den permiso de participar en el estudio. Pero mismo si tus papás te dan permiso, no tienes que participar si no quieres.

7. Si no quieres participar, está bien. Nadie se va a enojar contigo por eso, mismo si decides luego que no quieres seguir.

8. Me puedes hacer cualquier pregunta que tú quieras acerca del proyecto.Si después se te ocurre algo, me puedes llamar a 753-5750 o preguntarme la próxima vez.

9. Si firmas abajo, esto significa que estás de acuerdo en participar.

Favor de marcar para indicar lo que quieres hacer.

____No, no quiero participar.

____Sí, quiero participar.

Participante_____**NOMBRE**

Participante_____**FIRMA**

_____**FECHA**

INVESTIGADORA

Yo le he leído al participante este formulario (o el participante lo ha leído). Le he dado o le daré una copia. Recibió una explicación del proyecto y le contesté sus preguntas. El participante parece comprender la información.

_____ _____

FIRMA **FECHA**

Appendix C

Interview Questions

Where in Mexico are you from? Was it a town, a "rancho," or was it located away from other houses? Can you tell me a little about it?

How many children do you have? How old are they?

How long have you been in this country? Were your children born in Mexico, or here?

Did any of them go to school in Mexico? If so, can you tell me a little about the school?

Can you tell me about your own schooling (where, what level)?

What are some of the activities that you and your child, or the whole family, do together?

From having your child _____ as one of my students, I know that he/she started school ready to learn to read and was a successful student in my class. Can you tell me what kinds of things you have done to support your child's learning? Is that different from the way you support your children as they get older and go further in school?

What guidance or advice do you give your child?

What is it important that your child learn?

What are your child's responsibilities?

What do you consider to be your responsibilities as a parent?

What has been your experience with the schools your children have attended here?

Have you or your children experienced any obstacles to their education? If so, could you tell me about them?

What dreams and aspirations do you have for your children? How do you hope to help them realize their dreams?

Preguntas de la Entrevista

¿De dónde son ustedes? ¿Era pueblo, rancho, o una casa aislada? ¿Me puede contar un poco sobre el lugar?

¿Cuántos hijos tiene? ¿De qué edades?

¿Cuánto tiempo tiene usted en este país? ¿Nacieron sus hijos en los EEUU o en México?

¿Asistieron algunos de ellos a la escuela en México? Si es que asistieron allí, ¿me puede contar un poco sobre la escuela?

¿Me puede contar usted de sus experiencias en la escuela? ¿Dónde estudió? ¿Hasta qué año estudió?

¿Cuáles son algunas de las actividades que usted hace junto con su hijo/hija, o con toda la familia?

Porque _____ estuvo en mi clase, yo sé que entró a la escuela muy bien preparado para aprender a leer y que tuvo éxito en la escuela. ¿Me puede decir usted qué ha hecho para apoyar los estudios de su hijo/hija? ¿Cambia la manera en que lo apoya cuando entra a los grados más altos?

¿Cómo guía a su hijo/hija? ¿Qué le aconseja usted?

¿Qué le parece importante que aprenda su hijo/hija?

¿Cuáles so las responsabilidades que tiene su hijo/hija?

¿Qué considera usted que son sus responsabilidades como padre o madre?

¿Cuáles han sido sus experiencias con las escuelas aquí?

¿Ha usted encontrado o han encontrado sus hijos algún obstáculo al aprendizaje en las escuelas aquí? Si es que sí, ¿me lo puede explicar, por favor?

¿Cuáles son los sueños y esperanzas que usted tiene para sus hijos? ¿Cómo piensa ayudarlos a realizarlos?

Appendix D

Questions for Students

How do your parents help you to do a good job in school?

What do your parents expect of you?

Please tell me about something you like to do with your family.

Is there something you have learned how to do from your mother or your father? Tell me about it.

What do you like best about school?

Is there something you find difficult about school? What is it?

What do you do if there is something in your homework that you don't understand?

Preguntas para Alumnos

¿Cómo te ayudan tus padres a hacer buen trabajo en la escuela?

¿Qué esperan tus padres de ti?

Favor de contame algo que te gusta hacer con tu familia.

¿Hay algo que has aprendido a hacer de tu papa o de tu mama? Cuéntamelo.

¿Qué te gusta meas de la escuela?

¿Hay algo de la escuela que encuentras difícil? ¿Qué?

¿Qué haces si hay algo de la tarea que no entiendes?