

COMPARING EXPECTATIONS OF MEXICAN-  
IMMIGRANT MOTHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF FOR  
STUDENT SUCCESS

by

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	9
ABSTRACT	10
1. CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	11
Problem and Theoretical Background	11
Research Questions	13
Historical Perspective	14
Mexican-Immigrant Communities and the School System	15
Population Growth	16
Drop-out Rates and College Entrance	17
Bilingual Education	17
Legislation	17
Arizona's Proposition 203	19
The Role of Educational Leaders	20
Use of Power in a School Community	20
Participation	21
School Community Culture	22
Community view	22
Learning in a Social Context	24
Leading School Communities through Change	25
Moral Communities	25
Theoretical Background	26
Sociological Perspective	27
Cultural Deficit	27
Cultural Ecological	28
Cultural Mismatch	30
Psychological Perspective	32
Parental Influence	33
A Phenomenological Methodology	35
Definition of Terms	36
Organization of the Dissertation	38
2. CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE	40

Implications of this Research	
For Educational Leaders	40
Ethnographic Study of Culture	41
Socialization	42
Behavior	43
Culture in Large Organizations	45
School Culture	46
Learning Community	47
Characteristics of Leadership	48
Forces	48
Symbolic Forces	49
Cultural Forces	49
Participant Interactions	50
Maternal Effects	52
Minority achievement in school	53
Genetic View	54
Cultural Deficit	55
Cultural Mismatch	56
Cultural Ecology	59
Psychological Perspective	60
Systems of Influence	60
Mesosystems	61
Exosystems	62
Chronosystems	63
Psychological Factors	64
Pathway analysis	64
Social Cognitive Theory	65
Quantitative Research and	
Qualitative Studies	66
Summary	68
3. CHAPTER 3 METHODS	70
Methods	73
Setting	73
Rockford Elementary Profile	75
Measures of success	75
Attendance	75
State and district testing	
performance	76
School Quality Survey	78
Participants	80
Limitation	82
Data Collection	83
Interview Data	85

Interviews of the Mothers	86
Interviews of Staff	86
Use of two interview protocols	87
Organization and Analysis of Data	89
Organization	89
Use of outside Spanish	
transcriber	91
Challenges	91
Factors Effecting the Research	93
Analysis of the Data	94
Summary of Methodology	95
 4. CHAPTER 4 COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA	 96
Descriptions of the Interviews	96
Sra. Ramirez	97
Sra. Gonzáles	99
Sra. Duran	103
Sra. Miranda	105
Mothers' Histories and Perceptions	109
Descriptions of the Interviews with Staff	114
Mrs. Espinoza	114
Ms. Escarcega	116
Ms. Duarte	119
Mrs. Huerta	122
Mr. Robles	125
Staff Histories and Perceptions	129
Summary	131
 5. CHAPTER 5 INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA	 132
Aspirations and Expectations	133
Mothers' Aspirations and Expectations	134
Limitless Expectations	135
Strengths and Aspirations	137
Rockford's Support of Children's Strengths	139
Parent Advocacy	141
Schools as Experts	145
Staff Aspirations and Expectations	147
Building Skills	148
Concerns about Secondary School	150
Financial Burden	151

Comparing Aspirations and Expectations in a School Culture	155
Communication	155
Expectations	158
Funds of Knowledge	162
Leadership in a Learning Community	170
Power in Schools	171
Role of the Principal	172
Moral Imperative	173
No talk of test scores	175
A Learning Community	176
Differences in beliefs of teachers and mothers	179
Implications for Further Research	180
Summary and Implications for Practice	181
REFERENCES	184

## LIST OF TABLES

		Page
1.	Mother Characteristics	80
2.	Staff Characteristics	82

## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study compared the expectations and aspirations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children with the expectations and aspirations held by staff at the neighborhood school. The study involved interviewing four Mexican-immigrant mothers and five staff members from the school. The interviews for mothers asked about educational history and family background, as well as about their thoughts about the neighborhood school and their expectations for the students' academic success. Teachers were asked about potential barriers to the academic success of Mexican-immigrant students.

Salient themes that emerged from the data indicate that communication and connecting with the community are a focus of all the staff and mothers value communication at the school. However, teachers do not communicate with parents about the concerns for students in middle and high school and the importance of performing well on state and district assessments.

## CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## Problem and Theoretical Background

This dissertation examined the background, present schooling conditions, and personal reflections of four Mexican-immigrant mothers and five school staff to identify aspirations and expectations for school-age children within the context of a single school culture. The research identified the distinct expectations and attributes found within a school community and explored the notions of school/community mismatch described by Valdés (1996) and Delgado-Gaitan (1992) and cultural-ecological influence (Ogbu, 1986, 1991). Many factors, such as family composition, substance abuse, history and income, must be considered when analyzing students' school performance. Were differences in student achievement the result of differences in the expectations that were present in the home or at the school?

The first chapter of this dissertation presents the research questions; defines terms; described a historical and theoretical foundation; and states the research questions including the following, overarching question:

“How do the aspirations and expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children compare with expectations held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students within a school community?”

Chapter 2 of the dissertation provides a review of literature that:

- Identifies specific terms and themes from the literature,
- Describes psychological research on motivation,
- Reviews sociological literature on school performance of minority students,
- Explains the role of Mexican-immigrant mothers in the education of their children,
- Explains the role of leadership in building school culture,
- Describes organizational culture and the ethnographic study of culture.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods:

- Participants,

- Setting,
- Data collection, and
- Data analysis.

Chapter 4 describes the actual interviews and organization of the data and provides a preliminary analysis of subjects' histories and perceptions based on the interviews.

Chapter 5 uses the three guiding research questions to interpret the specific information and data gathered during the interviews and proposes themes from the research that would be useful for further research.

#### *Research Questions*

The overarching question was divided into three research questions, which guided the analysis of the data:

1. What aspirations and expectations are held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children?
2. What aspirations and expectations are held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students?
3. How do the aspirations and expectations of Mexican-immigrant mothers held for their children compare and

contrast with the expectations held for children by school staff?

Beyond the specific responses of the subjects with regard to their aspirations and expectations, an important aspect of the responses, which related directly to the overarching question, was the subjects' perceptions of how the school functioned within a school community and helped students meet expectations.

#### Historical Perspective

This section addresses the historical educational conditions of Mexican-immigrants for the purpose of providing a context of interactions with the schools. It described past negative aspects of education for Mexican-immigrant students and the dramatic growth in the Hispanic population at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Data demonstrate the disparity in high-school graduation rates among Hispanic students and White students. Finally, this section explains educational trends that have influenced Mexican-immigrants since the passage of the Civil Rights Act (Garner, 2000; Soltero, 2000).

*Mexican-Immigrant Communities**and the School System*

Participation of Hispanic students and communities in the public school system reaches as far back as the school system itself. Before the passage of the Bilingual Education Act in 1968 (Alexander & Alexander, 1998), some school districts required immigrants to attend separate schools and classrooms where English was the sole means of instruction. Students were sometimes punished for using Spanish at school (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000). MacGregor-Mendoza interviewed adults about their experiences in schools. Some chastisement came in the form of verbal abuse, for example, "When are you Mexicans going to learn? This is America!" (p. 361).

Other abuse was emotional such as the story of a girl who was not allowed to go to the restroom because she could not ask in English. Others told of instances when corporal punishment was a tool for forcing students to speak English. Children were "spanked" (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000, p. 359) with paddles and whipped with hoses while their hands were tied with rope. Fortunately, civil rights legislation (Soltero, 2000) reduced abuse, yet the history

of negative individual experiences continues as documented in ethnographic studies conducted by MacGregor-Mendoza.

### *Population Growth*

According to recent census data, Hispanics have become the largest minority. Hispanics, as a percentage of the total U.S. population, will increase from 9% in 1995 to 15.5% in 2010 due to larger average family size (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004).

These projections did not address language use, but it is clear that an increasing number of students in public schools will come from families that consider themselves to be of Hispanic or Latino origin. Schools will interact with communities that are increasingly Roman Catholic and foreign born. Half of the immigrants from Central America, South America, and the Caribbean will not have the equivalent of a high-school diploma (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

### *Drop-out Rates and College Entrance*

In 1997 15% of students entering two or four-year college in Arizona, were Hispanic, compared to 3% Black and 71% White. The number of Hispanics who complete high school was 62.8% in 2000; that number is woefully low when compared to the White population at 94% and Blacks at 86.8% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002).

Nationally, only 6.9% of the Mexican-immigrant/Mexican American population received a bachelor's degree compared to 25.4% of the White population. This figure is also significantly lower than the 9.6% attainment for other Hispanic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

### *Bilingual Education*

*Legislation.* With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Garner, 2000; Soltero, 2000), efforts to establish laws requiring schools to recognize the cultural and linguistic needs of non-English speaking students increased. The Bilingual Education Act (1968) Alexander & Alexander, 1998) focused instruction on building upon the cultural and linguistic diversity of all students.

The purpose of the legislation was to prevent students, whose first language was not English, denial of "the opportunity to learn successfully in classrooms where the language of instruction is English or to participate fully in society"

([http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel\\_schugurensky/assignment1/1968kip.html](http://fcis.oise.utoronto.ca/~daniel_schugurensky/assignment1/1968kip.html)).

The 1968 Bilingual Education Act emphasized the language aspect of the legislation, but a broader aspect of the legislation was a focus on multicultural education through Title I. Introducing the first language of a community into the curriculum and school was an opportunity to involve parents in the education of their children (Sosa, 1997). Increased parental involvement resulted in opportunities to tap the linguistic and ethnic background of students and build multicultural curriculum (Sosa, 1997).

California Proposition 227 (1996) (retrieved from <http://www.humnet.ucla.edu/humnet/linguistics/people/grads/macswan/unztext.htm>) passed with 61% of the vote. The wording of the Proposition stated, "All children in California public schools shall be taught English as

rapidly and effectively as possible." The law mandated structured English immersion throughout the state. Eighty-one percent of the students affected by Proposition 227 were Spanish speaking (Crawford, 1997)

*Arizona's Proposition 203.* In 2000, Ron Unz's organization *English for the Children* (Olsen, 1998) began a campaign against bilingual education in Arizona (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2000). Arizona Proposition 203 passed the Proposition with 63% of the vote. Support for English-only instruction in California and Arizona has grown as a response to well financed campaigns, yet for many students entering schools, Spanish is their primary language at home (U.S. Census 2000). School leaders will need to understand the importance of the home as a resource for increasing student achievement because school sites are no longer able to provide instructional support in the children's first language.

The factors described above influenced the interactions that Mexican-immigrant families have had with public schools. The development of bilingual education opened public schools to the use of languages other than English. Bilingual education made second language use in

the schools available to immigrants and mandated the use of immigrants' first language (Soltero, 2000). Subsequent shifts in state policy directly influenced the long-term effects on communities of removing second languages from the curriculum.

### The Role of Educational Leaders

This section describes the use of power in educational communities (Graham, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1995, 1999). It described how leaders used power to develop school communities within the context of staff and families. Who participate in school communities? How do the socio-economic, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of families influence schools? What do leaders need to know about a community and individual families within the community to build a shared purpose among the participants?

#### *Use of Power in a School Community*

*Power.* Mary Parker Follett, a philanthropist at the beginning of the 20th century and a researcher of the culture of business, became involved with business organizations during her time on wage committees that set pay rates for women and children. Through her experiences

with business leaders, she constructed a philosophy on organizational leadership that embodied all the themes in modern leadership theory (Graham, 1995).

In contrast to the hierarchical management theory proposed by her contemporary researcher, Taylor (1911), Follett advocated for less hierarchical organizations in which leaders were closer to the people with whom they worked with. She viewed the role of organizational leaders as one that "makes the team" and distinguished among "power over" and "power with" (Graham, 1995, p. 156).

For Follett, (as cited in Graham, 1995) power derived from a person's interactions with a team and was not attached to any assigned administrator within an organization (supervisor, foreman, principal). She understood that effective leaders did more than enforce the rules. Instead, a leader was "one who sees another picture, not yet actualized" (p. 230) and inspired followers to achieve their goal. Leaders had foresight that allowed them to communicate a shared purpose by tapping into the views of other leaders within the organization.

*Participation.* Discussing the thoughts of Dewey (1902) and Follett (Graham, 1995) is a way to introduce the need

to operate organizations as communities, with shared vision and purpose. As far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these two philosophers viewed the role of leaders as being more than simple managers forcing the expectations of others upon the individual members of an organization. To be successful, school communities require grass-roots involvement of all members, including families. Dewey and Follett's thoughts reflected contemporary discussions on the role of leadership in education.

The ideas proposed by Follett (Graham, 1995) are relevant to the study of Mexican-immigrants' interactions with schools because historically immigrant populations have not succeeded in public education due to problems of communication. Communication is an essential aspect of building communities.

### School Community Culture

#### *Community view*

Educational researchers have referred to communities of learners (Calkins, Montgomery, & Santman 1998). A community of learners is group learning in which members form their own schemata through personal interpretation of

the teachings. Shifting from an organizational view to a community view of education changes the school from an organization, which implies hierarchical structure, to a community, which gives the sense of diverse, critical participation from all of the members. The use of *community* to describe what had been called an organization can be viewed from two perspectives, (a) learning communities and (b) communities of learners.

A learning community view emphasizes communities growing as complete entities in which learning occurs for all members of the community who are bound together by the common environment in which learning happens. Salomon (1992) described the four social aspects of learning:

1. Social mediation of individual learning,
2. Social mediation as participatory knowledge construction,
3. Social mediation by cultural artifacts, and
4. Social entity as a learner.

These four perspectives are founded on the writings of Leo Vygotsky (as cited in Moll, 1990), a Russian

philosopher of the 20th century, and by proponents of cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1982).

### *Learning in a Social Context*

Vygotsky (as cited in Moll, 1990) viewed learning as occurring within a "zone of proximal development" (p.349) whereby the learner and teacher expand upon experiential interpretations through explicit interactions. The social interactions provide opportunities for learning that would not take place in isolation. Another perspective on learning is the holistic approach, in which learning expands from cooperative activities. Cooperative learning programs operate on the premise that learning occurs in groups. Salomon (1992) described how learning happens in a community as a single entity, whereby; the learning that occurs is bound to the community and environment in which it happened. A group may learn problem-solving skills that require various members to fill specific roles. If the group breaks up into individuals, the learning that occurred cannot be transferred to another group without new training.

### Leading School Communities through Change

As demand for increased accountability in school performance increases from the federal level down to the local school district, many communities must undergo a shift in the focus of curriculum. Public calls for improved skills in second-language learners strains educational leaders. The expectations placed on school leaders have been very clearly defined through calls for higher test scores. In part, improved test scores help members of the community understand and share the expectations placed on schools and how these expectations mix with aspirations and expectations in the home. (Eccles, 1983)

#### *Moral Communities*

Thomas Sergiovanni (1999) described a "moral imperative" (p. 30) that leaders must bring to their communities. He emphasized the process of moving a community through change. Sergiovanni advocated for a structural frame that put leaders in the position of "leader of leaders" (p. 57). The goal was to build staff collegiality through the identification of leaders in the school who could promote the goals of the district from a support position rather than an authority position. The

principal became the "servant leader," whose role was to serve the community. Warren Bennis (1994) wrote that followers look for three important qualities in a leader, "they want direction; they want trust; and they want hope" (p. xiii). During the building of a community, educational leaders must strive to convey an understanding of individual and group motivators beyond the confines of the school building (Bandura, 1986).

#### Theoretical Background

Achievement may be viewed from a psychological and a sociological perspective. Social theorists viewed student achievement in the context of the interplay among minority and majority groups (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Nieto, 1996; Ogbu, 1986; Okagaki, Frensch & Gordon, 1995; Trueba, 1987, 1989; Valdés, 1996). Psychological analyses of factors that contribute to student achievement (Eccles, 1983; Ethington, 1991; Seginer, 1983)

### *Sociological Perspective*

Social theorists have proposed many theories for explaining minority achievement. This research compares the cultural-deficit hypothesis (Bennett, Finn & Cribb, 1999; Hirsch, 1987), the cultural-ecological hypothesis (Ogbu, 1986, 1991), and the cultural mismatch hypothesis (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Moll, Tapia & Whitmore, 1993; Okagaki, Frensch & Gordon, 1995; Valdés, 1996). It is important to understand contemporary sociological views of how minority groups interact with the school system as an institution formed by the majority culture.

*Cultural-deficit.* A common perspective on the education of minorities is the cultural-deficit hypothesis held by Hirsch (1987), and Bennett, et al. (1999). The deficit perspective identifies areas of deficiency in which minority groups are not being taught the essential knowledge required for success in the school system. Hirsch and Bennett et al. advocated for preparing children and families of minority populations by teaching themes that were considered mainstream American. This view proposes that teaching parents the social norms of being American would bridge the deficit between home and school. In

contrast, cultural-ecological theory recognizes that there was a gap between home and school but views the gap as a political consequence.

*Cultural-ecological.* In cultural-ecological theory (Ogbu, 1986, 1991), minority populations fell into three groups: (a) those who immigrated to the United States, (b) those were here involuntarily, and (c) those who were religious minorities such as Amish and Mennonite communities. The latter group was not important for examination in this study because this group established themselves separate from mainstream culture including provided for their own schooling. Immigrant minorities on the other hand moved to a new country due to political or economic conditions in their home country.

Most immigrants received some level of education in their home country and maintained emotional ties to their home country. An example of an immigrant community was the Cuban American community. Many Cuban Americans came to the United States due to political conditions in Cuba and continue to identify with cultural aspects of their former country.

A second type of minority community (1986) described by Ogbu was involuntary. This group lived in the United States due to factors not under their own control, such as through slavery or conquest. An example was the African American community whose ancestors were brought here three or more generations ago as a labor force. Ogbu explained that involuntary minorities such as the African American or Mexican American communities were incorporated into the United States through slavery and political expansion, respectively. Research has provided evidence that impoverished second generation and third generation European minorities can also be included in the involuntary minority group (MacLeod, 1995).

MacLeod studied the attitudes of poor Italian and Irish youths whose families lived in the United States for two or three generations. He found attitudes similar to those of non-European involuntary minorities. Involuntary groups rejected the institutions of the majority group by finding ways to "change the system" (Okagaki et. al. 1995, p. 160) through slowing down schools over issues of attendance and curriculum.

A cultural-ecological explanation of low academic achievement viewed involuntary minorities as existing in a "caste" (Ogbu, 1986) that rejected high academic expectations as being an exclusively part of the majority culture. Hence, within the home, parents spoke about the need for students to do school work yet did not put faith in the school system to solve the social inequities of poverty in the community. Ogbu used the distinct groups to explain why children of immigrants tended to perform better than children of the "caste" group. He described immigrant populations as voluntarily participating in the sociopolitical system of their new home country.

*Cultural mismatch.* The cultural mismatch/context specific explanation (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Moll, et al. 1993; Nieto, 1996; Okagaki et al., 1995; Trueba, 1987; Valdés, 1996; Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1993;) suggested that low student achievement resulted from a misunderstanding of norms, values and "ways of thinking and communicating" (Okagaki et al, 1995, p. 162) among minority and majority cultures. Proponents of the mismatch/context specific explanation described problems of student achievement for minorities as the result of inconsistent matching among the

culture of the home and the culture of the school. The way parents dealt with homework was an example of a potential mismatch between home and school. Based on research with Mexican American families in California Delgado-Gaitan (1992) stated, "Parents and their children create a learning environment in the home that needs to be recognized by the school" (p. 513). In her interviews of six families of Mexican-immigrants, she found that "All the parents expressed a strong desire to have their children succeed in school" (p. 506).

In *Con Respeto*, Guadalupe Valdés (1996) described the lives of 10 Mexican-immigrant families in Texas. She argued against the cultural-deficit theory by explaining, "Teachers tried their best and appeared to fail. Children brought with them skills they had learned at home and found them inappropriate. Parents felt helpless, confused and angry" (p. 167). Valdés did not see a lack of faith in the school system but a lack of understanding on the part of the school. Findings were similar those of Delgado-Gaitan (1992). Both the Delgado-Gaitan and Valdés studies identified education as a strong goal for all of the parents, and variances in how students performed depended

primarily on the way homework was handled and how parents interactions with the school. As Valdés described, not all interacted with schools were effective. In one incident, a mother verbally attacked the teacher for showing favoritism in disciplining her daughter and not the other girl involved in an incident.

Although cultural deficit, context-specific, and cultural-ecological views have attempted to explain interactions among communities and schools these theories did not fully examine the dynamics that exist within the home and among home and school that may affect students' achievement.

#### *Psychological Perspective*

From a psychological perspective, researchers have examined relationships within homes in an attempt to construct a model that connected external and internal conditions of the family to expectations and student achievement. Researchers have mapped the influence of the family, community, and schools on student achievement behavior into models using path analysis (Eccles, 1983; Ethington, 1991; Seginer, 1983). Path analysis is a statistical procedure that uses multiple regression

equations to determine the strength of causal relationships among two or more specified variables. The strength of the causal relationship produces paths that were purported to follow a predicted outcome. In the case of student achievement, the desired outcome was a model that predicted student academic behavior.

*Parental influence.* Jacqueline Eccles (1983) examined factors such as student perceptions, past events, "socializers," student goals, task values and beliefs, and expectancy as factors leading to student achievement behaviors. Although Eccles acknowledged that this type of analysis was equivalent to "the blind man's description of an elephant," she found some significant relationships. She concluded that the influence of parents, particularly mothers, on student achievement, was stronger than teachers' influence. In addition, Eccles found that parents had "little influence through their power as role models" (p. 137). Instead, parents were more influential when they directly addressed achievement beliefs and attitudes through dialogue.

In a similar analysis Ethington (1991) modified Eccles' (1983) factors. He found that socio-economic

status, family help, past achievement, stereotyping, student perceptions, self-concept, goals difficulty value, and expectancies contributed to "intention" to achieve. Ethington concluded that "the effects of perceptions of parents' attitudes carried over as strong indirect influence on intention (to achieve) for both males and females ... stereotyping resulted in the indirect influence only for females" (p. 169).

Seginer (1983), based on his review of literature on the topic of parent expectations, identified parents' educational expectations, school feedback, aspirations, parent knowledge, parent expectations, child's aspirations, and supporting behavior as factors leading to academic achievement. Seginer asked to what "extent ... parents' expectations and related supporting behaviors affect the child's academic achievement through the activation of motivational and cognitive processes" (p. 19). Most research in the area of behavior modeling for student achievement was at least 10 to 20 years old; however, it continues to be relevant because it exposes the complexities of parent, student, community, and school-staff interactions.

### A Phenomenological Methodology

This study used a phenomenological methodology to answer the research questions because this method allowed the researcher to use information gained in the first person. A personal connection with each subject resulted in the analysis of the interview data was not being based solely on responses to a questionnaire. The interviews were conducted in subjects' homes and at their places of work, allowing for visual perceptions about the environments where interviewing was conducted.

Despite the personal interviews, the study does not provide a comprehensive picture of the school community or allow for general conclusions about other school communities. It was not the purpose of this study to analyze the relationships among specific teachers and students or families. Such a focus would lead to a more in-depth psychological study, rather than the sociological focus of schools as communities of learners. This study provides observations and interpretations for consideration in further research.

### Definition of Terms

The purpose of the study was to examine the background, present schooling conditions, and personal reflections of Mexican-immigrant families to identify aspirations and expectations of school age children. The study also examined the aspirations and expectations held by school staff for the children of Mexican-immigrant children. Contained in these two statements about the study are terms that must be clarified before proceeding.

*Background.* Background is family history, including, but not limited to, levels of schooling for parents, grandparents and extended family; explanations of how and why parents arrived in the United States; work history for parents; level of spoken and written English for both parents; explanation of how English has been learned by adults; and language usage in the home.

*Present schooling conditions.* The conditions were the mothers' perceptions of how their children currently perform in school; thoughts on the schools their children attend, strengths and weaknesses of their children; role of education in the home, for example, homework routine,

report cards, parent participation in the school, types of reading in the home, and family dialog regarding school.

*Personal reflections.* Reflections were the mothers' hopes for their children in the future, thoughts on what success means, predictions for the family's economic and social well being in the near and distant future, and feelings on potential for success in the family.

*Aspirations.* Aspirations fit the definition set forth by Webster's Dictionary (1989): "a strong desire (as of ambition)." More specifically aspirations were goals that were unrestrained by social, cognitive, or financial barriers and free from potential hurdles.

*Expectations.* As defined by MacLeod (1995), expectations were defined by "perceived capabilities and available opportunities" (p.61). The key words in the definition of expectations were *chance* and *probability*. In his study of urban teenagers, MacLeod (1996) stated that "Aspirations are one's preferences unsullied by anticipated constraints; expectations (on the other hand) take constraints squarely into account" (p.61)

*Connections.* Based on the outcomes of the data analysis connections were defined by Webster's Dictionary (1989) as being: a relation of personal intimacy.

*Mexican-immigrant families.* These families were defined as families in which both parents lived in the home and were born in Mexico, regardless of their age when they arrived in the United States.

#### Organization of the Dissertation

As educational leaders look at trends influencing schools, such as increased accountability, decreased support in students' first language, and a fast-growing Hispanic population, it was important for these leaders to be aware of the expectations and aspirations of the communities they serve. Improving standardized and state test scores may be the goal of state legislatures and school districts; however, to meet state and district goals, the "moral imperative," described by Sergiovanni (1999), must extend to the families, which form communities of learners.

This dissertation examined the expectations and aspirations of Mexican-immigrant mothers and those held by

school staff for Mexican-immigrant children for factors that influenced the culture. The organization of this dissertation provides

1. A review of the relevant information for understanding aspirations, expectations, and schooling of the children of Mexican-immigrant mothers,
2. A description of the way information was collected and organized for analysis,
3. A description of the individual interviews and general interpretations based on the interviews and the research questions, and
4. An interpretation of the subjects' statements for understanding aspects of a single school's culture.

The next chapter describes the literature and research that support a qualitative study of Mexican-immigrant families and school culture.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify the theoretical foundations of the dissertation by providing a review of the literature and research. The first section described the implications of understanding expectations held by a school community for leadership. The second section describes current perspectives on minority participation in the public school system, including the genetic theory, cultural theories, psychological theories, and social cognitive theories. A third section describes qualitative and quantitative studies on academic achievement.

#### Implications of this Research for Educational Leaders

As described in the Chapter 1, there was increased demand on school leaders to serve Mexican-immigrant populations in an environment of reduced funding and without bilingual education in some states. Without bilingual instruction in schools, outreach to the homes of non-English speaking parents becomes an important aspect of building strong learning communities. School communities

form distinct cultures with many of the norms associated with ethnic, religious, and linguistic groups.

*Ethnographic Study of Culture*

In the last 75 years, since the early works of Gregory Bateson (1937) and Margaret Mead (1933), the concept of culture has evolved from an ethnic and linguistic perspective to one that encompasses all levels of society. There are cultures of youth, gender, socioeconomic status, educational levels, and families. In terms of schools, many descriptions of what leaders did to build culture come from the business and administration community (Bennis, 1994; Drucker, 1988; McGregor, 1960; Peters, 1982; Schein, 1992; Smircich, L. 1983; Tichy, 1983). Karl Weick (1982) and Thomas Sergiovanni (1995, 1999), described schools as cultures with all the complexity of society as a whole.

Schein (1992) described organizational culture as being conceptually and semantically confusing due to the "difficulty of defining it abstractly" (p. 8) After much debate, Schein narrowed his thoughts to one crucial aspect of culture as being "shared or held in common" (p. 8). He defined culture as

[A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems.] (p. 12)

*Socialization.* Schein (1992) considered problematic aspects of defining culture as a context for working with, and within, organizations. First, he addressed the "problem of socialization." Schein described how culture passed among members and was conveyed to new members across generations. If culture were a set of basic underlying assumptions then what was conveyed to new comers would be only a surface representation of cultural features. Much of what is contained in a culture requires deeper participation in the group. Schein considered knowledge at the deeper levels to be "group secrets" (p. 13), yet it was possible that deep assumptions were in fact unconscious even by those members of a group considered insiders.

In describing ethnography, Spradley (1979) addressed the issue of "tacit knowledge" (p. 9). Some aspects of culture were so imbedded in the members' actions and thoughts that

they cannot be revealed through interview or conversation. This knowledge is a life that flows through individual members of a group. Communication of assumptions, both implicit and explicit, was part of socialization into a culture. Schein (1992) recommended an ethnographic approach to understanding group assumptions, which involved observation and interviews with "old timers" (p. 13).

*Behavior.* A second hurdle to understanding culture is that of behavior (Schein, 1992). If one observes overt behavior the person making the observation cannot always determine if the behavior, resulted from manifestation of shared group assumptions, individual patterns of behavior or a subgroup to which the individual belonged. An ethnographer has the task of "sorting out structures of significance" (Geertz, 1973, p. 9), which means the researcher identifies different "frames" (p. 9) from which to analyze behavior.

For example, a first-grade girl was tugging on the shirt of her mother, who was talking to the girl's teacher about the girl's behavior in school. The mother then turns and scolds the girls for interrupting. The frames were as follows, but are not limited to

1. The frame of parent needing to be heard, the frame of the child needing attention.
2. The frame of parent relation to child.
3. The frame of the teacher as participant and observer in the event.

All of these frames resulted from different sources but it was difficult to determine where the behavior originated. Thus the ethnographer must use several data sources, interviews, observations, and field notes, to produce "an orderly compilation of observations and native cultural knowledge" (Spindler & Spindler, 1987, p. 22) before beginning interpretation. Yet, culture was as was described in a story told to Geertz (1973).

An Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked ... what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle and that turtle? "Ah, after that it is turtles all the way down. (p. 28)

Geertz's (1973) point was that culture could be analyzed just so far because it was intrinsically incomplete. It is important for ethnographers to recognize

that cultural interpretation cannot produce any perfect answers. At best, it provides a window into the assumptions of the group being studied.

### Culture in Large Organizations

Addressing culture from a business perspective, Schein (1992) introduced a third aspect of organizational culture. "Can a large organization have one culture?" (p. 14). He answered this question as being contingent upon the strength of basic assumptions when a company is faced with crisis; however, he conceded that the larger a company is, the more likely assumptions of subgroups would fraction the larger culture. In the case of large school districts each school community may represent many smaller subgroups. Large urban school districts were a challenge to leadership because, as Schein stated, "The bottom line for leaders is that if they do not become conscious of the cultures in which they are embedded, those cultures will manage them" (p. 15). Leaders must acquire knowledge of the shared assumptions of communities.

### *School Culture*

Viewing school communities as having cultures requires that one take into account the groups and subgroups that compose a large complex community and the interactions among the groups. Due to the level of communication in complex communities, problem solving engages many factors associated with culture. Teachers and families represent a mix of gender, language, age, education, socioeconomic status, race, and religion. Each of these factors requires understanding on the part of the leader. Communication is the glue that gives shape and direction to a school's culture.

The challenge facing school leaders is connecting all the diversity without alienating subgroups. Schein (1992) described groups and individuals as having "psychological safety" (p. 299) which keeps them from being hurt by change and insulates members of the group through identity and integrity. Although Schein advocated for destabilizing or "unfreezing" (p. 300) sub cultures in order to build a new culture, Sergiovanni (1995) recognized the need to acknowledge the diversity and character of communities.

### *Learning Communities*

One way to view school communities is as learning communities (Faris, 2003; Schussler, 2003). Faris defined learning communities as

A concept of lifelong learning to a wide range of communities where people live and work and form the bonds of trust, shared values and networking that enrich both the individual and the collective life of our species the learning that illuminates our humanity. (p. 4)

Faris studied Canadian communities that focused on building learning initiatives around "whole people in whole communities" (p. 7). Communities were organized around the five sectors of the community, civic, economic, public, education and voluntary. Aspects of the five sectors were mobilized to foster "environmentally sustainable economic development and social inclusion" (p. 5). Success in learning communities was based on a model of "three Ps":

- Build Partnerships among all five community sectors
- Foster Participation of all, and
- Assess Performance (p. 7).

Faris described education as “fostering formal and informal learning” (p. 7). The concept of learning communities also values the background knowledge of all members of the community. A base goal for a learning community is that of a “shared vision of learning society led by learners” (p. 6).

### Characteristics of Leadership

#### *Forces*

Many forces influence educational leadership. Sergiovanni (1995) identified the forces as (a) technical, (b) human, (c) educational, (d) symbolic, and (e) cultural. Although none of those forces was isolated in its importance, leaders weigh the need to focus on specific forces to ensure the success of a school.

The first three forces emphasize the ways leaders use management, human resources, and knowledge of educational issues to move an organization. Technical forces ensure that the school abides and follows district mandates and procedures. Human forces involve the placement and use of school staff in effective arrangements that help the school meet goals. Educational forces use knowledge of educational

matters to focus positive, productive strategies on meeting academic goals.

Initiating transformation in a school community requires that leaders engage in strong use of the remaining two forces, symbol and culture. Recognizing and acknowledging the aspirations and expectations of the community that schools serve are important symbolic gestures.

*Symbolic Forces.* Symbolic leaders "are able to see the significance of what a group is doing and indeed could be doing" (Sergiovanni, 1995, p. 89). Leaders become a "moral authority" (p. 53). Through actions, and words, they construct a vision.

*Cultural forces.* Cultural leaders seek to establish routines that define a community as a culture. The process is ongoing. Sergiovanni (1999) quoted Dwyer who described cultural leadership as a "slow and steady campaign to create consensus of values and beliefs in a setting" (p. 91). Building culture is not transplanting a culture onto a different community based on the values and beliefs held by the former community. Effective schools had positive climates that create a sense of mission, values, and

standards where parents were involved in all aspects of children's learning.

In his book *The Principalship: a Reflective Practice Perspective*, Sergiovanni (1995) emphasized the work that principal's did with students and teachers. In *Rethinking Leadership* (1999), he described the servant qualities of school leadership encompassing parents and families. When analyzing a community of learners, he looked at the relationships, which form among all members.

*Participant interactions.*

Recently released results of a 21-year study in Seattle indicated that providing programs that enhanced participation of all parties in educational settings, i.e., parents, students and school staff, influenced students beyond their academic performance (Lonczak, Abbott, Hawkins, Kosterman, & Catalano 2002). The programs, which were developed by a University of Washington team, instructed teachers on ways to teach children self-control of aggressive and impulsive behavior.

The programs (Lonczak et al., 2002) also showed parents how to monitor children's behavior and balance family life. The study found that such programs reduced

drug use and teen pregnancy when compared to non-treated populations, without directly instructing students on the negative effects of early sexual encounters and drug usage. Students were less likely to engage in deviant behavior when strong bonds existed among the family and schools. Such findings have strong implications about the moral aspect of educational leadership.

Sergiovanni (1995, 1999) called leadership a moral craft. He described the "moral connections" which were "grounded in cultural norms rather than psychological needs" (p.99). Involving parents in the building of a successful culture requires that families and parents "understand the reason why they were being involved and the purpose, authority and scope of their participation" (Snowden & Gorton, 1998). As was described above ethnographers found that parents wanted their children to succeed in school but were not clear on how to participate in their education. Sergiovanni described the social and moral gap among the individual psychological needs of parents, students, school staff, and administration.

### Maternal Effects

In both qualitative and quantitative studies, maternal influence has been identified as a strong factor in students' achievement. In Chapter 1, maternal influence was identified as a prominent factor in student achievement based on Eccles' (1983) research. In a study of the influence of parental and teacher perceptions on math performance, Eccles found that parents, especially mothers, had a stronger influence on "children's achievement-related beliefs than teachers" (p. 137). Other quantitative research also found moderate relationships among children's performance and mothers' attitudes (Entwisle & Hayduk, 1978; Keeves, 1972; Seginer, 1983; St. John, 1972).

Ethnographic studies supported the influence of mothers on children's schooling performance (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Fine, 1991; Valdés, 1996). In her ethnographic study of Mexican-immigrant children, Valdés concentrated primarily on information from mothers. It indicated that mothers were the family members most likely to address problems in the school or with homework. Valdés explained that mothers' interactions with schools set the tone for children, and she blamed schools for not making

sincere enough attempts to conform to the expectations that mothers share with children.

In *Framing Dropouts*, Fine's (1991) interviews with adolescents were "inevitably woven back to her [mother]" (p. 172). In one-third of the interviews, adolescents "tied their futures-plans, dreams and fears-to their mothers". Fine discovered that mothers played an important part in their children's consciousness and at the same time were the focus of blame for all things that went wrong.

A telling sign of the influence of mothers was the response to questionnaires sent to Mexican American homes by Okagaki et al. (1995). Maternal level of education influenced student achievement positively. Mothers completed more than 80% of the questionnaires. Based on evidence of strong maternal influence in children's performance, the study focused on aspirations and expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers.

#### Minority Achievement in School

Various perspectives exist to explain the achievement of minority students in school. This section described the genetic view, socio-cultural views, psychological views and

the social cognitive view. Among the four views, the genetic explanation was certainly the most controversial.

#### *Genetic View*

The genetic perspective addresses the achievement of minorities because of innate racial and ethnic characteristics, which contribute to success, or lack of success, in school. As recently as 1996 researchers suggested that members of racial and ethnic minority groups had lower intelligence quotient (IQ) scores which was used as an explanation for lower school achievement (Herrnstein & Murray, 1996). Although the work of Herrnstein and Murray has been contested empirically (Tittle & Rotolo, 2000), the genetic view of differences in achievement was a perspective that continues to find supporters. However, a more widely accepted view was the socio-political perspective.

The socio-political perspective on achievement of minority students described interactions among members of minority groups and mainstream culture. Interactions among cultures were viewed as (a) cultural deficits (Bennett et al. 1999; Hirsch, 1987), (b) cultural mismatches (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Nieto, 1996; Okagaki, Frensch & Gordon, 1995;

Trueba, 1987,1989; Valdés, 1997; Vogt, Jordan & Tharp, 1993), or (c) cultural-ecology (Ogbu, 1981, 1986, 1991).

### *Cultural Deficit*

The cultural deficit viewed of minority achievement in schools had its largest impact in the wake of the publishing of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education [NCEE], 1983). In the climate of the 1980s, as the United States focused on the economic gaps between the U.S. and our trading partners in Japan and Europe, politicians began looking for answers for the disparity in educational achievement among students in the U.S. and those of other countries. One explanation was proposed by E.D. Hirsch and strongly supported by then secretary of education William Bennett (Bennet et al., 1999). In Hirsch's 1987 book, *Cultural Literacy: What every American Needs to Know*, he described the failure of the school system as the product of decreased "shared knowledge" among the diverse groups who lived in the United States. Hirsch envisioned a successful education as one that taught a common curriculum to its citizenry. He strongly advocated for the power of teaching over family and cultural influence. Cultural literacy theory promised

all social and economic groups "a ticket to full citizenship" (p. 22). William Bennett, secretary of education under Ronald Reagan, fully supported the values espoused by Hirsch and continued to do so. In 1999 he published a guide for parents to help them with their children's schooling (Bennett, et al., 1999). One section addressed the academic curriculum from kindergarten through eighth grade, outlining important knowledge and skills that children should learn before going to school. Other social-educational theorists held an opposite explanation for minority achievement.

#### *Cultural Mismatch*

Contrary to the beliefs of Hirsch and Bennett et al. (1999) many educational researchers pointed to schools as inadequately changing to meet the individual needs of the population they served. (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Moll, et al., 1993; Nieto, 1996; Okagaki et al., 1995; Trueba, 1987; Valdés, 1996; Vogt, et al., 1993). Okagaki et al. (1995) described the cultural mismatch as follows.

"(a) Cultural context affects social and cognitive development; (b) important differences exist among the Mexican American culture and the

majority culture; and (c) these cultural differences lead to development of different sets of cognitive and social behavior repertoires."

(p.162)

The factors mentioned above cause students to feel out of place in school settings that did not match the social and cognitive context of the home.

Studies conducted by Delgado-Gaitan (1992) and Valdés (1996) identified high valuation of education in the homes of Mexican American families but a lack of knowledge on how to help their children access school resources. Delgado-Gaitan identified parent expectations regarding schooling as being broader than the completion of academic programs. She found that Mexican American parents valued equally the socialization aspect of schools. A well-educated student was described as respectful and cooperative with those around him or her. The focus on socialization over academics conflicted with many of the competitive aspects of schooling in the United States, where much focus was placed on achieving increasingly higher spelling test scores or out performing peers on science projects.

Upon completion of her ethnographic study of Mexican-immigrant families, Valdés (1996) accused schools of

failing to align their curriculum and policies to meet the expectations of parents. Valdés found that families came from Mexico with low levels of education yet recognize the importance of education as a source of credentials for employment.

On the other hand, Valdés (1996) found that the values held by families of Mexican-immigrants many times did not go beyond "getting them to school" (p. 173). Contrary to the material expectations in schools held by teachers and administrators, Valdés found that the mothers she interviewed had more broad goals that focused on "raising good, responsible human beings" (p. 182). The families studied did not place equal emphasis on schooling as on "morality and family loyalty" (p. 189). Based on her findings, Valdés suggested ways that school and family might be bridged (p. 205). Her hope was that schooling for the children of Mexican-immigrants would "move [them] into the new world without completely giving up the old" (p. 205).

Ethnographic studies (e.g., Moll, et al., 1993) have indicated there was a knowledge base within family networks that connects schools with the communities. The researchers used the term "funds of knowledge" (p. 159) to describe the

socio-historical conditions of minority communities. In a case study of minority students, Nieto (1996) addressed the lack of culturally relevant materials and themes as causing a sense of devaluation of background knowledge students bring from the home. Nieto, Delgado-Gaitan (1992) and Valdés (1996) wanted the schools to change in ways that reduced conflict among the mainstream and minority culture.

#### *Cultural Ecology*

Ogbu (1986) analyzed the relationships that different minority groups had with the dominant culture. As was described in the first chapter Ogbu identified different types of minorities based on those events that brought specific groups to the United States.

Voluntary immigrants were individuals or groups who chose to migrate to the United States specifically to enrich the quality of their life and prospects for the future. The voluntary immigrants understand that a social system was already in place and the importance of using what society provides for one's own advantage. Many newly arrived immigrants from Asia and Latin America fit into this group. The children of this group were motivated by

their parent's own ambition to be successful within the confines placed on them by the larger society.

A second group was the involuntary minority. Involuntary minority groups were composed of second-generation and third-generation members who were born in the United States. A study by MacLeod (1995) identified similar characteristics in his subjects of Italian and Irish descent as those described by Ogbu. Students in the latter group failed to participate in school because such activity was elitist and conformist. Ogbu described the intent of the caste group as being able to force change in the system through lack of participation.

The analysis sought themes that matched aspects of the three socio-political perspectives. This dissertation was intended to identify sentiments and activities that fit the sociological perspective.

### Psychological Perspective

#### *Systems of Influence*

Under the surface of the socio-political interactions were the psychological processes involved when individuals make decisions based on their beliefs, values, and experiences. The psychological development of children, as

described by Bronfenbrenner (1986), was analyzed along two paradigms. The first paradigm considers the influence of external systems affecting families. The second paradigm relates to an "intrafamilial process" that was affected by external factors or the dynamics within the family. Bronfenbrenner described systems that influenced a child's development as "mesosystems, exosystems and chronosystems" (p. 723).

*Mesosystem.* Mesosystem models identify common environmental factors, which can influence a child's development even when the family settings were different. For example a study of premature infants (Scarr-Salapatek & Williams, 1973) found that parents who received post-natal instruction on how to care for their children using sensory stimulation techniques and various activities for interacting with infants had IQ scores that were 10 points higher than the untreated control group.

One such mesosystem was the interplay among family and school. In a study of 1000 eighth graders (Epstein, 1983a, 1983b) students who were afforded greater opportunities for communication and decision making in the home and/or classroom demonstrated greater independence and initiative. Later in this dissertation is a description of how these

findings affected the analysis of themes from this study of parental aspirations and expectations. Another model on child development was the "exosystem model" (Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

*Exosystem.* Exosystem models analyze the influence of parents' social networks and interactions outside of the home. Three influences on families were (a) maternal and paternal employment status, (b) social networks, and (c) community context. Bronfenbrenner, Alvarez, and Henderson (1984) studied exosystems. The researchers found that working mothers with some post secondary education held high expectations for their three year old daughters, and mothers working part-time provided more positive descriptions of their three-year-old sons than either fully employed or non-working mothers.

A study by Riley and Eckenstrode, (1986) analyzed the effects of stressful events related to social networks and psychological processes on families. The study identified three factors that caused shifts in attitudes (a) reduced socioeconomic status, (b) misfortune in the lives of significant members of a social network, and (c) low levels of belief in one's ability to influence one's own life.

Considering the community context where families live, research indicated distinct effects on children living in urban settings versus those in rural, less populated settings. Rutter and Giller (1983) described reduced levels of juvenile delinquency when families moved away from densely populated cities, yet other research by Vatter (as cited by Bronfenbrenner, 1986) found that children in urban settings demonstrated higher cognitive and intellectual functioning.

*Chronosystem.* A chronosystem model analyzes the long-term influence of family conditions on the development of children. Bronfenbrenner (1986) described a doctoral study conducted by Moorehead that found a correlation among increased stability in the mother's work place and positive child development. A more broad study (Werner & Smith, 1982) found similar results but also identified a separate group who were resilient to "poverty, biological risks and family instability" (p. 3).

Bronfenbrenner's (1986) models of analysis provided an extensive view of the psychological results produced by external systems' impact on families. Bronfenbrenner also addressed parents' education and the potential for the study of "causal pathways" (p. 736). To further break down

the psychological analysis of parent influence, researchers used pathway analysis to identify the strength and weakness of social interactions on student achievement (Atkinson, 1957, 1964; Eccles, 1983; Ethington, 1991; Fuligni, 1997; Mau, 1995; Patrikakou, 1996; Seginer, 1983; Trusty, 1996).

### Psychological Factors

#### *Pathway Analysis*

Pathway analysis is a model that identifies and places value on the causal relationships that form patterns for predicting success or failure. By first identifying specific attributes in an individual or group, researchers form a set of "mediators of students' achievement behaviors" (Eccles, 1983, p. 99). The mediators can be external, parents' and teachers' feedback, or internal, such as locus of control gender and gender identity. Data were gathered through student reports, questionnaires, observations and interviews.

Eccles (1983) first described known variables that contributed to student achievement. Second, bivariate and multivariate relations were assessed using correlation, regression, and contingency table analysis. Third, the predictive power of multiple regression path analysis

compared a model with previous testing of the model.

Fourth, a separate set of data was collected at another time and causal direction relations were compared with the previous model.

Path-analysis compares the relationship among parental attitudes and student achievement, but the purpose of this study was to identify themes in the data for use as factors of student achievement.

#### Social Cognitive Theory

Another perspective on expectation and motivation is found in the work of Bandura (1986). Bandura described social cognitive theory in which "self-reactive influences ... [are] achieved by creating incentives for one's own actions and by responding evaluative to one's own behavior depending on how it measures up to an internal standard" (p. 350). Bandura described self-concept, self-esteem and values as potentially shifting with self-evaluation. To evaluate one's self in terms of self-concept, self-esteem, and values, individuals rely on their own beliefs about themselves.

Social cognitive theory described an individual's motivation as the power of perceived consequences (Bandura,

1986), in the form of beliefs over actual consequences. Bandura gave the example of people regulating their effort in accordance with the effects they expect their actions to have. As a result, beliefs were better predictors than the actual consequences of their actions. Social cognitive theory identifies how both sociological context and psychological mediators mix to form self-concept, self-esteem and, values.

#### Quantitative Research and Qualitative Studies

The format of this data collection closely aligned to the work of Okagaki, et al. (1995). Okagaki et al. designed questionnaires that addressed

1. Educational expectations and values,
2. Perceptions of child's ability,
3. Parental efficacy,
4. Racial barriers, and
5. Parental behaviors.

The questionnaires used "Likert-type scales" (Okagaki, et al., 1995, p. 168) to interpret the responses of parents in the five areas listed above. Based on the information provided by Mexican American parents, two groups emerged, a high-achieving group and low-achieving group. In these

groups, parents' expectations for level of educational attainment were similar to the number who expected a college education. Forty-eight percent of the high-achieving group and 51% of the low achieving group expected their children to graduate from college.

The difference among the high achieving group and the low achieving group was that 38% of the former group expected some post-secondary education compared to 15% of the latter group. Research on grades found that parents of high achieving students were less satisfied with grades of C and below than parents of low achievers. Therefore, it was expected that parents of high-achieving students were more likely (82%) than parents of low-achieving students (45%) to agree with the statement "My child does well in school and usually does not need help with homework" (Okagaki, et al., 1995).

Other findings of the research were in the area of racial barriers, in which both groups felt equally about statements regarding "children facing prejudicial treatment in the classroom getting jobs because of their race" (p. 172). Parents of high achievers also felt well prepared to help children with homework in many subjects even though most felt their children did not need the help. More than

half of all the parents for both groups felt capable of helping most of the time. However, the parents of high achievers felt their help was more effective and provided more positive modeling of academic activities in the home.

Okagaki et al. (1995) provided quantitative data in specific areas regarding parent expectations and values. The researchers relied heavily on the individual interpretation of the questionnaires by the respondents. On the other hand, qualitative studies provided the researcher an opportunity to observe data and interpret responses using themes from the questionnaires.

Valdés (1996) and Delgado-Gaitan (1992) provided a picture of the Mexican-immigrant families. Ethnographic studies analyzed the physical environment, emotional climates and interactions among family and extended family members. One purpose of this research is the analysis of themes identified by Okagaki et al. (1995) in conjunction with the sensory data identified by Delgado-Gaitan by interviewing mothers in the home and observing interactions among children, among adults, and among children and adults.

### Summary

It was the intent of this research to identify themes in the aspirations and expectations of families and to discuss the findings of the study in relation to the current educational environment of increased accountability as it pertains to leadership and school culture. However, as a phenomenological study, the research may reveal other unforeseeable psychological and sociological themes relevant to the role of leadership.

## CHAPTER 3

## METHODS

The methods of this study utilized a phenomenological genre described by Seidman (1998). The study involved a combination of life history and focused interviews designed from assumptions described in Chapters 1 and 2. The goal was to provide educators with a view of the school system from the standpoint of both mothers and the school staff. This chapter described the context, setting, and participants in the study. It also described the organization and analysis procedures used. Although this study used a single interview of each of the subjects, Seidman described a three-part interview that took place at separate times.

According to Seidman (1998), the reason for separating the parts of the interview was to place the interviewer in "the context of their [informants] lives and the lives of those around them" (p. 11). The interviews focused on three areas: (a) life history, (b) experience with education, and (c) interpreting the meaning of the experience. This study used observation, documented in a field notebook, to describe the context of the interviews.

The guiding criteria for this study were found in Spindler & Spindler (1987) as follows:

1. Observations are contextualized, both in the immediate setting and in further contexts beyond the immediate setting, as relevant.
2. Hypotheses emerge in a situation as the study evolves. Judgment on what may be significant to the study is deferred until the orienting phase of the study is complete. In other words, a problem is defined before beginning the study but may be modified or discarded during the analysis.
3. The native view of reality is attended through inferences from observation and various forms of inquiry.
4. Sub cultural knowledge held by the participants makes social behavior and communication sensible. The information should be gathered in a systematic fashion.
5. Instruments, codes, schedules, questionnaires, and so forth should be generated in a situation because of observation and inquiry.
6. A transcultural, comparative perspective is present though frequently as unstated assumption.

Therefore, culture is viewed as dynamic rather than static.

7. Because sociocultural knowledge affects behavior and communication, it is the researcher's task to make what is implicit and tacit explicit.
8. The informant is the one who knows and has native knowledge; therefore, the interviewer will not predetermine responses through questioning. The interviewer must have an open-ended line of questions that allow knowledge to be shared in its natural form with sufficient time for expression.
9. Any form of technical device that would facilitate the collection of live data would be used

A phenomenological genre was used for analysis because it provided an opportunity to identify common themes from the theoretical foundation for qualitative analysis of Mexican-immigrant families. The purpose of this study was to analyze a qualitative inquiry into the expectations and aspirations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children in terms of academic and professional success and match those expectations to the school staff perceptions of the success of Mexican-immigrant children. Because the purpose of the study was to glimpse a school culture from

the perspectives of both the mother and the school staff rather than an in-depth study of either the family or the school, it was determined that the single interview format would provide the information needed to look for themes.

The research questions were as follows:

1. What aspirations and expectations are held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children?
2. What aspirations and expectations are held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students?
3. How do the expectations of Mexican-immigrant mothers compare to the expectations held in the school and influence school culture?

## Methods

### *Setting*

The school selected for the study was located in a primarily Hispanic community, meaning that at least 51% of the students were Hispanic as determined by the district school profile. Rockford was not open to magnet students, which meant only students from the immediate community attended unless they had special permission.

Rockford Elementary was located in Tucson, Arizona in a tree-lined neighborhood that was first developed in the 1930s and 40s. It served pre-school through fifth grade.

Rockford's enrollment averaged 327 students during the previous three years. The population was 94% Hispanic, and 92.2% of the students qualified for the Free or Reduced Lunch program. It had a relatively stable population at 88.5% compared to the district average of 86.1%. The school had a large number of Mexican-immigrant families, with the percent of English Language Learners (mostly Spanish speakers) at 39.2%, (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

The teaching staff was as stable as the rest of the district with 13.2 years service at the school compared to 12.1 years in the other district schools. The teacher-to-students ratio was 1 to 17 compared to 20 for the district. Rockford was a neighborhood school that had two self-contained classes for special needs students. It had an Outdoor Play program for kindergarten through second grade. There was a computer lab and a full-time computer lab teacher. The principal had been at the school for eight years. Based on the state formula for labeling schools, Rockford qualified as a "performing school" (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

*Rockford Elementary Profile*

*Measures of success.* Education is measured using specific areas that indicate a school's relative success. The categories most often used to measure school success were attendance, performance on state and district tests, and school quality surveys. Based on the state tests and attendance Rockford was "Performing" in each of the years when labels have been determined by the state formula. The school's mobility rate was steady at 88% compared to the district average of 86.1% for elementary schools (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

*Attendance.* Attendance at Rockford has climbed consistently from 92.3% in 1996-1997 to 94.2% in 2003-2004. The average attendance was calculated by dividing the daily number of absences into the daily enrollment and subtracting from 100%. The district's average daily attendance increased as well from 92.2% to 93.5%, but Rockford' attendance rate grew by .8% more over the same period (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>). Focus on attendance was a theme that was noticed by Sra. Miranda. When asked what she liked about the school she specifically said the attention that the principal gave

families. She related an anecdote about the principal visiting a neighbor's home because the children were not going to school. Yet, with the exception of Sra. Miranda's comment, subjects did not mention attendance or the importance of raising attendance.

*State and district test performance.* The second measure of school success was the widely publicized achievement on state and district tests. The three tests used to measure school performance at the time of this research were the Stanford Achievement Test 9 (SAT9), Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards (AIMS) and the Core Curriculum Standards Assessment (CCSA). On the SAT9, which was used to measure one-year's academic growth for students continuously enrolled for two years at Rockford, starting in the 2002-2003 school year, the number of students who made one-year's growth increase by as much as 12% in reading for third grade students coming from second and 4.1% in reading for fifth grade students progressing from fourth. Overall the number of students who made one year's progress increased in third, fourth and fifth with the exception of a slight decrease in fourth graders

reading and language of - 1.1% combined (found in <http://www.ade.az.gov/srcs/ReportCards/57002003.pdf>).

Performance on AIMS from 2002 to 2004 increased significantly in math and writing but decreased in reading. Performance on the math portion of the AIMS improved from 28.6% of students attaining mastery in 2002 to 43.2% in 2004. Writing improved from 54.1% of students attaining mastery in 2002 to 70.9% in 2004. In reading, in 2002 45.3% of students attained mastery. The percent increased to 48.7% in 2003 before decreasing to 42% in 2004. The changes in test performance were below the district averages of 53% in reading, 72% in writing and 48.9% in math but reflected an overall increase that approached the district averages (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

Students in grades 1 and 2 took the district test on the core curriculum (CCSA) the previous two years. Reading performance was 57.6% passing compared to 70% for the district and 38% in math compared with 54.7% for the district. Six-trait writing quarterly assessment was added the year before the research, and all schools across the district showed significant improvement in the area of writing.

In the interviews of mothers, no mention was made of the tests or the need to prepare students for performing well on the tests. Among teachers, only Mrs. Espinosa referred to the AIMS test when she suggested that students might not come to school if they thought they were going to take a test in English. Mr. Robles referred to the test only as part of a larger environment of increased accountability but did not make any mention of how Mexican-immigrant families were prepared for the test. The curriculum specialist made no mention of testing but she did describe the school's parent workshops where state standards were discussed. Another source of information on school performance came in the form of a mid-year school survey.

*School Quality Survey.* The district required schools to distribute a School Quality Survey for parents, students and staff. The survey was anonymous and results were posted on the district website for public access. Rockford had a response rate of 88.8% for students, 83% for parents and 67% for staff. The survey scale rated the school in the areas of instruction, home and family support, environment, diversity, leadership, computer technology,

and overall satisfaction. In the area of *instruction*, 98% of parents responded positively on the efforts of the school to teach reading, writing, and math. Of the staff who responded, all responded positively to the efforts of the school to teach reading, writing and math. Staff members were not asked to respond in the area of *home and family support*. On questions pertaining to homework help, 98.3% of parents responded that there was someone in the home to help and 97.9% responded that there was a regular time and place for children to do homework (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

In the areas of leadership and home and family support, the parents responded favorably to communication at the school. Ninety-eight percent of parents responded that the principal was easy to talk to and they were encouraged to be involved in their child's education. Ninety-four percent of parents responded that they received regular reports on academic progress and 96.6% responded that they got notices about school activities. Overall, parent satisfaction with the school was 99.5% (retrieved from <http://tusdstats.tusd.k12.az.us/>).

Based on increased attendance rates, the percentage of students who made one year's growth, a steady increase in

AIMS scores, and the results of the School Quality Survey, Rockford was a successful school.

### *Participants*

The participants for the study were chosen from a single school in large school district in the Southwest. The researcher described the study to the community representative from Rockford and asked for a list of eight possible families based on the criteria (Table 1).

Table 1

#### Mother Characteristics

	Sra. Ramirez	Sra. Duran	Sra. González	Sra. Miranda
Number of Children	2	3	1	3
Place of Birth	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico	Mexico
Years of schooling	6	10	8	10
Place in family	N/A	Middle	Middle	Middle
Years in U.S.	5	13	6	13
Helped with school work	N/A	Little	Some	Little

1. The mother moved to the United States from Mexico,
2. At least one child in the family was among the ages of 5 and 11 years and attending school.
3. They were willing to be interviewed in the home.
4. They were available to be interviewed between January 2003 and May 2003.

From Rockford's list, the researcher randomly chose four families from the eight possible participants selected by the community representative for initial contact. If a family chose not to participate, a second family was chosen from the list of potential families at the school.

One staff member from administration was interviewed. Also interviewed were one person from support staff and three classroom teachers who had taught one of the target families' children. Participation was voluntary and participants could be withdrawn at any time.

The criteria for school staff participants were as follows:

1. They had worked at the school for at least one year.
2. They were certified as a teacher or administrator.
3. They were available to be interviewed from May 23, 2003 to August 1, 2003.

Characteristics of the subjects are viewable in Table 2.

Table 2

Staff Characteristics

	Mrs. Espinoza	Ms. Escarcega	Ms. Duarte	Mrs. Huerta	Mr. Robles
Ethnicity	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic	Hispanic
Place of Birth	U.S.	Mexico	U.S.	U.S.	U.S.
Years at School	22	16	1	13	8
Grade taught	Resource	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Specialist	Principal
Bilingual	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No

*Limitation.* For the purpose of the analysis it must be noted that, while the researcher randomly selected the participants from the list of teachers and families, the names on the lists were selected by the school's curriculum specialist. Therefore, the bias of the curriculum specialist needed to be considered before making any general conclusions.

### *Data Collection*

Four Mexican-immigrant mothers with children from 0 to 11 years of age, and a minimum of one child attending Rockford were interviewed. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) developed by the researcher to address three areas: (a) life history, (b) experience with education for adults and children in the home, and (c) mothers' assessments of the children's educational experience at Rockford.

Five school staff members were also interviewed using a different interview protocol (see Appendix B) including (a) personal history with the community of Rockford, (b) educational and teaching experience and (c) expectations held for Mexican-immigrant children academically and professionally. No children participated during the research, and students' cumulative files were not examined. All interviews of mothers and staff were conducted in single sessions.

Based on observations made before, during, and after the interview, field notes were recorded and organized using a family code. The field notes contained descriptions of the house, the neighborhood, and other relevant

observations for use in describing the context of the homes.

#### *Interview Data*

This section describes the steps and procedures used to collect data, including time frames, settings, letters, consent forms, and other relevant factors. The collection of interview data began when the school principal first approved the research in January 2004. The principal requested that the curriculum specialist gather a list of eight mothers in the community who were born in Mexico and had at least one student attending the school, as well as a list of eight teachers who could be interviewed. Copies of the proposal were sent to the principal and the curriculum specialist, and the lists of potential subjects, along with phone numbers, were received via email. A letter, in Spanish and English, soliciting subjects' participation in the research was sent. The letter contained a brief description of the study and the interview.

### Interviews of the Mothers

Mothers were interviewed from February to March of 2004 and staff members were interviewed from May to June of 2004. Interviews were held in the homes of the families and wherever was most convenient for staff. The single interviews lasted from 45 to 60 minutes for the mothers. The question-protocol for staff had fewer questions than the protocol for the mothers, yet two teachers talked for over an hour.

The interview protocol was followed as closely as possible, but the researcher deviated to clarify specific answers. Most of the subjects cooperated and seemed very eager to participate. Of the eight mothers who were asked to participate, four agreed to the interview. The subjects were contacted by telephone and asked when would be a good time to be interviewed in their homes.

All of the mothers' interviews were conducted in their homes. Subjects signed two copies of an approved subject consent form before interviewing began, and they kept one of the copies. For reasons of confidentiality, family names were changed for description in this dissertation. All of the subjects were interviewed in the morning. The purpose

of the research was explained to subjects in Spanish before beginning. Subjects had a copy of the questions to follow. After the interview, the subjects were compensated with \$20. The interview tapes were coded A through D in the order of the interviews with a number to indicate the number of children attending the school. Although families who had children in the classrooms of the staff interviewed were requested the researcher did not directly ask either staff members or mothers questions about specific children or teachers so as to not compromise the confidentiality of the data collection.

#### Interviews of Staff

Four teachers, a curriculum specialist and the principal agreed to be interviewed. Names were changed to protect confidentiality. Staff members were interviewed at the school, at another school, and at the home of one of the teachers. Subjects signed two copies of an approved subject consent form and kept one copy. Audiotapes were labeled using T for teacher followed by a number to indicate the order in which they were interviewed. The curriculum specialist was identified by initials CS, and the principal with P.

The purpose of the research was explained to each of the subjects before starting the interview. Observational field notes were taken about the settings during the interviews, but observational notes were not considered in the analysis. Instead, conditions observed during the interviews were included during the description of the interviews for the purpose of adding to the context of the homes.

After the interview, the subjects were compensated in the form of a \$20 gift card from Borders Books. All of the participants were very willing to discuss their impressions of the school community. All of the subjects could ask questions after the interview. Interviews were completed by June 24, 2004.

#### *Use of two interview protocols*

Two different interview protocols were used during the study. The protocol for mothers had 30 questions dealing with family histories, past-personal schooling experiences and current schooling experiences involving their children. The staff interview protocol contained 11 questions pertaining specifically to experience at the target school.

The purpose for using two different protocols centered on the focus of the study.

The focus of the study was on the expectations that Mexican-immigrant mothers hold for their children as compared to a specific school not individual teachers. The criteria for selecting subjects from the staff only required that they had worked for one year at the school without regard to ethnicity or place of birth. Expectations on the part of the school were viewed as representing general sentiments of a portion of the staff, not necessarily bound to how those expectations were formed.

On the other hand, the study did focus on mothers of a specific ethnic criteria and thus sought commonalities and differences as to how expectations and expectations might develop in a Mexican-immigrant community. The study was intended to help schools understand more about Mexican-immigrant students not dwell on the wide range of backgrounds of teachers who were hired to work in the school.

The types of questions also differed for mothers. The questions for mothers were less direct regarding expectations because of the potential to be leading. For example, if I had directly asked a mother if her child

would attend college the close-ended question would elicit a simple yes or no answer. The nature of the question could also introduce a concept, such as higher education, that may not have occurred to the mother. The goal of the question was to collect data on how mothers perceive their child's potential to progress academically.

### Organization and Analysis of Data

#### *Organization*

Analysis of the data was ongoing during the study, involving the interpretation of field notes and interview transcriptions. The analysis of the interview data began with tape transcription in Spanish using a paid transcriber. The Spanish transcription was translated into English for passages used in the text of this dissertation. Each tape was given an identification number from one to nine and a letter code representing the number of children in the family (A meaning one child, B meaning two, C meaning three). Labels with the codes were placed at the top of each interview log, audiotape, and field note instead of names to identify the family during data analysis. School staff members were identified with the

Roman numeral I for administrators, II for resource staff, and III for classroom teachers.

The staff interviews were identified and coded by numbers representing the positions of individuals:

1. For administration,
2. For support staff such as counselors, resource teachers, and nurses, and
3. For classroom teachers.

All the transcripts were labeled by numbers for each line for the sake of ease in finding themes.

Data was read and coded for common themes and categories in the areas of expectations and aspirations. Themes were highlighted using colored markers and wrote themes into a matrix (see Appendix C). A similar matrix (see Appendix D) was used for staff interviews according to the position held by the staff member. The matrices were analyzed for similarities and differences in the types of responses recorded. All of the subjects were given fictitious names for the purpose of the analysis and interpretation.

### *Use of outside Spanish transcriber*

The Spanish interviews were transcribed in to a word processor by a visiting Mexican scholar from Culicán Mexico. The transcriber transcribed the data for translation into English by the researcher. Dr. Richard Ruiz, of the University of Arizona, then checked translations for accuracy.

### *Observational Data*

Observations were noted in a separate notebook and not included in the adult analysis. Observational data helped to personalize the families, however the adults want to see a movie. The researcher did not want to deal with the same father and or siblings.

### *Challenges*

As a white male interviewing Mexican-born mothers, the researcher was considered an outsider; therefore, the interpretation of data was from a different perspective than that of the informants. However, as a Spanish speaker with many years working with families of bilingual students, the researcher had experience in the target

neighborhoods, which lessened the researcher's role as an outsider during data collection.

Anecdotal information (Jameson, 1982) supported some benefit of not being too much of an insider during data collection. In studies of life histories, Zavella (1981) considered herself firmly an insider as a Chicano female but felt her place as an insider made informants less willing to share personal knowledge that they may have shared with a non-insider. Other studies (Tixier y Vigil & Elsanasser, 1976) confirmed the potential for outsiders to gain more information because the informants perceived them as neutral.

However, the findings were not limited to themes pertaining to expectations. The study sought to produce "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973; Rossman & Rallis, 1998) that "present details, emotions and textures of social relationships" (p.138) among Mexican-immigrant families and schools.

The recently released results of a longitudinal study done in Seattle, Washington, described in Chapter 2, revealed the power of involving families in the education of their children. It was the goal of this study to

identify continuity and mismatch among schools and Mexican-immigrant families.

#### *Factors Effecting the Research*

One factor affecting the study was the loss of two subjects and the loss of audiocassettes due to damage. One cassette used for a mother's interview was damaged by a malfunctioning tape player. After attempting to recover the recording and play it back, it was decided that the transcription would not produce a complete interview. At the same time, the mother returned to Mexico. In addition, a teacher who originally agreed to be interviewed left the school district and was unavailable to be interviewed in June. The original intention of the research was to interview four mothers and six staff. After the delay, only three mothers and five staff members were interviewed.

Another factor for consideration during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data was the change in the researcher's position in the district. Originally, the researcher was an itinerant district employee assigned to monitor special education programs, but before the interviews were conducted, he became a principal of another school within the district. As a

principal, the interpretation was influenced by the researcher position as a site administrator. The consequences of the shift in position may have been marginal, but it was a factor worth considering throughout the research process.

#### *Analysis of the Data*

Salient themes in the data were separated into (a) historical characteristics and (b) perceptual themes. The transcriptions were read entirely and notes made in the matrix based on the themes that most frequently appeared in the data or were new to the data. Notes in the matrix were assigned numbers indicating in what line they could be found in the transcripts.

Themes were compared, both within and across matrices, as well as disparities in which there was no consistency among any of the subjects. Common themes from both staff and mothers were listed and a third matrix was developed representing salient themes within the school culture. A list of disparities was compiled. Common themes appeared across both the mothers and staff. Characteristic of all of the subjects, staff and mothers was that all were Hispanic.

Perceptually, the most salient theme for all subjects, mothers and educators was the importance of communication. A second perception held by all of the subjects was that students could achieve at any academic level. However, the means by which students could reach high levels of academic success were scattered in the subjects' responses. Although there were some common themes across all of the subjects' responses, it was also important to look at some scattered themes that appeared for teachers and mothers.

#### Summary of Methodology

In summary, this study used a phenomenological methodology that collected first-hand information through interviews. The methodology allowed me to analyze a relationship that existed among school staff and the families they served. Using the interview format, the research could be probed and expanded upon answers for more clarity, thus providing a rich amount of information for analysis. This type of study allowed for an open-ended source for themes to evolve using the questions as a framework for generating conversation.

## CHAPTER 4

### COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

Chapter 4 describes the results of this qualitative study using interviews of Mexican-immigrant mothers and school staff for general analysis of themes that contribute to school culture. This chapter describes the results of interviews including a description of individual interviews of Mexican-immigrant mothers and school staff as well as steps used in the analysis of interview data.

The first section is a description of the interviews and the responses provided by Mexican-immigrant mothers, followed by an analysis of their histories and perceptions. The second section describes the interviews of Rockford staff followed by an analysis of histories and perceptions of teachers and administration. In the Histories and Perceptions sections of both mothers and staff, the research questions guided the identification of common and disparate themes.

#### Descriptions of the Interviews

The first mother interviewed was Sra. Ramirez, but the recording was unintelligible, and the family returned to

Mexico before another interview could be conducted. Sra. Ramirez's answers to questions and observations from field notes in the description of the subjects were included in the analysis because answers to the questions were relevant to salient points from the data analysis. All of the subjects were very willing to allow me into their homes.

*Sra. Ramirez*

The first interview was with the Sra. Ramirez. It lasted 35 minutes. A short chain link fence and dirt yard surrounded the house. Pepsi cans littered the ground, and there was no porch, only a small concrete slab. Two of Sra. Ramirez's children attended Rockford. Her fifth grade son was born in Mexico, and her third grade daughter was born in the U.S. An older son, 19, still lives in Mexico. Sra. Ramirez answered the door she was talking on a cell phone and asked me in to sit on the couch. The room was cluttered with toys, tapes, and a backpack. There was no literature, books, newspapers, or magazines in the home and the walls were bare. Other family members sat in an adjoining dining room and occasionally looked through the doorway at us. The children were in another room watching

TV. The son came in during the interview and brought me a glass of water.

Sra. Ramirez was crying on the phone, and obviously, something serious had happened. When she got off the phone, she explained that the Immigration and Naturalization Service had revoked her nephew's work permit and was threatening to deport him after 15 years in the U.S. She was asked if she wanted to postpone the interview, but she wanted to continue. It was discovered that the recorder was recording correctly. Rather than postpone the interview it was continued and decided notes taken on the question sheet.

Sra. Ramirez was born in Mexico to a family who worked in agriculture and ranching. She had come to the U.S. seven years earlier, when she was 34 years old. She had seven siblings, five brothers and two sisters and estimated that her parents had four years of schooling each. Growing up, her parents reviewed her homework with her.

When asked about how her children did in school, she said the biggest problem was that she did not understand the homework because it was in English. She said her son's strengths were sports, but she started answering the question about her children's strengths by saying that they

both needed a lot of attention and were argumentative. She expressed that both children struggled with school. She liked that the children were using and learning and using English with help from extra classes.

In addition, she felt that the school provided a lot of help with the work. She could not think of anything that she disliked about the school; however, like other mothers in the study, she felt the neighborhood was very unsafe.

Her expectations for her children were open, but she wanted them to get college degrees. She said her son wanted to be an astronaut, and her daughter wanted to be a teacher. Sra. Ramirez had a difficult time answering specific questions about what her children needed to succeed and whether the school was adequately preparing them to succeed. In the notes, it was noted that Questions 20, 24, 25, 26 and 27 were difficult for her to answer with any clarity. She felt that she could best help her children succeed by pushing them and talking to them and the biggest barrier to their success was financial.

*Sra. Gonzáles*

The second mother interviewed was Sra. Gonzáles, whose interview lasted 45 minutes. The home was well manicured

with trimmed bushes and green grass, and a small, barking dog greeted me from the other side of a chain link fence. Mr. González came out to quiet the dog and invite me in. The family had one daughter, who was retained in third grade at the neighborhood school and repeated two years with the same teacher. The daughter was born in Mexico and immigrated to the United States with her mother six years earlier. Before the interview began, Mr. González excused himself to go to work.

Sra. González was very outspoken about the school and the neighborhood. She and her husband attended school in Mexico to the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade respectively. She grew up in a large family, with five sisters and four brothers. She was a middle child. Her father was a businessman in agriculture, and her mother was a housewife. Each of her parents attended school through the second grade. She had very positive memories of school mostly involving the social aspect of having friends. Because her parents had little education, most of the help she received on schoolwork was from friends and siblings. In her family, five of her siblings had college degrees and were "professionals." Growing up, there was a lot of talk in her

home about all sorts of topics such as the importance of education, finances, and friends.

Sra. González's perceptions of the neighborhood school and education were articulated very clearly. She wanted her daughter to go as far as she could in school. She said art was her daughter's greatest strength and saw the potential for her daughter to become an artist. On the other hand, she saw math as her daughter's greatest weakness.

During the last school year, Sra. González spoke with her daughter's teacher to tell her that she wanted her daughter to do less drawing in school and concentrate more on academics. She felt that her daughter should practice art in the home and that school was a place to learn reading, writing, and math skills. Her daughter had been placed in Special Education the previous year. The mother blamed many of her daughter's academic difficulties on a "bad teacher" with whom the daughter spent two years and she was very happy with her daughter's most recent teacher, who spoke Spanish. She did not specify if the previous teacher spoke Spanish.

Sra. González said her battles with the previous teacher made her more of an advocate for her daughter and more vocal at the school. She said the level of

communication in the school among parents and teachers and the administration was one of the things she liked about the school. She said the principal listened to her complaints, but she knew that he was limited in what he could do to remove the teacher. Sra. Gonzáles believed schools in Mexico were better because their goals were tougher for the children.

Although she did not agree with hitting children she saw American schools as very loose in their control of the children because they were bound by laws that protected students. In Mexico, the teacher was always right. She also saw the need for schools to teach English. She said she believed that bilingual education was the best option when her daughter entered school, but she realized that the focus should be on English. She blamed the problems of bilingual education on the way it happened in the classroom, with the teacher alternating between the two languages.

She met with the principal and the teacher regularly in impromptu settings. Usually she was trying to find out how her daughter was doing. She wanted more resource support to help her daughter succeed but thought lack of money and language were the two primary barriers to

success. Sra. Gonzáles felt the neighborhood was unsafe because people were dealing drugs yet she understood that drugs were a part of the culture in the U.S. Until recently, she and her daughter wanted to return to Mexico.

*Sra. Duran*

The Duran's lived in an apartment just outside of the school attendance area. We sat on the couch for the interview, which lasted 30 minutes. The apartment was cluttered with toys and the TV was hooked to a video game. The boys went into another room to watch TV with the mother's boyfriend and father of the two-year-old little sister.

There was no evidence of literature in the home. Sra. Duran lived with her two school age boys, Grades 2 and 4 and a two-year-old daughter. She had lived outside the attendance area of Rockford for three years and wanted the boys to be able to continue without switching schools because she had heard bad things about the school where they were supposed to attend. She had lived in the U.S. for 13 years and all of her children were born in the U.S.

Growing up, Sra. Duran was the middle child in a family of two brothers and two sisters. Her father worked

in agriculture and her mother was a housewife. Her father attended school through primary, and her mother started secondary school. Sra. Duran received little help from her parents on schoolwork and did not say whether the family talked much about anything in particular. She reached 10<sup>th</sup> grade and remembered enjoying school.

Her perception of Rockford was that the boys were learning as much as they could. She felt the school was safe inside but worried about the dangerous traffic outside the school. What she liked about the school was the teachers, who she trusted, and the experience of the principal. Sra. Duran felt that the teachers and principal talked frequently to her sons. She attended some meetings to discuss her younger son's progress and the teacher eventually decided against retention. Ms. Duran had considered taking her boys out of the school, if one were retained. She received frequent phone calls from the school. She felt that lack of English proficiency hindered work and meetings with teachers.

Sra. Duran said that her older son wanted to be an astronaut, but she did not know how to promote his interest. She knew about special programs through the university but did not know how to access such programs and

worried about costs and language barriers. She wished the school would provide more support as an advocate for helping financially and with information. Nonetheless, Sra. Duran felt that teachers made the positive difference in schools. Her goal for the children's level of academic achievement was that they finish school and go as far as they could. She felt that learning English was important to overcome barriers, but she did not comment on bilingual education or Spanish instruction either positively or negatively.

*Sra. Miranda*

The third mother interviewed, was with Sra. Miranda, lasting 45. Sra. Miranda had sojourned back and forth between the U.S. and Mexico for 13 years. Her most recent stay here began two years ago. Her husband lived in Mexico. She had three children, one in middle school, another in first grade and another in preschool. The house was a low-ceilinged structure that one entered from the alley. It appeared to be a converted garage.

The children were in a bedroom watching TV and playing games. During the interview, cousins and uncles came through the house and took the children out to do things.

The interview was conducted in a dining room with boxes stored along the walls from ceiling to floor. Sra. Miranda thought it would be less noisy and busy than in the kitchen. She earned money by selling tortillas at the school.

She was one of the middle children in her family of eight sisters and four brothers, one of who died. Her parents each attended school until the fifth or sixth grade. She said she got no help at home on schoolwork when growing up. She remembered school as being a positive experience, but she did not do well because she was too shy and never asked questions. According to Sra. Miranda, there was no time in her house for talk because her mom and others were always working. Two of her siblings attended college.

Her perceptions of Rockford were that the quality was good. Things she liked about the school were the work, the teachers and the principal. She felt the work appropriate for what she expected students to be learning and there was enough English. She liked the principal's attention to her and the children, and she was impressed that he knew her and her children's names and had visited homes in the neighborhood.

She related a specific incident where the principal went to the house of a student next door, who was missing a lot of school, and told the parents to get the student to school. She liked everything and had no complaints about the school. In her opinion, everyone communicated with the students and the parents. To find out about schoolwork, Sra. Miranda visited the school often at the beginning because the teacher spoke Spanish. She was also present for the Open House where they explained the rating system. She believed that the measure of a good or bad teacher was whether their students left class prepared to continue in school.

Sra. Miranda said her older daughter wanted to be a dentist, but she did not know the younger children's strengths or interests. To help students achieve, she felt it was important for them to learn right from wrong and English. However, she also expressed her hope that the children would be bilingual so they could get better jobs along the border. She mentioned that a member of her family had a business on the border and was always looking for people who were bilingual. She felt that English was necessary in academics.

[Sra. Miranda: Cuando recién entraron (the children) a la escuela dijo que el director (de la otra escuela) que los que ya estaban en octavo grado no los pasaban a (high school creo que dice) si no llevaban muy bien el Ingles, ...Han dicho eso que si no andaba bien con le Ingles no va a pasar ...bueno no recuerda si fue el director o otra persona ahí pero yo sé por que yo se lo estaba diciendo a la niña constantemente y le digo que ya el otro ano tiene que agarrar muy bien el Ingles le digo porque si no vas a pasar de ano. Si ella sabe todas las materias en Español porque para que le vaya a mantener otro ano en octavo por saber las materias.?)

[Sra. Miranda: When the student first started in school the principal (of the other school) said that those students who do not know English would not graduate from eighth grade. They have said it, that if they do not do well in English they will not pass.

Well I do not remember if it was the principal or someone else but I have been telling my daughter constantly that she has to do well in English because she will not pass. If she knows the subject in

Spanish, why are they going to keep her another year in eighth grade.]?

Sra. Miranda taught her children to be self-advocates and to ask questions as self advocates. She also praised and encouraged her children as a way of supporting them, and she has learned with them. She liked the school, she did not trust the neighborhood and would not allow any of her children outside alone.

#### Mothers' Histories and Perceptions

The interviews of mothers provided a filter for the next set of interviews with staff. The four mothers interviewed shared some common characteristics in their history such as level of education, placement in family, and educational experiences in their homes while growing up. The first mother interviewed, of which no transcript exists, provided only comparison data on home conditions, history, and some perceptual information based on hand-scripted notes.

Three mothers attended secondary school in Mexico. Two mothers, Sra. Duran and Sra. Miranda, attended up to 10th

grade, and Sra. Gonzáles attended up to eighth grade. They were all middle children in large families of five or more children. In response to the question, "Did you receive much help on homework in the home?" Three subjects said they received little or no help. Sra. Gonzáles said she went to her teachers, friends or siblings for help with schoolwork.

The field notes indicated that signs of literature such as magazines, newspapers, or books, were not evident in the parts of the homes where the interviews were conducted for any of the subjects. In every case, the children were present in the home and were watching TV in other rooms during the interviews. At the Ramirez and Duran homes, extended family members came through the homes during the interview. The mothers were cooperative in answering the questions.

Three of the mothers were raising their children alone. Sra. Gonzáles lived with her husband and daughter. Two of the families had children the school identified as needing extra interventions. One of the special academic characteristics of the Gonzáles family was that the daughter had a learning disability and qualified for Special Education as having a learning disability. In the

case of the Duran family, the school suggested retention for the younger son earlier in the year but at a later meeting decided that he should be promoted. The Duran family lived outside of the attendance area, and the children would need to attend a different school the next year.

The following answers developed around the research question: What are the aspirations and expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers?

The mothers had some common agreement in the areas of language acquisition and level of education desired for their children, the purpose of parent-teacher meetings, the personal interests of their older children, and the quality of the neighborhood.

However, there was contrast in the mothers' perceptions of the role that parents play in helping their children achieve towards achieving personal aspirations and advocacy for meeting expectations. The mothers had mixed perceptions of the quality of the schoolwork and two mothers were vocal about how they perceived retention of their children.

A common theme for all of the mothers was that they liked the level of communication at the school and the

access they had to the principal. All of the mothers expressed trust in most of the teachers with the exception of Sra. Gonzáles who had a bad experience with a specific teacher, but the negative experience did not transfer to the rest of the staff.

Also common among three mothers was the perception that lack of English was a barrier to success. Sra. Miranda, however, emphasized the potential to be successful speaking both languages. For Sra. Duran and Sra. Gonzáles lack of money was a barrier to success, but all of the mothers expected their children to go as far as they could academically, the main reason being to get better work.

In terms of who was responsible for moving children along academically, there were three different answers. Ms. Duarte wished the school would take a bigger role in helping her sons achieve and be successful by providing more opportunities to visit the university and advice on where to go to help her oldest son learn more about his interest in astronomy. Sra. Gonzáles was most proud of her own ability to advocate for her daughter using the power of parental influence.

Sra. Miranda wanted her children to ask questions and learn "right and wrong" on their own through self-advocacy.

Conferences with teachers for all the mothers were held to discuss student progress. When asked about how they promote their children's interest, there was inconsistency in the answers. As mentioned before, Sra. Duran thought the school should help children further their interests, such as her son's interest in astronomy. Sra. González wanted the school to be more academic with fewer opportunities for her daughter to draw. She acknowledged her daughter's talent but wanted her to practice art at home. Sra. Miranda said she supported her children's interests through encouragement and praise and by learning along side them.

Sra. González and Sra. Duran both had experiences with retention. In Sra. González's situation, she blamed the teacher for the retention. Although Sra. Duran's son was not retained, there was discussion and she said she would pull her son from school rather than have him retained. On the topic of bilingual education, only Sra. González had any opinion. She had come to distrust bilingual education. She also favored education in Mexico. She felt that U.S. schools were not tough enough and that teachers did not have enough power to control children, as they did in Mexico. All of the mothers worried about safety in the neighborhood, either the traffic or the neighbors.

### Descriptions of the Interviews with Staff

#### *Mrs. Espinoza*

The first teacher interviewed was Mrs. Espinoza. The interview took place in a classroom where she was teaching summer school. The interview was the longest of all the subjects lasting 55 minutes. Mrs. Espinoza had been a teacher at Rockford for 22 years and spoke Spanish. She began her teaching career at the school as a first grade teacher and then worked as a special education teacher in a self-contained class for 10 years before becoming a resource teacher.

Mrs. Espinoza felt that the most important aspect of her role at the school was building and maintaining communication and "ties" with the families. Although she had been at the school for many years, she did not feel as though she was completely an insider in the community. She knew many people in the community but did not see herself as relating to the serious problems facing the families in the community. She had hesitated to become too involved.

However, many of her former students had come back with their children to visit and tell her what they were doing. She saw home support as the primary factor in

helping students achieve, beginning with getting children to school. Her experience with the children of Mexican-immigrants had shown her that the students who received some schooling in Mexico arrived with skills and their parents respected education and teachers more than U.S.-born parents and wanted their children to learn the basics of reading, writing, and math from school.

Mrs. Espinoza thought parents could participate in their children's schooling even if they did not speak English, believing their presence inspired children to do better. She said parents should hear good things about their children and be reassured that college was an option when they left high school. However, like her fellow staff, her concern was that students did not have positive experiences in middle school and "got lost." She also saw the cost of education as limiting levels of achievement.

Most of Mrs. Espinoza's meetings with parents had been informal, occurring in hallways or elsewhere in the school. She also called parents to invite them to Individual Educational Planning (IEP) meetings. She saw meetings as opportunities to praise students and emphasize their potential to succeed.

As a bilingual teacher, Mrs. Espinoza saw the benefit of teaching children in both languages. She taught students who were bilingual in Spanish and English and thought the "English Only" movement was a step backwards. Two former students had gone to Spain, received master's degrees and were Spanish teachers. After the passage of Proposition 203 (2000), she worried that children would be negatively influenced by the lack of Spanish instruction in the classroom. She described a girl who started out crying every day because she did not understand.

*Ms. Escarcega*

The second teacher was Ms. Escarcega, who was interviewed at her home. We sat at her kitchen table. She showed me her garden and explained to me some of the difficulties she was having with the heat and her tomatoes. She had been a teacher at the school for 16 years and taught second grade. She was born in Mexico, spoke Spanish, and went back to school late in life when her son was old enough to be in school.

Ms. Escarcega thought the most important aspect of her role as a teacher at the school was connecting with the children. She thought that before learning happens, a

connection must be established with the child. She recounted an anecdote involving a girl from Mexico. The girl did not speak in the first grade after arriving from Mexico. Ms. Escarcega decided that she had to connect with the girl immediately and looked for ways to make the connection. She felt the previous teacher did not treat the girl with respect. She was "yelled at" and completely closed down.

Ms. Escarcega's belief was that some Mexican-immigrant children have had negative experiences because teachers did not know how to connect with them, and without the right skills, would give up before they graduated from high school. However, she believed that with the right financial support and guidance many students were capable of going to college if they got through high school. Ms. Escarcega did not access counseling resources at the school because she had background in counseling. When asked if she visited homes to make connections, she said she used to but had a negative experience that involved drinking, so now she meets with parents at the school and makes frequent phone calls.

Her late-life experience in higher education was negative and required that she learn self-advocacy. She

felt that the younger students who were not burdened with children and other responsibilities had a real advantage. Ms. Escarcega had to find her own way through the university and thought Mexican-immigrant students needed guidance and counseling in high school as well as at the university, to gain study skills and maintain high self-esteem in the face of difficult teachers.

She wanted students who had problems with professors to complain to the administration. She also explained that financial support, through scholarships, was important for keeping students in school. Her concern was that parents did not have the educational background to seek out support, and they relied too heavily on teachers to help their children. Home environment was a factor that she saw as a barrier to student success, along with the challenges of middle school and lack of English proficiency. Her perception of post-Proposition 203 (2000) education was that being able to teach the children and deal with them in Spanish was much easier and less stressful on everyone. Nevertheless, she understood that she must only teach in English.

Ms. Escarcega believed that supporting children began in early childhood when parents must connect to their

children. She blamed many problems on the decision of young parents to put their babies in childcare at an early age. Although she said she treated all children equally, she also viewed Mexican-immigrants as culturally different from Mexican American Hispanics.

Primarily, she saw a big difference in the communication among Mexican-immigrants from communication among non-Mexicans. Ms. Escarcega, referring to Mexican children in the first person, said, "We yell at each other but we let it out." She supported giving children an opportunity to be angry and yell at one another. She viewed American children as "letting things build up" and not letting things out. She said, "We are more expressive than Americans" and talk to one another more. She believed that students needed to have a positive self-concept by fifth grade in order to succeed in middle school and acknowledged the need for reading skills, which gave children self-confidence.

*Ms. Duarte*

The third teacher interviewed was Ms. Duarte who had just finished her first year as a third-grade teacher. She was at another school working as a summer school teacher.

She was Hispanic and grew up in an adjoining neighborhood to Rockford. She did not speak Spanish but her parents did.

She had limited experience with Mexican-immigrant students but recalled a situation from her first year involving a girl who recently moved to the U.S. She felt the most important aspect of her position was one of "broadening the minds of the kids." She attributed her personal success in completing school to the efforts of her family and parents to emphasize the benefit of college and pushing her onward toward graduation.

As a first year teacher, Ms. Duarte said her experience with Mexican-immigrant families was limited to a single girl. However, she may have understood the question because later in the interview, she acknowledged that some of her students' parents spoke only Spanish. The girl's parents wanted her to get an education in the U.S. The girl spoke no English but was very bright and had attended school in Mexico.

Ms. Duarte formed a positive bond with the girl that involved the teacher and student practicing a second language. She met the father once when he came to visit and felt he was hard working, supportive and wanted the best for his daughter. Her impression, based on this experience,

was that the girl had learned good skills in Mexico and was ready to learn with support from the home.

Aside from the regular school conferences in the fall and spring, Ms. Duarte usually relied on parents to come to her about problems because they had the same concerns she had seen in the classroom. She made phone calls as needed. When asked how Mexican-immigrant students could be successful, she said family support, more instruction in English as a second language (ESL) and opportunities to practice and learn English one on one were most important, along with hope.

She said she had used school resources like Child Study and interpretation. She brought two students to Child Study as a way of implementing plans for intervention and initiating testing for disabilities (neither student fit the criterion of having Mexican-immigrant parents), and neither qualified for special education services.

For interpretation in conferences with Spanish speaking parents, Ms. Duarte used the services of the curriculum specialist. In one case, she expressed how parents can be over protective when they spend too much time involved in their children's education. In a specific

situation, she said parents spoiled a child and needed to let the child move on.

After one year as a teacher at the school, Ms. Duarte felt like a visitor even though she grew up in an adjoining neighborhood. She did not know many families, except by reputation, which was mostly negative. She believed that the reputation of specific families corresponded to expectations held by Rockford staff. She did not look at behavior records in a student's file because she did not want her expectation of the child to be tainted by his/her past. Becoming an insider, she said, "requires time."

*Mrs. Huerta*

Mrs. Huerta was the Curriculum Specialist at the school, where she had worked for a total of 13 years. She was Hispanic and spoke Spanish. She began in education as a teacher assistant. She worked at Rockford as a first-grade for eight years and returned five years later as a curriculum specialist. She had experience with most of the Mexican-immigrant families at the school. She took clothes to families and considered herself an insider based on the gifts of food and other artifacts that she received from

the families. Mrs. Huerta saw her most important role as providing education and making children proficient.

She said the most important part of her experience with Mexican-immigrant families was to educate the children, help them learn English and educate the parents. She made home visits to deliver things to families and believed that that students benefited from parent involvement. Some of the workshops she had organized were on understanding state standards and communication at parent/teacher conferences.

She said it was important to address parents on their level, meaning she provided information differently to parents than she did to teachers. In the workshop on state standards, parents learned what standards were and what the standards meant to schools. The workshops on communication helped parents build communication skills by teaching what questions to ask as well as "buzz words" that could come up in conferences.

Mrs. Huerta also held open-ended meetings with parents for questions and answers. The ultimate goal was to make a connection with the parent that showed the school was there to help. That help included follow-up meetings with parents to see if they were able to use what they learned in the

workshops. She said it was important to treat parents with respect regardless of the diversity of their background, either economic or linguistic. Language was just another factor to consider.

She said at first that there was no general difference among Mexican-immigrants and other families but then acknowledged that a monolingual Spanish-speaking parent might have a different perception of learning than a monolingual English-speaking parent.

With respect to the teachers in the community, Mrs. Huerta wanted teachers to understand that they were at Rockford to serve the community and to accept the norms because teachers chose to come to the community, and must adapt to the community. She specifically gave the example of a teacher who was worried about mothers from the neighborhood selling tortillas around the school without a license. Mrs. Huerta explained that selling food was a normal part of business at the school and should be accepted by visitors. She believed in being 100% dedicated to the community.

When asked what Mexican-immigrant students needed to be successful after they left school her first answer was an ability to transition to English and that it was the

school's responsibility to ensure that students learned English regardless of whether their first language was Spanish or Chinese. Besides English skills, she believed that students must find a way to get through middle school with knowledge of academic English because of the absence of bilingual support. She said there were eight families who had chosen to send their children from Mexico to live with a relative in the U.S. in order to get an education.

She defended the use of the system by Mexican-immigrants against accusations of abuse by some teachers. She believed that learning English and getting through middle school would help 90% of Mexican-immigrant students attend high school and college. For Ms. Huerta, teaching parents to be advocates was a big part of building success, as it was for the principal.

*Mr. Robles*

The principal was Mr. Robles. He was Hispanic and spoke some Spanish, but not fluently. He was interviewed in his office, which felt open and uncluttered with documents organized in binders on shelves. He grew up in a nearby neighborhood. He had been the principal for eight years and said the most important aspect of his role as principal was

the care, safety, and education of the students. He considered himself an insider in the community because he knew all the students by name and most of the parents. He had an "open-door policy" that allowed parents to come and speak to him without making an appointment.

He used a specific example of how a parent was caught in a situation with Child Protective Services (CPS) and cried out for his help. The school nurse had called CPS over a bruise, and when the police arrived, the first person the father looked to for help was Mr. Robles. He saw communication as being important for Hispanic families and thought the fact that he was male gave him influence. He visited the homes around the outside of the school to ask the residents to look out for the school. He also made many phone calls to parents and families. Most of his meetings with parents were in the form of Open Houses, curriculum nights, and through a site council.

Mr. Robles usually met with Mexican-immigrant parents when trying to get their children enrolled in after-school, Saturday school, and summer programs for English Language Learners (ELLs). When asked how to best serve Mexican-immigrant families, he said that it was most important to

identify them and get to know them so that the children could be matched to programs for support.

He did not distinguish the needs of Mexican-immigrants from those of other immigrants. The staff was trained to identify immigrant students early. Mr. Robles understood that children arrived with a range of skills depending on the amount of schooling they had at other schools. Rockford gave students reading assessments in Spanish so they would have information on the potential of the student. The information was also used to show teachers who wanted to believe a student was not capable due to lack of second language ability that the student indeed had skills.

He wanted parents to become advocates for their children and to support English; however, after Proposition 203 (2000), he understood that bilingual education provided students with opportunities to be successful in their first language. He said that the problem with bilingual education was the inconsistency in the programs and used the example of a girl who spent five years at the school before learning English.

He connected the success of Mexican-immigrant students to advocating by the parents and educators and English

skills. He feared for students who immigrated to the U.S. too late in life and did not have sufficient English to be successful in high school. Like other staff who were interviewed, he worried about students once they get to middle school. Mr. Robles used the example of a Mexican-immigrant mother who was very active in her children's education.

She had begun to work with her children's teachers when they were in pre-school and then got her son admitted to a magnet/non neighborhood middle school. Mr. Robles was convinced that the children would do well. He attributed much of the mother's activism to the work of mentors at the school. His feeling was that students who spent six or seven years at Rockford, beginning in preschool or kindergarten, had the best chance of being successful academically, e.g., graduating from high school. He said it was important to make "connections" with the families by providing opportunities for parents to meet with counselors and teachers to discuss the options available.

He saw middle school and AIMS testing as barriers to student success. He said a four-year college was a viable option if parents were educated that college was not such a

scary place. Mr. Robles described recent research (but he could not recall the author) that advocated talking to kindergarten students about "when you graduate from college." He supported exposing students to the university so they could be exposed to the environment but acknowledged that many parents grew up in a different time and decided they could make a good living without higher education.

#### Staff Histories and Perceptions

The histories and perceptions across the staff had some common characteristics and themes. The only common historical characteristic for all the staff members was their ethnicity. Four staff members were born in the U.S., and one was born in Mexico. The teaching experience at Rockford varied widely from 22 years to one year.

Transcriptions were analyzed to identify responses to the following research question: What are aspirations and expectations held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students?

All the teachers said that Mexican-immigrant students could go to college. Moreover, all the staff said that success required a combination of both home and school

support. There was also commentary by all the staff regarding the importance of getting students through middle school as the most important hurdle along with learning English.

The most salient theme in the staff matrix was the importance of communication and making "connections." All the staff members who described the importance of communication used the word *connection* or *connecting* except the first year teacher.

Culturally, the staff split on the difference between Mexican-immigrant and U.S.-born students. The three teachers used terms like *hard working*, *respectful*, and *problem solvers* and *bright*. Mr. Robles and Ms. Escarcega both commented on the role that communication played in Mexican-immigrant families. Mrs. Espinoza, Ms. Duarte, and Mr. Robles all referred to the skills that students bring from outside the school.

All staff expressed concern about how students would do in middle school and high school. Mr. Robles, Ms. Huerta, Ms. Escarcega, and Ms. Espinoza specifically mentioned middle school as a barrier to success. Ms.

Escarcega said that she saw students began to lose interest in fifth and sixth grade.

#### Summary

The purpose of the interviews and the organization of data were designed to provide a rich set of themes and features within the school community for interpretation using the frameworks and theories described in Chapter 2. The matrices provided a visual tool for arranging the data from the transcripts, which was analyzed for commonalities and disparities.

Testing was a theme that was completely absent from the mother's answers and was only lightly mentioned among the staff. The more salient themes were the importance of communication and the potential for advocacy from parents, staff, and children. Chapter 5 interprets the data by using specific responses by subjects, a framework of theories, and research from the Review of Literature.

## CHAPTER 5

## INTERPRETATION OF THE DATA

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to use the guiding research questions to interpret the analysis made in Chapter 4 by identifying and clarifying central themes and differences present in the interview data. The chapter interprets the first following research questions by addressing the responses of the mothers and then the Rockford staff.

1. What are the aspirations and expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children?
2. What are aspirations and expectations held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students?
3. How do the aspirations and expectations of Mexican-immigrant mothers held for their children compare and contrast with the expectations held for children by school staff?

The first section identifies expectations and aspirations found in the study at Rockford as they related to characteristics of leadership; organizational culture;

and the roles of teachers, parents, and the administrator. Specifically, the section describes incongruence among the mothers' feelings about their children's potential to succeed within the educational system and the feelings of the Rockford staff that children may not survive middle and high school. The chapter then addresses salient themes that went beyond the focus on aspirations and expectations but were noteworthy as future research topics. The final section summarizes the implications for school leaders working in schools with similar demographic features and with Mexican-immigrant families.

The data gathered through interviews and the performance of the school must be considered in a wider perspective with an infinite combination of factors contributing to the relative level of academic success of students.

#### Aspirations and Expectations

In this section, I revisit the theoretical perspectives and the first two research questions of this dissertation for comparison with the themes identified in interviews with school staff and Mexican-immigrant mothers. The salient theme to emerge from the analysis of data was

the importance of communication for all of the subjects, both teachers and mothers. Communication was a consistent theme that aligned with the findings of Valdés (1996) and Delgado-Gaitan (1992). Mothers' had high expectations for academic achievement of their children and affirmed Ogbu's (1986; 1991) theory of immigrant caste motivation. The mothers demonstrated confidence that the educational system would allow their children to achieve their aspirations. Although Rockford's staff expressed an expectation that students could succeed academically in the educational system, they questioned the potential of students to be successful after leaving Rockford.

#### Mothers' Aspirations and Expectations

The first guiding research question was:

What are the aspirations and expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers for their children?

Question 22 (see Appendix A) of the interview specifically asked mothers what level of educational attainment they wanted for their children.

¿Que nivel de escuela quiere que su(s) hijo(s) logre?

[How far do you want your child(ren) to progress in school?]

*Limitless Expectation*

Overall, mothers said their children would be successful academically in the future. The answer by all three was that they wanted their children to go as far as they could in school.

Sra. Duran: Pues yo les digo que ellos tienen que terminar la escuela, hasta donde se pueda para que por que si... les digo a mis hijos que sin la escuela ustedes no van a poder tener un buen trabajo, que para obtener un buen trabajo y tener lo que ustedes quieren pues tienen que tener escuela.

[Sra. Duran: Well I'll tell you that they have to finish school as far as they can just in case... I tell my sons that without school, you will not be able to have good jobs, that to get a good job and have what you want, you have to have schooling.]

Sra. Duran valued education for its potential to provide better jobs for her children. All three of the mothers expressed the same feeling about the benefit of doing well

in school. Doing well in school was seen as a way of getting better jobs.

Sra. Miranda's answer was very similar to that of Sra. Duran. She included the importance of being bilingual in the work place.

Sra. Miranda: Yo les digo mucho a los niños al más chiquito que tiene que estudiar porque no les queda de otra si no estudias este. Vas a trabajar en casas. No vas a tener ninguna oportunidad. Tienes que aprender muy bien el inglés y que no se te olvide el español. Porque los dos idiomas son muy, muy, muy importantes en la vida este en cualquier parte entre más estudios tiene más bien... mas en donde quieras vas a encontrar.

[Sra. Miranda: I tell the children a lot, and to the littlest one, that he has to study because there is nothing for them if they don't study. You are going to work houses and not have any opportunity. You have to learn English very well and not forget your Spanish. Because both languages are very, very, very important in life and wherever you are. The more school you have, the better you are wherever you end up.]

Sra. Gonzáles, whose brothers and sisters were the most educated of the siblings of the mothers interviewed,

expressed that education was not only a way of getting better work but something that provided personal satisfaction for her daughter. Schooling represented something people did for themselves and no one else.

Sra. Gonzáles: Hasta donde ella pueda... porque yo le digo mira, yo no quise estudiar y estoy batallando para el trabajo. Tengo que hacer mucho trabajo porque no me pague, o sea, yo le explico por qué debe de estudiar... de que es algo bueno que es para ella no para mí. Yo le exijo porque es mi hija y es algo que es para ella. No es para mí, yo siempre se lo recalco que es algo para ella, es para el futuro de ella depende para el rumbo de ella.

[Sra. Gonzáles: As far as she can ... because I tell her, look, I didn't want to study and now I'm struggling to work. I have to work a lot because they do not pay me. That is, explain to her why she has to study, that it is something good for her not for me. I push her because she is my daughter and it is something for her. It is not for me. I always say it is for her and her future depends on the course she takes.]

### *Strengths and aspirations*

The mothers were also asked about their children's strengths and aspirations and what would help them achieve

their aspirations. Mothers knew their children's strength and what their older children aspired to be when they grew up. Sra. Ramirez's and Sra. Duran's sons both wanted to be astronauts and Sra. Miranda's daughter was interested in being a dentist.

Sra. Gonzáles and Sra. Duran recognized their children's talent as artists. Sra. Miranda said her son was most interested in the concept of money and explained how he was already planning on making lots of money to buy her a house. We joked about how he was spending the money before he had even earned it.

Question 24 (see Appendix A) asked mothers how they could help their children be successful.

¿Que puede usted hacer para ayudar a sus hijos a lograr ese éxito?

[How will you help your children become successful?]

Although they were confident in their children's ability to succeed academically, the mothers had very different perspectives on what would help their children achieve.

The variance among the mothers' answers regarding support from the school can most accurately be described as

a range of support on the part of the school. The three mothers each looked to the school to have a lesser or greater role in helping children meet their expectations and aspirations.

*Rockford's Support of Children's Strengths*

For Sra. Duran the school needed to do more to help her children achieve aspirations. She wanted the school to take the lead by introducing her son to programs at the university, including the financial, logistical, and technical aspects of making the connection. Her son wanted to be an astronaut, but she felt helpless to register him in summer science programs and lacked the money. She also was without transportation to take him to the programs.

Sra. Duran: Debería de haber digo yo becas para los niños así que... Que por ejemplo los maestros si saben que un niño le gusta mucho dibujar, ellos mismos. El dinero es algo que también pues son las ventajas que uno tiene allá en la escuela saber de las oportunidades de estudiar, conseguir becas. Si por que mi niño el año pasado y el año antepasado tuvo la misma maestra, dos años consecutivos. Y dice la maestra, llévelo me. Dice, llévelo vaya y inscribirlo por que él, dice, es muy inteligente dice él dibuja muy bonito.

A él le gusta mucho el espacio y todo eso.. y comentaba con la maestra. No me dice llévelo, llévelo. Por ejemplo, si los maestros saben que a un niño le gusta mucho eso deberían de tener becas o algo así para que en el verano los niños, gratis para que los niños fueran y aprendieran. Entonces el maestro te ha dicho que es mejor llevarlo pero como en esos años teníamos un carro no más.

[Sra. Duran: I say there should be scholarships for the kids, for example, the teachers, if they know that a child really likes to draw then, the teachers should ask (for support). Money is another of the advantages that someone has at the school, knowing what opportunities there are to study, finding scholarships. Because last year and the year before my son had the same teacher, two years in a row. And she said, take him. She said take him and register him because he is very smart and draws very well.

The other son likes space and all that so I told the teacher. She (the teacher) didn't tell me take him, take him. For example, if teachers know that a child likes that a lot there should be scholarships or something like that for the kids in the summer, free for kids to go and learn. Then he teacher that it is better to take him [to space camp], but in those years we had only one car.]

Sra. Duran lived in the United States longer than the other two mothers, having been here continuously for 13 years. She expressed dissatisfaction with the school's attempts to improve her son's opportunities. The other two mothers placed less responsibility on the schools to help their children be successful and more responsibility on their own actions to support children.

#### *Parent Advocacy*

In the case of Sra. González, who lived the least amount of time in the United States, she took some of the decision making into her own hands because she trusted herself to decide what her daughter should learn. Bandura (1986) described such intrinsic motivation in his social cognitive theory. Sra. González said her daughter lost two years with a bad teacher and she was determined to not allow it to happen again. She clearly identified the shortcomings of U.S. schools by comparing them to Mexican schools.

Sra. González: Lo que pasa es que en México es diferente tipo de enseñanza, que para mí personalmente se me hace mejor y en el sentido de que casi siempre, digamos, ellos tienen algo como una meta de que el niño de primer año tiene que saber . . . tal cosa,

determinadas cosas, el niño de segundo año tiene que saber.

[Sra. González: What happens is that in Mexico there's a different way of teaching. For me, personally, it seems better in the sense that almost always . . . shall we say . . . they (Mexican schools) have something like a goal that the child in first grade has to know . . . certain specific things, the child in second grade has to know.]

She recognized that her daughter had a special artistic talent, yet Sra. González did not want the teacher to avoid academic preparation by overly focusing on strengths. She advocated directly to the teacher to avoid allowing her daughter to spend so much time drawing. Instead, she wanted her daughter learning academic skills. She visited the teacher and said,

Sra. González: Sabe qué maestra no quiero que la deje hacer dibujos por que me gustaría que la ponga a leer a escribir a hacer matemáticas, no quiero que haga tantos dibujos.

[Sra. González: You know what teacher, I don't want you to let her draw because I want you to have her read, write, and do math. I don't want her drawing as much.]

Moreover, Sra. Gonzáles advocated having a teacher who she felt was inappropriate for children removed from the classroom. She went to the principal to ask that the teacher be removed, and though she was unsuccessful, she attributed the lack of success to the larger school system instead of the principal. The parent advocacy demonstrated by Sra. Gonzáles defied the immigrant image proposed by Ogbu (1986, 1991) because it exemplified an immigrant who rather than passively buying into the system attempted to exert control over the system. The question that this situation raises was

How did Sra. Gonzáles's level of advocacy evolve?

In the interview, Sra. Gonzáles described how she evolved into an advocate. The process began when she first arrived in the U.S. and was asked if she wanted her daughter taught in Spanish.

Sra. Gonzáles: Cuando yo llegué aquí eso no sabia, o sea yo he aprendido mucho ahora que estoy en los EEUU. He aprendido a hacer mejor el café,

R: jajaja

Sra. Gonzáles: Entonces cuando me preguntaron en qué idioma quiere que se le enseñe en su hija...en

español, fue lo primero que sé, porque ella habla el español, o sea de repente yo no pensé en el inglés.

[Sra. González: When I arrived here I didn't know; I mean I learned a lot now that I am in the U.S. I learned how to make coffee better.

R: Ha Ha Ha

Sra. González: Then, when they asked me in what language I wanted my daughter taught . . . in Spanish. Because she speaks Spanish. I mean suddenly I never thought about English.]

Over time she changed her mind about bilingual education and now supports Proposition 203 (2000).

Sra. González: Me gusta la ley. Lo que pasa es que me esta gustando ahora, por que ahora ya sé que para vivir en EEUU, el Ingles es algo necesario.

[Sra. González: I like the law. The thing is that I like it better now because now I realize that to live in the U.S., English is required.]

Her attitude of parent advocacy reflected the social cognitive theory described by Bandura (1986), in which individuals found motivation through intrinsic satisfaction and apart from any single sociocultural conditions that

would cause parents to follow the extrinsic pressures placed on them by the school.

*Schools as Experts*

More in line with the sociocultural perspective of Ogbu (1991) was the support described by Sra. Miranda. Sra. Miranda placed the school in a position of being the expert and expressed her role as being supportive of her children's aspirations by supporting the education system. Her experiences at school meetings were informational, such as attending neighborhood meetings about state labeling formulas and Title 1 programs. She sold tortillas at the school but stayed clear of any decision-making.

In response to the question:

¿Qué puede usted hacer para ayudar a sus hijos a lograr ese éxito?

[How will you try to help your children become successful?]

Sra. Miranda said the best way she could help her children was by providing encouragement and praise. She trusted the school to teach her children.

Sra. Miranda: Yo pienso motivándolos y diciéndoles, animarlos en su escuela en todo. Cuando el niño hace algo bien en la escuela me dice, "Mamá, hice esto y me saque una calificación buena y me dieron una estrella." Y ya le digo que bueno mijo. Tú eres muy bien, ¿no? Eres muy estudioso, este vas sacar muchas muy buenas calificaciones. Y este porque eres muy bueno, muy inteligente y así el niño se siente grande porque le da uno ánimo, pues hay que seguir animándolo para seguir aprendiendo porque eso es, aparte que yo estoy aprendiendo junto con ellos.

[Sra. Miranda: I think that motivating and supporting them at school about everything. When my son does something well at school he tells me, mom I did this, and I got a good grade, and they gave me a star, and I tell him good job my son. You are a good son and very studious. You are going to get good grades. You are good and smart. I make a big deal because he gets motivated. Well, you have to keep getting them excited so they keep learning. Besides I am learning along with them.]

Sra. Miranda fit what Ogbu (1986) described as the immigrant profile that supported the educational system and focused children on conforming to the demands of the system. Yet, on a social-cognitive level, Sra. Miranda

provided her children with the sort of support that also builds intrinsic incentives to perform well.

The mothers did not express any concern about whether their children would succeed in secondary or higher education and were open ended in their expectations for the children's academic success. With the exception of Ms. Ramirez, the mothers could articulate what actions would help their children reach their aspirations. In the next section, I describe how the mothers' lack of concern over the children's success in middle school and high school sharply contrasted with the concerns expressed by Rockford staff. Furthermore, none of the mothers said they worried about how their children performed on state and district tests.

#### Staff Aspirations and Expectations

The second guiding research question was:

What are aspirations and expectations held by school staff for Mexican-immigrant students?

All of the staff shared a preoccupation with the potential for Mexican-immigrant students to perform well in middle and high school. The Rockford staff expressed concern about what happened to students once they got to middle and high

school. Staff expectations focused mostly on communication and helping parents become strong advocates for their children. When asked if they thought Mexican-immigrant students would be successful after leaving elementary or secondary school, the staff worried about the support students would get at the secondary and post-secondary level.

The staff was asked the following question:

How do you feel Mexican-immigrant students will be most successful after leaving school, this school or high school?

Answers ranged from building skills, to finding happiness, to enthusiasm. Yet, the most common fear centered on getting students through secondary school.

### *Building Skills*

The second grade teacher, Ms. Escarcega, wanted students to leave Rockford with strong academic skills as well as the emotional confidence to get them through secondary school.

Ms. Escarcega: [It is important] to make sure they don't leave this school without knowing how to

read. If they don't learn how to read in primary most likely they'll not succeed. I mean what kind of tools are they going take to high school. They are just going to drop out and they're afraid. By the time they are at high school it is too late, because they are embarrassed. They are so embarrassed that they just drop out without telling anything to anybody.

I think not only reading but give them a sense of self-confidence that they're someone that has worth, someone who can do it. In other words help them with their self-concept.

Ms. Escarcega believed that students began to turn away from academics as early as fifth or sixth grade.

The curriculum specialist, Mrs. Huerta, focused on the importance of learning English as did the novice teacher, Ms. Duarte.

Mrs. Huerta: Number one is being able to make that transition into English. I don't perceive them as failing because they don't have the language because it is our responsibility to make sure that they get their academic education aside from what language they speak. But I know that once children have made the transition to English I don't know if it's Chinese or Spanish but once they have made that transition to English I think middle school is going to be a lot easier for them.

Ms. Duarte, like Mrs. Huerta, wanted students to get more English instruction in pullout situations, individually or in small groups. She considered her single Mexican-immigrant student when she described the benefits of English instruction.

Ms. Duarte: They [students] had her in the mornings every day reading simple English. They had her doing, you know, games that required her to use a lot of English vocabulary. What would have been nice is if maybe that half an hour could have been extended a little more because she was doing so well with that I could only imagine how much more progress could have been seen if she had been there for longer.

#### *Concerns about Secondary School*

Nonetheless, all of the staff said they worried about students' success in secondary school. Mrs. Espinoza described the high school system as an institution that fails students.

Mrs. Espinoza: I mean middle school; it's almost set for failure because the drastic change from elementary school. There's not much support and so many kids. They're all switching classes, and the peer pressure is there. In addition, I think the teachers are frustrated, and they are trying their best, but we do need to change something there. I mean I feel bad

for the middle school teachers and the middle school kids because it seems to be such a hard place.

Other staff had similar feelings. Mr. Robles blamed the problems in secondary school on the lack of attention given students and families. He said that students who spent their entire elementary school years at Rockford stood a better chance of succeeding.

Mr. Robles: At the elementary level we give it a personal touch, and I think that if they are not comfortable as a family, they're uncomfortable with the school and the setting and there aren't people out there looking out for their welfare, [so] they're going to have a difficult time.

Teachers suggested specific ways that secondary could provide support through help with homework and provide mentors for students someone to talk to when they were struggling with the work.

### *Financial Concerns*

Teachers also described the financial strain of attending college. Ms. Escarcega, who attended college later in life, described how going to school was a

financial strain because of the restrictions placed on students who relied on scholarships.

Mrs. Escarcega: In my case, it was a lot of pressure I was on scholarship, and I could not get a C.

She also felt that she had to compete with younger students for financial support, because "they didn't want to give me a scholarship because I was already an adult."

Mrs. Espinoza also mentioned the financial burden of going to college and focused heavily on the need for students to be self-sufficient in finding resources. She used recent, personal anecdotes from her own family to emphasize the financial costs of attending a university. Her concern led her to break from a focus on parent advocacy and stress the importance of student self-advocacy and the level of independent decision making involved if students were to continue in higher education.

Mrs. Espinoza: It's really hard to afford that big extra bill. Tuition. It is hard but people just need to know and accept it. I think a lot of 18 year olds need to know that from here on it's your decision. You can work really hard to put yourself in school and they [parents] can help you as much as they can. Therefore, I want to tell 18 year olds,

"Don't give up. You have to look around, look around and see how you can find some way to get through school, decide and don't blame anybody else, not your parents, not school."

Even with all the concern about students' ability to succeed in secondary school and pay for college Rockford staff said they believed the children of Mexican-immigrants could be successful academically in higher education.

A theme that emerged in a couple of the interviews was early emphasis on the importance of higher education. Mr. Robles recently read that children began contemplating higher education as early as "preschool." Mrs. Espinoza emphasized the importance of making parents aware of the college option so families could break the cycle of unskilled labor.

Mrs. Espinoza: All parents want their children to learn. And I think that we have to let them know that they can have high expectations for their children. They need to know they can go to college, that there are monies for them to go to college and that they can. Because sometimes they just want them to read and write. They think that's all they need and to work in hard labor. I think you can let them know that there are all these things that they can do.

Fear about students' success after they leave Rockford may be a reason the school focuses heavily on building student self-esteem and training families, specifically mothers, to advocate. I sensed from the interviews that the focus on communication was a part of the school mission because of the way it was expressed by all the staff.

Staff clearly stated that communication and making "connections" were their primary expectations for dealing with parents. Making connections was a mantra held by all individuals at Rockford. Hence, the question arises: How does such a mission become so prevalent in a school culture? Does the environment expand the concept of communication and connections to its families? Does the environment attract teachers of a like mind? In addition, how does a focus on improving communication translate to student success?

Comparing Aspirations Expectations in a  
School Culture

I have addressed the expectations of the two sub groups, mothers and school staff. In this section, I discuss the third guiding research question:

How do the aspirations and expectations of Mexican-immigrant mothers held for their children compare and contrast with the expectations held for children by school staff?

I compared the expectations held by staff with the expectations held by Mexican-immigrant mothers. In the following sections, I will describe the Rockford community and identify aspects of the relationship that influence the building of a learning community (Faris, 2003; Schussler, 2003).

*Communication*

The Rockford community was focused on lines of communication at all levels. Teachers communicated with each other, administrators communicated with staff and parents, and teachers and parents communicate formally and informally. Mothers believed that communication at Rockford

was positive and one of the best qualities of staff and the principal. Staff members said that communication was one of the most important aspects of their positions. The school provided opportunities to strengthen lines of communication through parent workshops and conferences.

Mr. Robles strengthened connections when he made home visits and addressed parents and children by name. Teachers built connections and grew as insiders in the community when mothers were made to feel welcome at the school. Strong communication allowed the community to grow because it opened paths for conflict to be resolved. Mrs. González recognized Mr. Robles as a leader and utilized his open-door policy to advocate for changes. Even if all of their recommendations were not honored, members felt as if they were heard. Nonetheless, a focus on communication at Rockford did not eliminate conflicts due to differing expectations.

Interestingly, two apparently obvious district and state expectations, increased attendance and increased test performance, were absent from mothers' and staff's comments. Considering the amount of pressure the state placed on public schools to raise test scores and

attendance rates, the teachers' and mothers' expectations were not focused on raising test scores or attendance.

Rockford continued to make steady progress on standardized testing, yet mothers and staff did not mention testing, either positively or negatively. The low emphasis on standardized testing indicated that the technical and educational characteristics of leadership (Sergiovanni, 1995) at the school were not a part of the public face of the school. Efforts by Mr. Robles and Mrs. Huerta to guide Rockford toward meeting attendance and testing goals were not a primary consideration when they were asked about expectations for Mexican-immigrant students. In the homes, as well, there was little mention of curriculum and standardized tests. Instead, learning English was the single most important curriculum issue for parents and some of the staff.

Sra. Gonzáles emphasized the importance of learning academic skills in school the way she experienced it in Mexico. She described education in Mexico as better because it had clearly defined academic goals at each grade level.

*Expectations*

Hence, a conflict among the classroom teacher's expectations and Sra. Gonzales's expectations developed and was resolved for the mother when she told the teacher to challenge her daughter academically. Sra. Gonzáles thought her daughter was spending too much time drawing instead of practicing academic skills, writing, reading, and math. She was very direct in expressing her expectation that the school should teach academic skills, yet no mention was made regarding her daughter's AIMS testing. As for her daughter's aspiration to be an artist the mother wanted her talent promoted in the home.

Sra. Gonzáles's expectations for schooling formed around her experiences in Mexican schools. She was willing to follow the school's lead after first arriving in the community, but she came to realize that she could advocate for her daughter and did not have to accept every recommendation made by school staff. By using her background knowledge of schools in Mexico, Sra. Gonzáles contributed to growth at the school because she introduced an unexpected perspective on expectations, one that emphasized specific skills and standards.

Sra. Duran wanted the school to be more helpful. She expected the school to be a stronger resource for helping her son connect with the university and other opportunities. She expected Rockford to support her son's strengths by doing whatever possible financially and logistically to connect him with programs at the university. From Sra. Duran's point of view, the school did not meet her expectation. Yet Mr. Robles stated that promoting higher education at an early age was important at the school.

Mr. Robles: Those special people and teachers that take their kids to visit universities, go on campus for animal science, horticulture. At the UA you expose them right away, and the chances rise that kids will attend, then talking to their parents about the opportunities that we are promoting.

The principal and the mother agreed on a specific need, but from Sra. Duran's perspective, the school was still not doing enough to help foment her sons' interests.

The school, for its part, promoted parent advocacy for children by inviting parents into the school and training them on ways to seek and utilize resources, as well as giving them opportunities to participate. In Sra. Miranda's

case she sold food at the school and had opportunities to communicate with teachers and staff. Sra. Duran participated in meetings to decide on the retention of her son. Mrs. Espinoza had daily contact with parents, and Mrs. Huerta, with the counselor and the community representative, took food and clothing to people's homes.

The situations that involved Sra. Duran and Sra. Gonzáles and the staff were not so misaligned that the problems could not be resolved or turn the mothers against the school. However, the misalignment indicated that despite all the communication a school promotes, there would continue to be gaps among the expectations of the home and the school. The key to a strong learning community was providing the means for families to voice their expectations. Another misalignment existed among aspirations and expectations held by teachers and by parents as they related to the potential for academic success.

Parents all expected their children to continue in school for as long as they wished, without consideration of any instructional or guidance barriers at middle and high school. The barriers mentioned by mothers were first money and second English skills. Mothers did not express any

worry about their children's ability to succeed in middle or high school.

On the other hand, all of the teachers believed that middle and high school experience would be significant struggle for Mexican-immigrant students. Teachers worried about the amount of counseling and academic support, as well as whether students would have sufficient reading and math skills to avoid becoming frustrated. The negative feelings on the part of the teachers were prevalent, in contrast to the positive expectations of the parents, and I wondered why mothers did not share the same concerns. Either the low expectations were not communicated to the families, or families did not have equally pessimistic expectations for their children.

From the social cognitive perspective described by Bandura (1986), motivation evolves from perceived consequences and internal forces that contribute to self-esteem. It was possible that mothers were told by teachers that middle school and high school would be difficult for their children, but the mothers' drive to have their children succeed and earn more money superseded the negative expectations expressed at the school. The implication from the mismatch in positive and negative

expectations was that Mexican-immigrant mothers bring a level of self-confidence that negates any negative commentary.

### *Funds of Knowledge*

The connections that the school staff sought with the community and the appreciation on the part of the mothers for having such communication was a foundation for building "funds of knowledge" (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002). Teachers and leaders reached out to the community and welcomed the mothers into the school. The interesting aspect of these connections was the filter through which connections were developed.

The primary context for interactions with families was at the school rather than in the home, which meant interaction occurred with mothers in the role of guest at the school. The reverse of the school-centered interactions would involve more home visits, where the teachers and staff would be operating as guests in family's homes. The teacher, in such cases, would "assume the role of learner" (Moll, et al., p. 9).

Types of knowledge gained and used by the school staff were similar to those found by field researchers (Moll et

al. 1993). These types were "social, economic and productive activities" (p.160) The Rockford staff understood the life histories of the families and the relevant household operations. Veteran teachers accessed much knowledge from informal encounters in the hallways or outside the classrooms.

Mrs. Espinosa: Actually I must say I meet the parents every single day. I don't know if it's always by choice, but when they're coming to drop kids off or taking them home, they always stop to say, "Hello." Then I always take the opportunity or maybe I just talk too much. But we always end up in this conversation about something, and I'm OK with questions.

As the curriculum specialist Ms. Huerta gained information in formal meetings with families:

Ms. Huerta: I have a parent group that is open to children and adults so I deal with a wide diversity of parents. I mean I had a father come in here.

Within the school, the message to teachers and staff entering the community was that there were specific aspects of the school that, although running counter to mainstream culture were accepted, such as Mrs. Huerta's

expectation that teachers would conform to the norms of the school.

Mrs. Huerta reinforced the norms of the school by telling new teachers about the importance of honoring the neighborhood and accepting the specific moral conditions that existed. She told a new teacher who questioned the sale of non-licensed food by a mother,

Mrs. Huerta: You chose to come here. You picked this school this community. What you need to remember is this is who this community is and this is what the students look like. And you have the right to say, 'No Thank You.'

The connection among the staff and the families was most evident when I compared the sentiments of the veteran teachers with those of the first-year teacher. The experienced teachers had specific desires for the students and ideas about what would help them succeed in school. The messages that veteran teachers communicated were that students could succeed with the right level of support in school, i.e., guidance and mentoring. The first year teacher, however, was less specific about her expectations for students' educational success. She mostly relied on "hope" without knowing specific ways to

help except to teach more English. She wanted to "broaden their minds."

On the other hand, Ms. Espinoza thought that building "ties" with family was the most important, and Ms. Escarcega who wanted to make "connections" with the students.

Based on the knowledge they gained over time, establishing "strategic connections" (Sergiovanni, 1999) became the focus of the veteran staff at the school. Ms. Escarcega incorporated her knowledge of Mexican behavior into conflict resolution and problem solving among students. She responded very clearly to the question.

R: Do you see Mexican-immigrant students different in any way in their personality or the way they behave?

Ms. Escarcega: Yes. In their behavior yes they are different themselves. The way they deal with things, the way that they handle problems. They are different. Mexican students tend to talk; they try to say, "Well tell me what happened I mean what's going on." The American children tend to just shut down they don't express their feelings. But they (American children) don't try to deal with the problem. They don't try to solve the problem by talking. Sometimes they just explode.

Mexicans communicate more even though we yell at each other but we let it out. And American children don't let things out. They wait until it builds up and then they yell. And the Mexicans we yell for everything.

The description of the behavior she attributed to Mexican students was knowledge that she said was gained as a Mexican-immigrant and as a teacher of Mexican-immigrants.

A core belief that the school community held special knowledge was supported from the leadership. Mr. Robles believed that students arrived at the school from many places with strengths and skills learned elsewhere.

Mr. Robles: When we have those kids who are dominant in Spanish, we tell teacher to give them the DRA in Spanish. We tell them to do it so they [teachers] get it out of their head that just because children don't have the skills in English doesn't mean they are illiterate.

The importance of these core beliefs with respect to funds of knowledge was that families who came to the school were afforded a positive level of knowledge that the school could build on.

In contrast to the overall focus on family's strengths and ability to contribute positively, it must be noted that Ms. Duarte, the first-year teacher, described how perceptions of the families in the community were not entirely positive. When asked about being an insider, she said she did not know the community well enough to be an insider, but in her first year she had already been exposed to negative comments from the staff regarding specific families that were not of Mexican-immigrant parents, but the information gave some perspective to the school's focus on building community.

R: In what ways do you consider yourself an insider in the community? Or do you?

Ms. Duarte: I don't. As a first year, I'm just kind of like the visitor. Right now. You know. I don't know. I'm not really inside. I don't know most of the families. I know the major ones because people always talk about them. I know that family now. But it's always negative, never positive, always the negative ones [families].

The negative families with the negative kids. And they're like you know the ones that live down there. I don't. I'll take your word for it.

R: Do you think there is a lot of that built into the culture in terms of expectations with certain families or certain . . . members of the community?

Ms. Duarte: Oh. Yes. Once we know that this particular family is this certain way, it's like the minute their child gets there you can see the teachers are like, "Oh no." I have third graders coming up now that my kids warned me about.

The observation by the first-year teacher was important because it balanced the other staff members' descriptions of the community. Like all school communities Rockford was not without its real side. Members of the school and neighborhood had their own views on fellow members, be it students, parents, or other teachers. Nonetheless, there was evidence that connections were a major focus of the staff and appreciated by the mothers.

The characteristics that emerged from this research indicated that there was a strong sense of what Sergiovanni (1999) called a "moral community" (p. 99) guided by a "moral imperative" (p. 30) to drive leadership within the community through open communication of cultural norms. From the principal to the child there was an emphasis on building connections "that satisfy the needs for

coordination and commitment" (p. 99) which supported the community as it struggled to meet the external demands placed upon it by the district and the state. I believe Rockford wanted to be a moral community, yet to be a learning community, the leadership at the school needed to listen to the expectations of the families they served and bring them into the discussions on the importance of meeting the demands of rigorous testing.

An observation worth noting was not how expectations were communicated, but which expectations were not communicated to parents or possibly not heeded by the mothers. Most striking was the contrast in the expectations held by mothers for student academic success in secondary school and expectations held by school staff.

All of the staff expressed concern and reservation about student success in secondary school, but none of the mothers expressed the same reservations. All three of the mothers who answered questions about expectations had high expectations that their children would succeed academically and for as long as they were willing to continue in school. I could not qualify the incongruence among the school and the homes as being either positive or negative.

This observation supports further study in the area of communication of expectations within schools and neighborhoods and whether members of the community pay attention to positive and negative expectations on the part of the school. In the next section, I describe the way leaders in the school established and propagated the core belief that the school was a vehicle that served the community in a "moral" sense.

#### Leadership in a Learning Community

This section considers all information provided by teachers, parents, and administrators in the context of a learning community (Faris, 2003; Schussler, 2003) and the influences of the three types of participant, parent, educator, and child in forming leadership in a vibrant and dynamic learning community. As the official school leader, Mr. Robles set the tone for the school. Based on the findings from my research, a picture of the leadership evolved into one that worked on building upon the school and neighborhood's strengths instead of focusing on the deficits.

First, this section defines leadership in the school as an organization, how leadership manifests in many

participants, and how communication forms the foundation of a learning community (Faris, 2003). Finally, this section looks at ways that new members were brought into the community and acculturated into the mores and core beliefs.

### *Power in Schools*

Viewing the relationship between Rockford and the neighborhood as reciprocal reflected what Follett called "power with" (as cited in Graham, 1995), rather than "power over" (p.23) Power was distributed across different levels at Rockford. Statements made by the staff indicated that they perceived communication as allowing for participation of all members, parents, teachers, and administration. The concept of "power with" means there was shared responsibility among the members of the community.

Mr. Robles moved the school toward meeting goals by acting in the role of lead teacher and a leader of the whole community, both the families and the teachers. In the case of Mr. Robles, he wanted his door open to the whole community and, through his curriculum specialist, solicited feedback and comment from the community. Nonetheless, to determine if the thoughts and expectations of all members were being considered equally in the decision-making

process, the voices of diverse groups must be considered and incorporated into the process.

### *Role of the Principal*

Leadership in the school was expressed in many voices within the school and the neighborhood from the principal to the teachers to the parents. Assessing the leadership in any school starts with the principal. Mr. Robles stated in very clear terms that his "mission was to serve as a caretaker of their kids and make sure that people, who were underneath him [me], were doing the best they can to educate."

Leadership was established with symbolic gestures that assured all the members that the school was a safe place. The principal was available to all members of the community for comment. However, one of Mr. Robles's comments revealed a level of hierarchical control that he maintained at the school as "caretaker." He clearly expressed a sense of hierarchy existing among leadership and teachers when he referred to staff as being "underneath him."

The second part of Mr. Robles's statement focused on the educational component of leading a school. Statements by mothers and staff demonstrated many of the symbolic

characteristics that built culture around a safe core. Actions such as the principal and curriculum specialist visiting the homes, allowing parents to sell tortillas and tamales at the school, and teachers meeting with mothers in the halls demonstrated symbolic leadership. In a neighborhood where mothers worried about drug dealers, dangerous neighbors and unsafe driving none of the mothers expressed any concern about the safety of children in the school.

Likewise, teachers expressed little concern about their safety in the neighborhood with the exception of one negative home visit experience. Ms. Escarcega said she would not make home visits because she "had an experience that I [she] didn't like when there were too many people drinking there." However, the sense from the interviews was that teachers felt safe at the school. Ensuring that a school provided a safe environment was a foundation for strong leadership, but moving the school toward becoming a learning community was a more complex goal.

#### *Moral Imperative*

In the second part of Mr. Robles's statement, he used the word *educate* to describe the responsibility of

teachers. Beyond the academic definition of *educate* is one that promotes growth socially and morally.

Given Rockford's steady improvement on measures of academic performance and the ability to keep the school out of the underperforming category, there was evidence that focus was placed on accountability without specifically telling the mothers the importance of scoring well on the AIMS test. Use of the word *educate* could also be closely aligned with Rockford's focus on making connections with the community and Mexican-immigrant families. Mr. Robles noted that research showed it was important to build expectations early.

Mr. Robles: They're saying how tremendously important it is that in kindergarten we're talking to them that when you're done with college or when you graduate from college. Therefore, they are hearing it all the time.

Clearly, the stated belief of the principal was that all students could succeed academically but statements by all the staff indicate that they worried about the potential for academic success.

Reviewing the information provided by this phenomenological study, there were some specific areas of

school culture and leadership with regard to expectations in the community.

- All mothers and staff expected open communication.
- Teachers expected secondary school to be tough.
- Mothers held a range of expectations for how schools could help their children.
- New staff adapted to the community or was encouraged to leave.
- State and district expectations were not articulated frequently to mothers by staff.

Considering the context in which schools operate, there was increased accountability and drive to have 100% of students meet mastery through the forced calibration by standardized testing (NCLB, 2001). However, the expectation was not evident in the interviews.

#### *No talk of test scores*

It must be noted here that a glaring inconsistency in the findings of the analysis was the complete lack of reference to the importance of test scores. Neither mother nor teachers made an reference to the importance of passing the state accountability test (AIMS).

The importance of improving school and district test scores is evident every time the newspapers publish the scores of all the state schools. Scores are also used to determine important state and federal labels of individual schools. In 2006 passing AIMS became a requirement for all high school graduates. The AIMS therefore carried great importance for both parents and school staff. Yet, the importance of test scores was not a part of the relationship between Rockford and the mothers who were interviewed.

The lack of emphasis on test scores underscores the staffs' belief that students will struggle in middle school high school and according to Ms. Escarcega, in college. The inconsistency between accountability placed on the school and low interest on the part of the mothers led to a question of the level of communication in a learning community.

#### *A Learning Community*

From this study, I was able to get a glimpse of how a school complements the larger community by seeking to develop a learning community (Faris, 2003, Schussler, 2003) that used lines of communication to expand and transform.

The community and the school complemented each other and interacted as a large entity where it was possible to view all the members as belonging to a learning community. A learning community is one that is viewed less as a school in reformation and more as a constantly growing, learning entity in constant transformation. The learning community grows and transforms through open communication among all the members. The enculturation of new members occurs for both families and teachers.

When a senior teacher told a new teacher to adapt to the "community" and the principal greeted a parent and student by name, it influenced the community. The attitude of the senior staff member reflected an inflexible sense of communication. Her statements closed down any ability for the new staff member to contribute to the learning community. While the aggressive reproach by one staff member could not be generalized to the whole staff, Mrs. Huerta's influence as a curriculum specialist allowed her a broad impact on the community.

Leadership was promoted throughout the community under the auspices of a central "caretaker." Yet, expectations that were held by one group within the learning community were not told to all the members.

The expectation was that everyone contributed to the school through an open door policy. However, although expectations held by staff must be considered as a guiding force in a learning community, as well as the expectations held by the mothers, the lack of communication or communication of expectations between the two groups influenced how transformation happened in this learning community, even though communication was constantly said to be a strength at the school.

The purpose of this phenomenological study originally stated that I would examine the background, present schooling conditions, and personal reflections of Mexican-immigrant mothers to identify aspirations and expectations for school age children within the context of a single school culture and clarify the distinct expectations that manifested within school communities. The positive aspects of this school community were evident in the feelings expressed by staff, administration, and mothers. There was much perceived communication and positive commitment from staff and mothers. The measurable effect was Rockford's ability to remain as a "performing" school.

*Differences in beliefs of teachers and mothers.* The most salient theme regarding expectations held for students was the teachers concern about how Rockford students, both of non-immigrants and immigrants would succeed in middle and high school. While teachers worried about how students would perform after leaving Rockford, mothers expressed boundless belief in the success of their children academically.

A longitudinal study could follow students and analyze the dialogue that happens in classrooms for the children of non-immigrants and immigrants.

One thought was that mothers should not be introduced to the same concerns as those held by teachers, in order to protect the optimism. A second thought was that as a learning community mothers should be aware of the potential roadblocks to success perceived by teachers. In the implications for research and practice sections below the topic of incongruence in communication is further discussed with recommendations for how to develop a stronger communication between the school and the mothers of Mexican-immigrant students.

### Implications for Further Research

The research conducted for this dissertation was limited in scope to the views of a narrow slice of the mothers and educators in the Rockford community and, therefore, not sufficient to generalize about the overall culture and climate at the school. Interviews indicated that there were positive expectations for students on the part of mothers and educators, but the concerns of teachers did not match the mothers' positive outlook that mothers have. Questions that arose from the analysis of interview data were

1. Do teachers' concerns about the support of students in secondary and higher education reflect skepticism?
2. Are the vague academic expectations of mothers common among Mexican-immigrants, and are such expectations common in other ethnic or socioeconomic groups?
3. How do educators communicate expectations to students and families in other school communities and what is the incongruence?

Further research would be longitudinal in its scope. It would measure the long-term effects of teachers' worries and concerns about student academic success. Statements made in interviews could be compared to observational data collected through classroom observation for analysis of congruency between the two contexts. A similar longitudinal study could be conducted to compare mothers' stated expectations with discourse observed among mothers and children, as well as discourse with teachers.

This study could also be replicated with other ethnic and socioeconomic groups. Are educators' concerns evident in interviews of families in schools with higher socioeconomic families attending? Do third and fourth generation minority mothers also hold the vaguely positive academic expectations that these three mothers expressed?

#### Summary and Implications for Practice

Through the research, I discovered a school community where mothers care deeply about their children's education and hold high expectations for their success. They did not dwell on the potential roadblocks described by staff and, in one case, learned to be advocated. I also found a school

where staff was genuinely invested in the school community where they worked. They sought to integrate themselves into the community and provided a caring and welcoming environment for parents and children. They strove to understand and be accepted whether they had worked at the school for 22 years or one year.

Data showed that the school made gains in academics, yet parents and teachers did not talk about the importance of state and district testing or improving attendance. The school used open forums and parent meetings to talk to the community about state and district expectations for making yearly progress on the AIMS test.

Nonetheless, there was notable inconsistency among the expectations and aspirations that Mexican-immigrant mothers held for their children and the sentiments held by the school staff with regard to student success. From the teachers to the curriculum specialist, the school staff was concerned about the potential for students to successfully graduate from high school and attend higher education institutions. The parents, on the other hand, did not express doubt about their children's potential to go as far as their desire would carry them in school.

Maintaining lines of communication was a basic and stated focus of the school and staff; however, the optimism felt by parents was not evident in the expectations of the staff. The scope of this study was not such that longitudinal effects of teachers, skeptical expectations were identified. Subsequent studies could analyze the language used by teachers when talking to students and parents for comparison with other schools where teachers were less skeptical about students' success in middle school and high school.

Rockford could benefit from an in-depth self-analysis of how concerns were communicated to students and parents on a daily basis. If indeed the parents expected their children to succeed and attain their aspirations, then the school must support parents by continuously reinforcing success through instruction and comments to all members. Communication must extend beyond invitations to parent conferences, home visits, remembering names, and allowing members to sell goods at the school. Communication is a complex transfer of core beliefs about students' potential to succeed.

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