

PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MIGRANT HEAD START: PARENTAL BELIEFS AND  
TEACHER PRACTICES

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## ABSTRACT

### PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN MIGRANT HEAD START: PARENTAL BELIEFS AND TEACHER PRACTICES

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The current study focused on parent involvement of migrant farmworker families of Mexican origin with children enrolled in Migrant Head Start. Under investigation were parent and teacher beliefs and practices pertaining to involvement in the child's early schooling context. An ethnography approach and modified grounded theory approach was chosen which involved in-depth interviews, observations, and focus groups for member checking. Participants included 14 parents and 7 teachers at three sites in Northwestern Michigan. Findings from the study include the constructed roles of parents in the early education of their children. Extended family ties as additional message barers and use place of work as contrary to family educational goals were non-traditional ways in which parents constructed their role. Additionally, both Spanish speaking parents and English speaking teachers struggled with language and written forms of communication. Language and culture also influenced how parents developed *confianza* with educators and experienced favorable views of Migrant Head Start staff. Some parents discussed cultural differences in child rearing practices that emphasize an understanding of *respecto* between adults and children from the lens of Latino culture. This study provided insight into a population in which little research has previously been conducted particularly around parent involvement. It furthers the understanding of diverse groups of Latinos within U.S. educational systems and specifically expands the knowledge of the migrant farmworker families of Mexican descent.

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## DEDICATION

Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord. – James 5.4

I would like to dedicate this work to God and the Laborers. To the Almighty who gave me strength to fulfill it, a belief in myself, and inspiration to continue and succeed. And to the migrant farmworkers of Michigan who graciously gave me their time on this study, and whose children have inspired my higher education.

I would like to also dedicate this dissertation to my family. This work is in memory of my beloved brother, Donald Harris Smith (Hoss) who died the summer of 2013, his wife Amanda, and their children Jan Michael, Zackery, and Anastasia. It is in honor of my Parents who instilled the importance of education in my life. I also want to dedicate this work to my daughters Adrianna and Azania who have been my strength and inspiration during this process

I would like to dedicate this to my guidance committee: my chair Dr. Deborah Johnson who has influenced my life in many ways. I want to thank her greatly for bringing me into the program, guiding my work, always being straight and tough with me, and expecting high quality work. I also want to thank my committee members, Dr. Miles McNall, Dr Holly Brophy-Herb, Dr. Rene Perez Rosebaum, and Dr. Hope Gerde. You have all been wonderful throughout t

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

As a child migrant laborer at 12 years of age, Cesar Chavez supported the family when his father became disabled. Although he experienced harsh working conditions as a migrant child, his family's beliefs about the importance of hard work, respect, and education gave him the motivation to stay in school and learn to read and write (California Department of Education, 2012). Chavez attended 37 different schools (UFW, 2012). Despite these challenge circumstances and perhaps because of them, Cesar Chavez became a leader and activist for migrant farm workers rights in California in the 1960's, (Levy & Chavez, 1975). Chavez's life story underscores the experiences of many children and youth being raised in migrant farmworker families. It is estimated that there are over 400,000 children of migrant farmworkers in the United States who travel with their families and thus consistently change schools (Tomaine, 2010). Despite the strides that Chavez made for migrant farm workers, they remain one of the most educationally impoverished, vulnerable, and underserved groups in the US today. His life also underscores the challenges faced by migrant parents who want better educational opportunities for their children but are disenfranchised from involvement and decision making in that regard.

Very little research has been generated that contributes to our understanding of how migrant farmworker parents of Mexican origin<sup>1</sup> participate in the education of their children, particularly during the preschool years. As an educational setting that encourages families to

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<sup>1</sup> Migrant farm worker families of Mexican origin, is the full description of the population pertaining to this study. The author will interchangeably use the above description with migrant farm worker families or migrant farm worker parents.

participate in and support their children's educational experiences, Migrant Head Start is an important context to explore these questions. In particular, Migrant Head Start programs<sup>2</sup> serve this unique population of migrant farmworker children, and it may be there that these key questions about migrant families and education can be most easily addressed.

In this study I intended to examine how parents with children in Migrant Head Start programs in Michigan make decisions to become involved in their children's education, and how those decisions are shaped by social interactions with teachers and by parents' cultural views (Daniels, 2008; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Vygotsky, 1978). In this study I considered the cultural background and personal experiences of migrant parents and how they influence the ways they become involved in school-related practices. Furthermore, I looked at how a sample of Migrant Head Start preschool teachers' practices and communication styles with families encourage migrant parents to become involved in their children's early education.

In the first chapter I will give an overview of the problem and summarize the background of migrant families, migrant children, and the Migrant Head Start program in Michigan. I will also describe the purpose of the study and introduce the research questions.

## **Problem Statement**

The benefits of parent involvement in the education of children have been cited in many studies, including work with minority families (Delgado-Gatain, 1991; Oyserman, Brickman & Rhodes, 2007; Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark & Peay, 2001; Seefeldt; Denton, Galper & Younoszai, 1998). Some research has underscored the early years of a child's schooling as a critical time for parents to take an active role in their children's education (Castro,

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<sup>2</sup> Migrant Head Start Program is a branch of Head Start which services children of Migrant farm workers.

Bryant, Peisner-Feinberg & Skinner, 2004). The early education years of migrant farmworker children may be an opportune time for parents to learn skills to support their children's education so that more migrant children succeed in school in the long term.

Migrant children are at great risk for failure to complete school, or to transition out of the cycle of poverty into which they were born (Branz-Spall, Rosenthal & Wright, 2003; Child Labor Law, 2008). A couple of studies have given insight into the motivational factors of migrant parents that contribute to long term academic success of migrant children completing high school (Lopez, 2001; Trevino, 2008). Although these findings are important, little is known about what motivates and contributes to parent involvement in the early education of migrant children. Additionally, little is known about the role of early education teachers in providing opportunities for Mexican migrant parents to become engaged in their children's education.

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997) is one theoretical lens that has been used to study parents' motivational beliefs. The model introduces a theory of psychological factors that contribute to parents' school involvement decisions (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995). Relevant to this study is the notion that pertinent social groups motivate parents to construct roles of parent involvement in education, and that teachers' practices of invitations influence decisions to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Another lens through which to view parent involvement of migrant farmworker parents is Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Theory. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that cultural values and experiences are socially transmitted. Thus, parents' cultural beliefs and experiences would influence their role in their children's education. Furthermore, the work of Vygotsky (1978) recognized the importance of two-way communication, interrelatedness, and human development. These theories provide insight into important constructs that can be extended to

better understand parents' cultural beliefs, experiences, and the social influences and practices of teachers as related to parent involvement.

Increased parent involvement is a critical component of Head Start through The Programs' Performance Standards, which include building relationships with families, enhancing parenting skills, encouraging parents to volunteer, and participating in the decision making process (Schumacher, 2003). Some research on parent involvement in Head Start program has stemmed from practitioner's concerns with the barriers that families face which inhibit parent involvement practices (Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar & Peay, 2001; In Migrant Head Start, where increased parent involvement is desired, there is not much research on how parent involvement is practiced within the program. Thus, this study's focus is to discover some of the psychological factors that contribute to the involvement of migrant parents, and how teachers' practices and interactions with parents assist parents in becoming involved. The next section will give background information on the migrant farmworker families and their children.

## **Background and Context**

### **The Migrant Farmworker**

Northwest Michigan is known for its abundant harvest. Many seasonal crops and orchards produce tomatoes, blueberries, cherries, grapes and apples which thrive in the fertile soil and gentle summers that the region has to offer. Because these crops cannot be machine harvested, they require extensive human labor to carefully handpick and harvest. Currently, Michigan shares first place in apple production with Washington State and New York, and overall the state is the fourth largest employer of migrant farm labor (Apple Journal, 2012; Parra-Cardona, Buloch, Imig, Villarruel & Gold, 2006). Migrant farmworkers, typically arrive to the area in April and May for planting and field work and stay on at farms through the end of the fall

months. When the seasons change and the harvest is done, they move on to other states to find similar work or cross international borders and return to their home communities in Mexico (Reichert & Massey, 1979).

The scope of migrant labor is expansive. It is estimated that 2.5 million people earn a living doing temporary farm labor each year across the United States (Chavkin, 1996). They work long hours in rugged conditions that require men and women who can work efficiently to assure that the harvest is produced in a timely manner. According to The Michigan Civil Rights Commission (2007), migrant workers often do not have access to bathrooms and water while working in the fields, and in some cases their employers will charge workers for water while they work. Wages earned by migrant farmworkers have been found to be far below the poverty line, with an annual income reported at around \$15,000 dollars (Child Labor Law, 2008). The majority of migrant farmworkers are Spanish speaking immigrants from Mexico who have come across the border illegally, and US nationals of Mexican origin. In 2010, The United States Department of Agriculture reported that 67 % of migrant farmworkers were born in Mexico, and 27 % were born in Puerto Rico or The United States. The remaining six percent were from Central America. Additionally, the data reported that 33 % of migrant farmworkers were citizens of the United States of America, and of the non-citizens, the majority were undocumented workers (USDA, 2011). Even though many workers are illegal, they represent a vital workforce in rural farming communities such as in the state of Michigan. Although many migrant farmworkers are single men, many of them travel with families and are accompanied by young children (Chavkin, 1996).



## **Children of Migrant Farmworkers**

Migrant children are known to many places such as rural communities in Michigan. The exact numbers are unclear, but it has been estimated that approximately 409,000 migrant children travel with their parents each year across the continental United States (Chavkin, 1996). A migrant child is defined as a child whose parents or guardian work in migratory agricultural work, including dairy or fisheries, and have moved for work in the preceding 36 months (United States Commission of Civil Rights, 2007). Like many children from low-income families, migrant children are being raised in poverty, which has been associated with poor educational outcomes (Branz-Spall et al, 2003). In addition, the majority of migrant children are culturally and linguistically diverse, with close to 85 % speaking Spanish as their home language (Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2009). Latino children and migrant farmworker children are one of the most underserved groups represented in early care and education programs in the United States.

There has been reliable documentation of migrant children entering the workforce at a very young age (Human Rights Watch, 2012; Child Labor, 2008). It is estimated that at least one-third of migrant children go to work to contribute to their families' earnings, and children as young as seven years old have been found working in the fields (Child Labor Law, 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2012; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2003). Although the federal government has cautious guidelines pertaining to child labor under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), the laws differ for children working in agriculture (United States Department of Labor, 2012). FLSA assures that when children work, they have parental consent, work minimal hours, and perform work in a safe environment that does not jeopardize their health, well-being, or educational opportunities. In many states migrant children are exempt from FLSA standards and

under law are allowed to work in less regulated conditions (United States Department of Labor, 2012). The migrant child working in agriculture can be easily exploited and exposed to hazardous working conditions, and their work may potentially affect attendance and school routine. State Child Labor Laws Applicable to Agriculture Employment in Michigan does not require children to show proof of their age to work in agriculture. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) which restricts children under 16 from working in certain types of jobs, and working over 10 hours a week is exempt in most types of agriculture work in Michigan (United States Department of Labor, 2012). For example, migrant children in can work up to 11 hours a day or up to 62 hours a week (6 days a week) during school vacations, and can combine work and school activities up to 48 hours a week (6 days a week) while school is in session. Children in Michigan also do not need to show proof of age to work in the fields (United States Department of Labor, 2012). Apart from the loose child labor laws which make access to work in the fields an option for migrant children, the mobility of migrant families also complicates schooling and can interfere with children's attendance and performance in schools.

The mobility of migrant children is a fairly frequent occurrence. Although many migrant families have permanent locations, which they call home, mobility during the school year has been found to have negative effects on children's academic outcomes and is associated with behavioral problems (Branz-Spall et al., 2003; Hartman, 2002). Texas is a home base state for many migrant families who work seasonally in Michigan. It is not unusual for children to begin the school year in the fall in one state and relocate to Texas by late fall, enrolling in another school. Likewise, children may leave Texas before the end of the school year in the spring (April and May) to relocate in another state where their parents are working (Fagnoni, 1999). The interruptions in schooling caused by mobility have been associated with instability and poor

educational outcomes for migrant children (Branz-Spall et al, 2003; Diaz, 1991), and the dropout rate of migrant high school children has been found to be as high as 67 % (Child labor Law, 2008). The problems associated with children growing up in migrant farmworker life styles underscores the need to better grasp what can be done to assist children and families with their education challenges. Currently, the Federal Government offers two education programs specifically for migrant children, Migrant Education Program and Migrant Head Start.

### **Education Programs for Migrant Children**

In rural Michigan many migrant families have access to education programs for their children, such as Migrant Education and Migrant Head Start, which are specifically designed to provide education services to migrant children while their parent are working in agriculture related activities. These programs have the potential to create positive perspectives on education through their family involvement initiatives and by working directly with migrant families. Migrant Head Start is one such program that can be influential to families in the early years of their children's education. Like regular Head Start, it has traditionally focused on parent involvement as a main component of its program with a focus on "the whole child" and family (Broughton, 1989; Findlay, 1995; Vinovskis, 2005; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). Migrant Head Start may be a domain where parents can learn valuable skills to engage in their children's education in the early years.

### **Migrant Head Start Program**

The Michigan Migrant Head Start (MMHS) is a seasonally operated Early Head Start /Head Start program serving children from birth up to six years old. The program serves over 1,500 children who migrate annually with their families who work in the agriculture industry (Program Information Report, 2003). The program has 17 locations in the State of Michigan,

primarily on the western side of the state near Lake Michigan, but with other centers located in other regions of the Lower Peninsula. As migrant families arrive in the spring to find work, MMHS operates accordingly to provide services from May through November during the planting, growing, and harvest times. Michigan is the fourth largest employer of migrant labor in the United States (Parra-Cardona, et al., 2006), and the need is great to provide quality care programs to young children, such as the Michigan Migrant Head Start.

Michigan Migrant Head Start is one of many Migrant Head Start programs in the United States. The scope of the program is one of national significance, with care being provided to nearly 37,000 migrant children and nearly 2,500 seasonal children (seasonal children are children whose parents work in seasonal labor which is year around) annually in 40 states (National Seasonal and Migrant Head Start Association, 2010). However, Migrant Head Start serves only 19 % of eligible children on average (Beltran & Goldwasser, 2008), which means that many more children and families could potentially be served by this program in the future if more programs were created to serve children and current programs expanded with funding. Migrant Head Start offers extended hour care, which reflects the long hours which parents typically work in the fields. Programs usually run from six weeks to eight or nine months, and children attend from five to seven days a week, eight to twelve hours a day (Fuentes, Cantu & Stechuk, 1996). It operates only for families who meet the eligibility requirements of mobility, income level, and work in agriculture (National Seasonal and Migrant Head Start Association, 2010). The program is developmentally focused, taking into consideration the child's education, health, and family. Migrant Head Start implements multi-cultural, developmentally appropriate practices for Spanish speaking children and it provides bilingual staff when available (Yandin, 2005). Children are encouraged to build upon their native language while gradual instruction in English is introduced

(National Seasonal and Migrant Head Start Association, 2010). Migrant Head Start is part of the larger context of Head Start programs, including Regional Head Start and Native American Head Start.

### **The Purpose of the Study**

Some researchers who have focused on migrant farmworker parents with school age children have acknowledged that in general, migrant families have been overlooked in research studies (Lopez, 2001; Lopez, et al., 2001; Siantz & Smith; 1996; Trevino, 2004). Particularly, little is known of parents' beliefs and teachers' practices which foster parent involvement in the early education of children for migrant farmworker families. Because studies have pointed to the importance of parents becoming involved in the early years of children's development and education (Castro, et al., 2004; Epstein, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005; Lamb-Parker et al., 1997) it is important to assess how parent involvement can attenuate the educational challenges faced by migrant children and youth. This study will endeavor to address the gaps prevalent in current published research on the education of migrant farmworker children and to extend the available research on this population. This study has the potential to inform Migrant Head Start and other education programs on best practices for parent involvement for migrant school-aged children. It will highlight parent involvement from the cultural perspectives and experiences of these parents, and how teachers' communication for the purpose of engaging these families may work towards bridging more effective parent involvement practices.

### **Research Questions**

How are parent involvement practices among migrant parents influenced by cultural belief patterns at home and teachers' roles at school?

The following more specific questions will guide the study:

- 1) How do Mexican migrant parents construct roles in their children's education through involvement with early childhood education programs?
- 2) What practices of teachers are related to parents' participation in the process of their children's education as reported by teachers and parents?
- 3) What are the cultural beliefs and life experiences with education systems which influence parents' perception of parent involvement in Migrant Head Start?

### **Summary**

In this chapter I have introduced the problem, background information, purpose of the study, research questions of the study, and I have discussed the importance of this work to advance research in the field of education. In the next chapter I will provide a discussion of the literature related to parent involvement, history of parent involvement in Head Start, parent involvement and Latino and migrant families, will discuss the theoretical frameworks important to this study and the constructs of the study.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The purpose of this study is to hear the voices of migrant farmworker parents regarding their beliefs' on educational parent involvement as related to their child, the teacher, and the school context. I will examine the aspects of culture that influence their practices of parent involvement. The study will also address practices of Migrant Head Start teachers and their perspectives on engaging migrant families in the early education of their children. This chapter will include a review of the literature related to: (1) home and school parent involvement as defined in research, (2) the benefits of parent involvement, (3) education and parent involvement and its importance in Head Start, (4) theories of parent involvement and human development, and (5) the constructs of parent involvement related to the study.

#### **Home and School Based Parent Involvement**

Parent involvement in children's education has many features. Typically, parent involvement is defined in two ways, home-based parent involvement practices and school based parent involvement. Parent involvement in the home is defined as interactions taking place between the child and the parent outside of the school that support learning (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, & Sandler, 2005). These include help with homework, overseeing children's school progress in the home, and other strategies focused on learning (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2007). Home-based parent involvement tends to be widely practiced. Up to 70 percent of parents reported some form of involvement in the home, such as help with homework that supports children's schooling, regardless of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or education level of parents, in a national survey (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

School-based parent involvement is frequently defined in school-centered terms, such as volunteering in the classrooms, attending conferences or school functions, and participating in governing boards and parent decision making committees (Waanders, Mendez & Downer, 2005). According to The Department of Education (2006) school conferences were attended by two-thirds of parents of all ethnicities. However, other forms of parent involvement such as volunteering were less common among minority parents, African American (32 percent), Hispanics (28 percent), compared to European parents (48percent), (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Recent models of parent involvement have moved towards an approach of incorporating both home-based and school-based connections that emphasize cooperation, community, transitions from home and school, and shared goals for children (Epstein, 1996; McWayne, Campos & Owsianik, 2008).

Connections between home and school based parent involvement are areas of interest to researchers involved in child development and educational outcomes of children in preschool and K-12 programs. Epstein's model (1996) of home-school connections identified six types of parent involvement: parenting, communicating, volunteering, decision making, collaborating with community, and learning at home. For example, communicating included talking to families about school programs and student progress through effective home-school and school-home connections. Decision making includes families as participants in school decisions, governance, and advocacy through school committees and other parent organizations. While some research focuses on the categories of involvement, others have explored the patterns of influential factors in the parent involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Watkins (1997) suggested that particular patterns of parent involvement practices be identified from the home-school connections with a focus on teacher communications with families. Other studies suggest



that practitioners may not be aware of the many ways families support their children at home (McWayne, Campos, Owsianik, 2007). For example, in minority families it has been found that parents approach involvement in ways less noticed by the schools (Olmendo, 2004; Valdez, 1996). Olmendo's (2004) ethnographic study argued that Latina mothers in Chicago defined the roles of involvement as providing a nurturing environment and teaching children to be respectful towards educators. Likewise Lopez's (2001) case study of high achieving migrant worker children found that parent's hard work ethic coupled with strong beliefs that emphasized the significance of education led to their children's success both in the primary grades and later in life. Although parent involvement practices are defined and studied within a broad context, it is agreed upon in the literature that parent involvement leads to positive education outcomes for children (Epstein, 1996; Brickman & Rhodes, 2007).

### **Benefits of Parent Involvement**

It is important to understand the vital role that parent involvement has on children's academic achievement. The positive effect of parent involvement in their children's education have been cited in numerous empirical studies (Epstein, 1996; Brickman & Rhodes, 2007; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker, Kessler-Sklar, Clark & Peay, 2001; Reynolds, 1991; Seefeldt, et al., 1998; Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco & Todorova, 2008). In particular, the role it can play in children's cognitive, language, and socio-cultural growth in the early years of learning which does influence better school outcomes later in life (Castro, et al., 2004). Parent involvement has been found to significantly influence reading, math, and socio-emotional maturity of prekindergarten at risk minority children, in a longitudinal study of 1539 children and families (Reynolds, 1991). An evaluation of prekindergarten programs in the Chicago Public School's Child-Parent Centers found positive effects on low-

income children's achievement and behavior when their parents were involved (Georgia State University, Health Policy Center, 2003). Further, an extensive review of empirical studies on the benefits of parent involvement concluded that it was positively linked to higher graduation rates, lower dropout rate, student competence and many other beneficial contributions to children's education (Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins & Closson, 2005). Overall, it is one of the strongest predictors of student achievement.

Research has documented a number of barriers to parent involvement for low-income and minority families (Hill & Taylor, 2004). These include, but are not limited to, low levels of education of parents, economic stress, neighborhoods, parents' negative experiences with schools, depression, and language barriers (Cooper, Denner & Lopez, 1999; McWayne et al., 2008; Ramirez, 2004; Romo, 1984; Smith & Singh, 2003; Waanders et al., 2007). Although findings suggest a number of obstacles for low-income and minority parents becoming involved in their children's schooling, other studies report benefits for low-income and minority families as well (Perez-Carreon, Drake & Barton, 2005; Lopez, 2001; Nzinga-Johnson, Baker & Aupperlee, 2009). Nzinga-Johnson, Baker and Aupperlee (2009) found that with minority parents, as well as other majority parents, partnership building between educators and parents was a key variable in parents' engagement in their children's school, in a stratified random sample of 483 parents and 431 teachers. Research on Latino parents found that when parents are informed about the education systems in which their children are involved, they are able to make knowledgeable choices and influence their children's development (Carreon, et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Suarez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Acknowledging that language barriers and social supports were often hindrances of parent involvement for low-income immigrant Latino

families, Perez-Carreón et al., (2005) found that parents were able to establish presence in their children's education by constructing relationships with school teachers and administrators.

In addition to parents gaining decision making skills and becoming active participants in their child's education, parents who are involved in Head Start also experience psychological benefits. The Head Start FACES study reported that low-income parents with high levels of involvement in the Head Start program significantly increased their locus of control, social support, and significantly decreased their depression scores (Zill et al., 2001). Head Start families were also found to be more likely to participate in their children's kindergarten one year after having been in Head Start (Seefeldt, et al., 1998). These findings are consistent with other research on Latino families whose engagement led to a sense of empowerment through involvement in the schooling process and learning about their children's education (Carreón et al., 2005; Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Collectively these findings suggest that parent involvement in children's education can benefit low-income and minority children. As such, it is an area worthy of further exploration specifically with migrant farmworker families who access public schools and early childhood programs in the United States. The next section will focus on the history and background of parent involvement in the United States. It will discuss the development of parent involvement as an important component of Head Start and the Migrant Head Start Program (Lubeck & deVries, 2010).

## **Education and Parent Involvement**

In the public education system in America from as early as the late nineteenth century, concerned parents began to question the increasing separation between parental control and public schools (Hiatt, 1994). These concerns motivated a group of middle class mothers to form

the National Congress of Mothers (NCM) in 1897, who met with teachers on Saturdays, studied school curriculum and became informed about child development (Hiatt, 1994). The NCM worked as volunteers on the national, state, and local level and their efforts eventually led to the establishment of the Parent Teacher Association (Haite, 1994). The pioneering efforts of the National Congress of Mothers and Parent Teacher Association deepened parents' influence in children's education and established mutual cooperation between parents and teachers (Schoff, 1916).

In the later part of the twentieth century, parents relied on the court systems to promote change in the public schools. A number of landmark cases (including *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* and *Serrano v. Priest*) headed by parents involved school reform and marked changes in the public schools for equality in public education for minority children (Brown, 1975). Along with these court rulings, research and knowledge of the positive influence of parent involvement in children's education was incorporated and parent involvement programs were implemented in the public schools (Haite, 1994, Vinovski, 2005). Federally funded legislation led to the Elementary School Act of 1965 and Project Head Start which required parental participation in governing boards and in school activities (Haite, 1994).

Head Start has been one of the most enduring programs for early childhood development for low-income families with an emphasis on the involvement of families (Seefeldt, et al., 1998). In the 1960's when Head Start was founded, it was influenced by Urie Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach to child development which included a strong dedication to families (Zigler & Muenchow 1992). This approach was based on the idea that by helping the family, that child was also helped (Findlay, 1995; Vinovskis; 2005; Zigler & Muenchow, 1992). In these early years, parents were encouraged to participate in the classrooms, in governance, in the decision

making process, and in workshops. Public reports of the results of early Head Start viewed the growth and development taking place for families as a symbol of change for poor communities (Connard & Novick, 1996; Findlay, 1995). This early level of engagement represented empowerment for Head Start families through the process of interrelatedness, which supports growth and development from relationships (Connard & Novick, 1996).

Head Start today functions on that early foundation and includes an active parent participation component. Additionally, Head Start Performance Standards include programmatic guidelines for teachers and staff to engage parents. HS emphasizes relationship building, involvement, decision making on curriculum and governance, participation in the classroom, and opportunities for parent skill enhancement (Schumacher, 2003). Revised Performance Standards have included individualized “Family Partnership” agreements which are envisioned as cooperative agreements that establish collaborative relationships between families and Head Start center staff (Lukbeck & deVries, 2010).

Migrant Head Start is guided by the Head Start Performance Standards’ position on involving families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1999). Although, its services to families are similar to regular Head Start, Migrant Head Start provides more flexible services to families to meet the unique needs of the population by focusing on multicultural child development and individualized services (National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2009-2010). Migrant Head Start was established in 1969 so that infants, toddlers, and preschool-aged children could be engaged in education activities while their families work in the fields. Currently, Migrant Head Start operates in 34 states serving over 37,000 children, with 450 Migrant Head Start Centers nationwide (National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2012). One problem that has been acknowledged in

regards to outcome goals set by Head Start is that there remains a shortage of studies on child and family outcomes within the Migrant Head Start program population (Kloosterman, Skiffington & Sanchez, 2003). Therefore, more research is needed to better understand the effectiveness of Migrant Head Start in serving children and families including learning more about parent involvement.

### **Diversity in Head Start**

Diversity of families is not a new concept in Head Start. The historical setting in which Head Start was founded, in the initial pilot project of the Mississippi Delta, gave opportunities to African Americans children and families with programs that provided early education to children and supports to families (Findlay, 1995; Vinovskis, 2005). As Head Start expanded, so did the outreach to more diverse families, including immigrants, refugee families, and dual language learners (Broughton, 1989). The need to address culturally and linguistically diverse families within the program grew as immigration began to change the faces of the children of Head Start and America. At the policy level, an early effort to address the needs of diverse children and families was thought out through the 1990 Multicultural Principles for The Head Start Program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991). This early attempt to outline core principles of serving multicultural families provided a framework to inform Head Start programs and their practices for working with children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991). Three key principles that address culturally and linguistically diverse families are the following:

- The cultural groups represented in the communities and families of the Head Start program are the primary source for culturally relevant programming.

- Culturally relevant and diverse programming requires learning accurate information about the culture of different groups and discarding stereotypes.
- Culturally relevant and diverse programming examines and challenges institutional and personal biases.

The Multicultural Principles for Head Start set guidelines that identify the importance of culture and its ‘rootedness in people,’ and create an environment of fairness and empathy towards others. These principles lay the foundation for the Head Start Performance Standards and The Head Start Outcomes Framework for the development of strategies to support positive child outcomes for diverse families. The standards include specifics that address continued support of the home language, learning English, respect of family background, and maintenance of the home language of children of Head Start (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Of the many children who speak a second language in Head Start, the majority are of Hispanic/Latino origin, and in the migrant program 81% of the children come from families where Spanish is the first language spoken in the home (NMSHSA, 2009). With the growing presence of the Latino family in Head Start, policymakers and researchers will have to continue to explore ways to improve services to Hispanic families in Head Start (Beltran, & Goldwasser, 2008). The Head Start Standards and Multicultural Principles of Head Start provide a solid framework through culturally relevant practices for working with Latino families can be explored, developed, and tested through a research agenda.

It is not surprising that the Latino family in Head Start has been in the forefront of many of the current discussions around improving practices in the Head Start program. Today, Latinos

comprise one out of every four children served in Head Start (Beltran & Goldwasser, 2008). Many of these children are native Spanish speakers hearing English for the first time in their contact with the Head Start program. Hiring culturally and linguistically knowledgeable staff and providing trainings for staff in working with diverse families have been a priority for the program. In an effort to hire bilingual staff with credentials, Head Start endorsed the University of Cincinnati's degree in Early Childhood Education, which gave Hispanic teachers an option to complete a bilingual Spanish/English Associate degree. The implementation of the Head Start English Language Learners Project (2006-2009) provided training to teachers and family service staff working with culturally and linguistically diverse families of Head Start including the Migrant branch. Head Start also sponsored two Hispanic Head Start Conferences (2005-2006) to explore best practices and research related to working with Hispanic children and families. These efforts have greatly benefited the Head Start community in learning about best practices and research related to Latino families and children. However, culture and language are complex topics. More work still needs to be done to learn to educate and connect with Latino children and families.

### **Head Start and Parent Involvement**

On the same foundation that reached out to diversity, Project Head Start from the 1960's had a strong dedication to families. The level of engagement of Head Start families has historic roots from the foundations of Head Start in the Mississippi Delta, as a program for children of sharecroppers, with a strong emphasis on parent participation in implementation, staffing, and decision making in the program (Findlay, 1995; Vinovskis, 2005). Parents were encouraged to participate in the program through workshops, working in the program, as classroom resources teachers, governance of the program and decisions about how Head Start would function. The



workshops, which taught parenting skills, were also places where parents could make new friends and talk about their children. Public reports of the results of early Head Start revealed the growth and development that was taking place for families, as a symbol of change for deprived communities (Findlay, 1995). This early level of engagement represented empowerment for Head Start families through the process of interrelatedness, which supports growth and development from relationships (Connard & Novick, 1996). Head Start empowered these first families of the Mississippi Delta who had historically been given very little say in the education of their children.

Head Start today functions on that foundation from its early days and includes an active parent participation component. Head Start Performance Standards on parent involvement are the following:

- Building relationships with parents as early as possible from enrollment, and creating ongoing opportunities for parent involvement throughout the time children are in the program.
- Helping families work toward their goals and linking families to or providing necessary services.
- Making programs open to parents at any time, involving parents in the development of program curriculum, and providing parents opportunities to volunteer or become staff.
- Providing parents with opportunities to enhance their parenting skills.
- Helping parents to become active partners in accessing health care for their children, making community services more responsive to their family needs, and transitioning their children into school.

- Involving parents in decision-making and governance (Schumacher, 2003).

Migrant Head Start uses the same parent involvement model as other programs. The Michigan program includes a policy council at the state level that meets in Texas during the winter to involve parents in discussion about the program throughout the year. Even though it is a seasonal program that is closed in the winter months, the involvement in governance year around is encouraged. The continuation of the policy council during the season when the centers are closed shows the dedication migrant families have to this program.

The practices of parent engagement through participation in parent meetings year around for a seasonal program demonstrates the commitment that the Michigan program has in engaging families. Head Start and Migrant Head Start alike also engage families in participation through volunteering in the centers, holding parent meetings, home visiting, teacher-conferences, and the parent policy council. However, research has found that Head Start families struggle with participating in the program. The Head Start FACES report indicated that 64% of families had not participated in the policy council (2002). Dina Castro and her colleges (2004) found in their study of parent involvement in Head Start that although 76% of the volunteers were parents, 59% of those parent volunteers only came into the center one or two times a year. The research team proposed asking, “How can we make parent involvement happen?” instead of asking, “is parent involvement beneficial?” A change such as this in the perspective of involvement could open the door to better communication, confidence, and quality relationships with families and center staff. Other barriers impacting parent participation in Head Start include long work hours of parents, parent-staff communication, needing English as a Second Language to speak with staff, and young children in the home that need constant care (Castro et. al., 2004; Lamb-Parker, Piotrkowski, Baker Kessler-Skiar, Clark and Peay, 2001). When families’ needs can be

addressed and taken to heart by staff, perhaps parent engagement can be nurtured to the point that parents find a sense of place in the Head Start center.

In sum, parent involvement in early education programs has historically been used as a bridge between the home and school, through parents' efforts to learn about their children's education and through policies which have sought to strengthened family-school partnerships. Evidence supports the potential benefits of participation of parents including involvement in early education programs like Head Start and Migrant Head Start (Hill & Taylor, 2004). Such programs may be most crucial for families who struggle with poverty, language barriers, mobility, depression, and social isolation (Lamb-Parker et al., 2000; Lubeck & deVries, 2010; Slaughter, Lindsey, Nakagawa & Kuehne, 1989), such as migrant farmworker families (Smith & Siantz, 1994; Kloosterman, Skiffington & Sanchez, 2003). Theoretical perspectives on children's development and parent involvement offer lenses to examine the ways families engage in the early education of their children. The following section discusses two theories which offer insight into parents' perspectives for becoming involved in their children's education.

### **Theoretical Perspectives and Parent Involvement**

Theoretical perspectives provide the foundation for research on parent involvement in education. This section of the literature review will describe two major theories related to parent involvement. The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997) which is a psychological theory applied to the study of parent involvement. The inquiry will also use Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Approach (1978) which emphasizes the cultural underpinnings which influence social interactions among people.

## **Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement**

The Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model (1997) is a psychological theory applied to parent involvement. In this perspective processes and decisions most important to parents becoming involved in their children's education are the focus. In addition, the theory is used to describe elements or variables and the patterns of influence at critical points in the parent involvement process (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Hoover-Dempsey et al., (2005) suggests that parents are motivated by two main belief systems: role construction for involvement and a sense of efficacy around helping their children. Role construction is defined by parents' positive beliefs about what they should do to engage in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Efficacy is defined as parents' perceptions of the positive impact of their actions on their children's success in school (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). Walker et al. (2005) revised the model with two other constructs related to parents' motivation: invitations to involvement from others and parents' life context. Invitations focus on parents' perceptions of examples from schools, teachers, and children which motivate parents to become involved. Invitations from educators provide the starting points for two-way communication for the creation of partnerships and studies have suggested they are significant in parents' decisions to become involved (Epstein, 1986; Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Life context as a construct includes elements such as socioeconomic status, knowledge, skills, time, and cultural orientation that allow for or encourages parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Walker et al., 2005). The theory is relevant to the study in that it helps to frame an understanding of migrant parents' beliefs about how they should construct roles in their children's education, it further offers insight into family life context that influence parents' decisions to become involved. The theory

additionally acknowledges potential “invitations” provided by Migrant Head Start teachers to the parents which may encourage parent involvement in Migrant Head Start.

### **Vygotsky’s Cultural Historical Approach**

Vygotsky’s Cultural Historical Approach (Vygotsky, 1978) is rooted in the history of human development, culture, and social interactions within the environment. The theory suggests that *human* development is fundamentally different from that of other species because humans create and elaborate their own contexts with tools and symbols within their environment that reflect their culture (Moll, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, culture is seen as a historical process that continues to develop across time and place in societies (Moll, 1990). Options depend on race, social class, and circumstances within a society as people are products of the culture that they produce, and these variations influence individual and group development and identity. The theory is grounded in the belief that human development is social by nature, and development results from interrelatedness and interdependence within the social environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Accordingly, social interactions involve both people and cultural artifacts that are language based and theory emphasizes that higher mental functions are the result of social interactions and are culturally transmitted (Daniels, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) stated that every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first between people (interpsychological), and then within of the child (intrapsychological). This applies equally to voluntary attention, to logical memory, and to the formation of ideas. All higher mental functions originate as actual relationships between individuals (Vygotsky, 1978). By emphasizing social interactions, culture, and interrelatedness his theory is useful in understanding how migrant families perceive the home and school context and grasp the process of education from their own

cultural perspective. This is translated to the child's own development and perspectives on learning and taking in information.

The Cultural Historical Approach is grounded in the idea that learning is social by nature. Vygotsky referred to language as a social tool with the capacity to unfold potentials for learning through interactions between people (Daniels, 2008). The Cultural-Historical Approach helps us to understand the context of human activity and growth through socialization and the rootedness of culture as an aspect of communication, learning, teaching, and nurturing relevant to diverse groups. The theory emphasizes linguistic relationships between people, thus suggesting that opportunities for growth and development are created through communication (1978). Vygotsky also believed that other people-teachers, parents, and peers-mediate learning and enculturation through cultural tools, in a two-way process, because knowledge and language pre-exist and are external to the individual (Lerman, 2001). Migrant farmworker families convey teachings to their children in the home by employing their unique cultural perspectives to those teachings. Additionally, through their cultural beliefs, they process their interactions with teachers in the Migrant Head Start center which may or may not facilitate better communication depending on the factors mediating those processes and cultural lenses.

Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler (2005) and Vygotsky's theories synchronized provide a lens for looking at parents' motivational beliefs for constructing roles in their children's education, how educators' invitations encourage parent involvement, and the cultural life context of Migrant Head Start families. The first variable to be examined will be parental role construction. In the passages to follow I will now examine the core constructs as they relate specifically to research conducted with Latino children and families.

## **Role Construction: Social and Cultural Understanding for Latinos**

Parents' capacity to construct roles in their children's education is achieved when parents have a strong understanding of the actions they can take that support their children's success in school. It is shaped by pertinent social groups and personal beliefs which influence parents' ideas about child development, perspectives on responsibility, and their role relevant to the child's schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). To date, role construction as defined by the Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997) has been minimally used to study Latino groups (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2002; Walker, Ice, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2011). The Cultural Historical Approach by Vygotsky may provide additional insight into cultural influences on parents' motivational beliefs for constructing roles in their children's education. Vygotsky's (1978) theory suggests that the home environment shaped by family's social and cultural norms would influence decisions to become involved. Similar to Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Approach (1978) the construct of role construction is shaped by the expectations of pertinent social groups, relevant personal beliefs, and created by parents' experience, and may change over time (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005).

### **Role Construction**

Use of role construction as a construct exists in a number of studies (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Gonzalez & Chrispeels 2004; Lubeck & deVries, 2010; Sheldon, 2002). Sheldon (2002) reported that parents construct roles through social interactions and that both home and school parent involvement was influenced by others, in a survey of 195 parents in urban and suburban elementary schools. As well, Lubeck and deVries' (2010) in a qualitative study of Head Start parents indicated that parent involvement was socially constructed through interactions occurring during parental activities in Head Start centers. Drummond and Stipek

(2004) reported that parents' motivation to be involved were relatively high, but they lacked confidence in defining their roles, in a sample of 234 low-income African American, Caucasian, and Latino families. Similar findings in Anderson and Minke (2007) showed that role construction was positively related to involvement behaviors, but had no direct effect on involvement practices. The literature implies that parents are motivated to construct roles in the education of their children but better ways of understanding how parents can become involved may be needed. Of importance in this literature review will be to better understand how Latino families construct roles and how the Cultural Historical Approach by Vygotsky (1978) can be used to explore cultural perceptions of role construction of migrant farmworker families.

Latino parents' roles in the education of their children have been addressed in a number of empirical studies (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Olmendo, 2004; Perez-Carreón, Drake, and Barton, 2005; Trevino, 2004; Valdez, 1996), including studies that have used the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001; Gonzalez & Chrispeels, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Walker et al., 2011). The following discussion focuses on how Latino families' access social groups to construct their roles in the children's education and how these roles are influenced by their cultural values.

### **Latinos and Social Construction of Roles**

Several studies suggest that Latino parents like other parents socially constructed roles in the education of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Durand, 2011; Perez-Carreón et al., 2005; Chrispeels and Rivero, 2001). The work of Delgado-Gaitan (1991) which focused on Latino parents and parent involvement found that parents used social settings to construct roles in their children's education. By forming their own parent committee for the purpose of learning about the school, parents became more knowledgeable about the school system. Moreover, they



learned about their rights and responsibilities as parents, in a four year ethnographic study of Latino families in pre-kindergarten and elementary schools in California (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). In the study, parents determined that it was their role to be informed about their children and their children's education and through these social networks they were able to engage in learning about their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991). Similarly, Durand (2011) reported that social capital was the most prominent predictor of increasing parent involvement for Latino families, in a longitudinal study of 2,051 Latino parents of kindergarten age children. Perez-Carreón et al., (2005) found that Latino parents of elementary children used support networks to build sustaining relationships in the schools for the purpose of making sense out of the school setting and establishing a voice in their children's education. Although the study found that support networks helped them overcome participation barriers, in contrast it was reported that Latino parents felt isolated and inferior during school meetings such as PTA and other school functions. Some reasons for these feelings included language barriers and their minority and immigrant status. In the study by Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) parents construct roles by involvement through participation in a parent intervention program. The study used ethnography to evaluate a group of 300 recent immigrant Latino parents participating in parent education classes in two elementary school contexts. It was concluded that as parents gained information from the groups in which they were involved. The groups aided them in better understanding what they needed to do to communicate with schools and their children regarding education (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001). These studies provide evidence that Latino parents' role construction is influenced by social engagement with others. Similar findings have been reported in studies of non-Latino populations that underscore the importance of social settings in role construction (Lubeck & deVries, 2010; Sheldon, 2002). The next section addresses how home

and cultural values may play a critical role in how Latino families construct roles in their children's education.

### **Role Construction and Cultural Beliefs**

With a focus on beliefs, some empirical research has found that role construction may be influenced by home and cultural values (Auerbach, 2007; Lopez, 2001; Olmendo, 2004; Trevino, 2004; Valdez, 1996). Among Latino families, Valdez (1996) found that parents' perceptions of their role in education may differ from educators' such that Latino family values of unity and collective understanding, often contrast with the values of mainstream American society that are focused on individual achievement more so. Olmendo (2004) reported that Latina mothers also held family and cultural values that differed from the values being taught in the public schools their children attended. The study found 'respect' to be a pertinent value that Latinos taught their children in the home, but the mothers expressed concerns that their children were not being taught respect towards adults, self, and their teachers in the public schools (Olmendo, 2004). Similar findings were reported in Bermundez and Marquez (1996) which found Latino families held teachers in high esteem, and Valdez (1996) who confirmed that respect for adults was a pertinent value held by Latino families. Trevino (2004) used semi structured individual interviews with open ended questions to study the role in education migrant farmworker parents with high achieving academic children. Results found that parents envisioned superior achievement for their children, held remarkably high expectations for their children, took pride in children's accomplishments, and held strong religious beliefs (Trevino, 2004). Lopez's (2001) case study of parents of high achieving migrant farmworker children reported that parents constructed roles through their values of hard work, life lessons and religious beliefs, which they used to motivate their children in school. This group of studies provides evidence that Latino

families' role construction is shaped by home and cultural values including: strong family values, instilling respect for others, work ethic and religious beliefs which may contribute to how families construct roles in the education of their children (Bermundez and Marquez, 1996; Lopez, 2001; Olmendo, 2004; Trevino, 2004; Valdez, 1996). The next section looks at how the construct of "invitations of teachers" influences how parents become involved in the education of their children the challenges of two-way communication between educators and Latino families.

### **Invitations of Educators and Communication with Latino Families**

According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (2005), teachers' practices of engaging families are often key motivators in how parents respond and make decisions to be active in their children's education. Invitations, as described in the model, suggest that parents view the school as a place where they are welcomed and valued. Specifically how parents perceive that they are welcomed by teachers and other staff and how teachers view their own role as welcoming. Teachers' practices and schools' policies are communicative and characterized by warmth and trust (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005). In Walker et al., (2005) invitations included those from: schools, teachers, and children. While the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997, 2005) offers insight into ways educators can positively engage families through invitations that promote home-school relationships characterized by warmth and trust, the Cultural Historical Approach by Vygotsky's emphasizes the notion of two-way communication, a process of parent engagement that is mediated through the use of cultural tools, in particular, language use in two-way communication between people (Lerman, 2001). For example this two way communication can occur among teachers, parents, and children's peers. This is particularly important for educators working with

families whose first language is other than English, such as Spanish language use among Mexican migrant farmworker families. In the following section I will discuss the construct of invitations while building on the idea that educators and parents, particularly Latino parents, engage in two-way communication.

### **Teacher Invitations, Trust and Warmth**

Invitations of educators can play a key role in parent involvement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Lupiani, 2004; Sheldon, 2002; Walker, et al., 2011). Epstein and Dunbar (1991) have suggested that teachers' attitudes towards families and invitations were the strongest predictor of home and school involvement. Watkins (1997) reported that teacher's positive communications increased parent involvement, and that parents' perceived amount of communication from teachers was significantly related to parent involvement. Drummond and Stipek (2004) found that invitations were the most powerful predictor of parent involvement at home, in a correlation study of 234 low-income African American, Latino and Caucasian families. These findings are consistent with Anderson and Minke (2007) and Lupiani (2004) who concluded that invitations have enormous potential in engaging families in education. Although the majority of studies reported positive effects of invitations leading to parent involvement practices, Halsey (2005) found that teachers tended to employ institutional communication methods, while parents wanted more personal and individual communication styles, in a case study of parents of middle school age children. A majority of studies support invitations as positive contributors to parent involvement and their predictive values holds for Latino families, including migrant farmworkers, as well.

## **Latino Families and Invitations**

Studies of invitations on Latino families have confirmed positive effects of invitations for Latino families (McWayne et al., 2008; Lopez, et al., 2001; Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009; Shah, 2009). In a sample of 147 Latino families from the Chicago Public Schools, Walker et al., (2011) found invitations are a strong predictor of parent involvement, when schools made considerably strong efforts to reach out to families. Shah (2009) reported with Latino families when schools made additional efforts to ‘invite’ parents by making direct contact, and accommodate families by having interpreters available. Results of a study of 374 Latino parents found invitations to be a significant predictor of parent involvement. Additionally, Shah (2009) reported that the presence of Latino teachers and administrators in the schools resulted in Latino parents’ favorable views of the school. These findings are important in light of a study by Seefeldt, et al., (1998) who found that Head Start parents’ favorable perceptions of the program increased the likelihood of parents being involved in their children’s kindergarten year of school. Nzinga-Johnson et al., (2009) reported that relationship quality was the most significant factor that contributed to parent involvement. Even though it was reported to be lower among Latino and African American families, it improved when relationships were characterized by warmth and trust, in a stratified random sample of 431 teachers and 483 parents (Nzinga-Johnson et al., 2009). McWayne et al., (2008) also acknowledged that high quality relationships between educators and parents increased satisfaction with the schools, and that reciprocal dialog between staff and Latino parents may help teachers adapt culture-specific methods to the classroom environment. Lopez, et al., (2001) looked at parents, schools and educators, in high performing migrant schools in Texas, using interviews and observations. Likewise, findings show that when

schools and educators make commitments to reaching out to Latino migrant families, better home-school relationships are formed (Lopez, et al., 2001).

In sum, most studies confirm that educator's efforts to reach out to families (including Latino families and migrant farmworker families) through invitations and practices that are characterized by warmth and trust encourage parent involvement. Efforts having these qualities tended to result in positive effects on parents' involvement in the education of their children, such as better communication and dialog between educators and families (CITE). However, other studies suggest that deeper communication practices with Latino families may often be more complex due to cultural and linguistic barriers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Perez-Carreon, et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2003).

### **Communication with Latino Families**

A number of empirical studies of immigrant Latino families have found language to be a barrier in communication with educators and in engaging in parent involvement (Bernhard, Lefebvre, Kibride, Chud, Lange, 1998; Carreon et al., 2005; McWayne, Campos, Owsianik, 2008; Ramirez, 2003; Romo, 1984). Using group interviews, Ramirez (2004) studied 40 parents from Mexican immigrant families and found that parents did not describe schools as welcoming and trusting places, characteristic of quality invitations. Parents in this study also identified language barriers with school administrators and teachers as one of the obstacles to communication with the school (Ramirez, 2003). Likewise, Perez-Carreon, et al., (2005) reported that language barriers were one of the core obstacles of immigrant Latino families in communicating effectively with teachers and additionally, parents felt less respected by educators when they could not communicate with them. Although McWayne, et al., (2008) identified quality relationships as having positive effects on parents' school involvement, the

study also acknowledged language as being a significant predictor of school involvement. Parents demonstrated less involvement and less satisfaction with school contacts, in a study of 171 parents, including non-English parents (28% Polish speakers and 28% Spanish speakers) in a multicultural Head Start program (McWayne, et al., 2008). A Canadian study Bernhard, et al., (1998) examined the views of teachers and parents in several early childhood centers with diverse populations, including Latinos. Findings from this study revealed that teachers sometimes viewed the cultural child development practices of immigrant families negatively and misunderstandings between educators and parents were common, in a sample of 199 teachers and 108 parents (Bernhard, et al., 1998). Romo (1986) found that Chicana mothers felt isolated from schools, and that their own schooling did not prepare them for positive interactions with educators because of their past experiences with discrimination at school. Teacher biases against minority students have also been found in studies of African American children (Cooper, 2003). Delgado-Gaitan (2004) confirmed that of particular importance is that educators' beliefs and practices are respectful of Latino parents' cultural and linguistic differences. While language and cultural barriers have been found to impact the level of involvement and communication practices between educators and parents, other studies have found that positive efforts of educators and the school climate can play an essential role in how minority and Latino families respond to schools.

In sum, the literature reveals that the construct of invitations of teachers characterized by warmth and trust, was consistently related to positive parent involvement outcomes in most studies reviewed, and that these characteristics are effective in supporting parent involvement for Latino families ( Lopez, 2001; Lopez, et al., 2001; McWayne, 2008; Nzinga-Johnson, et al., 2009; Shah, 2009) and these finding are consistent with other studies across varied school

populations (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Epstein, 1991; Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005; Lupiani, 2004; Kohl, Lengua & McMahon, 2002). In contrast, evidence also shows that Latino parents continue to struggle with cultural and linguistic barriers in becoming involved in their children's education, these barriers are not only linguistic, but are the result of past negative experiences related to families' origin and experiences of discrimination (Bernhard, et al., 1998; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Romo, 1986). Some research shows that presence of Latino administrators and teachers aids in helping connect families to school and other studies suggest that quality home-school connections that emphasizes personal contact with families are important (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez et al., 2001; Shah, 2009) and The following section discusses further the cultural and linguistic characteristics within Latino family life context.

### **Life Context of Migrant Farmworker Families**

For the purposes of the current study, life context, is generally defined as parents' socio-economic status, parents' knowledge, skills, time and energy, and family culture (Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (2005) suggest that variations of family life context need to be further examined to target, patterns of resources, and involvement opportunities provided to families. This approach may be especially important when considering the life context(s) of migrant Latino families. Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Approach (1978) furthers this discussion of life context, in that it implies that the tools of a given cultural group function as means of interacting with other groups and society (Daniels, 2008). The theory (Vygotsky, 1978) acknowledges that people are products of their culture including race, social class, and circumstances and that these variations influence individual and group development and identity. Because the nature of the last two sections of this literature review was to explore the constructs of (role construction, invitations and life context) of the Hoover-Dempsey and



Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997) within a cultural context, and to discuss Vygotsky's theoretical approach (1978) can further develop these ideas. Many of the elements of "life context" have already been embedded in the discussion of role construction and invitations. Therefore, the purpose of this section will be to extend these discussions of life context issues to the more specific experience of the migrant farmworker population.

### **Barriers Associated with Life Context**

For migrant Latino families there are potentially many barriers within their life context that would influence parental involvement in their young children's education, these include: language and cultural barriers, depression levels, mobility, overcrowded housing, and economic instability (Brantz-Spall, Rosenthal & Wright, 2003; Hanna, 2003; Lopez, et al., 2001; National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2009-2010; Siantz & Smith, 1994). Migrant farmworker families have been found to be one of the poorest of the working poor in America with income levels well below the standard poverty line (National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2009-2010). They often live in crowded and rundown spaces where they reside temporarily while working in the fields (Cranston-Gingras, 2003; National Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Collaboration Office, 2009-2010). Other health focused studies have confirmed depression to be high among migrant farmworker families (Peoples, Bishop, Barrera, Lamas, Dunlap & Gonzales, 2010). Specifically, Smith and Siantz (1994) reported stress and depression levels to be high among parents of Migrant Head Start children. As might be expected in a study of 60 Mexican American parents of 3-8 year olds these circumstances correlated negatively with developmental outcomes of their children. Migrant children frustrated by academic failure have often been found to leave school or drop out early to work in the fields with their families (Child Labor Law, 2008; Cranston-Gingras, 2003). While

studies exemplify the barriers that migrant farmworker families face in their mobile lives, other studies have found quality in many aspects of migrant farmworker cultural life context.

### **Life Context as Voice and Opportunity**

While much of the research on migrant families has focused on barriers to life context a few studies have highlighted the positive aspects of the migrant farmworker's life (Lopez, 2001; O'Hagin & Harnish, 2001; Trevino, 2004). Lopez (2001) and Trevino (2004) both reported that migrant families' life context incorporated values of a hard work ethic, strong religious beliefs, and family. These elements of life context influence children in the family to achieve high academic outcomes in schools. Lopez (2001) discussed how migrant parents' unique orientation towards work was used as a life lesson. Finally, one study (O'Higin & Harnish, 2001) explored the musical culture of migrant farmworker families in Northern Ohio, using observation and interview techniques with six migrant farmworker families. The study revealed that music played a central role in families' lives and was used to pass along traditions, a sense of community and cultural values to their children (O'Higgins & Harnish, 2001). Music may be a means by which parents with young children engage in learning activities and could, in turn, be a means of involving parents in Migrant Head Start. These studies reveal the cultural aspects of the lives of migrant farmworkers that create their unique life context. Because the research on the lives of the migrant farmworker population in America remains limited, more research in this area is needed.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this literature has shown that parent involvement has many benefits to children's development, is an important component of Migrant Head Start, and that parent involvement may be culturally constructed by diverse groups including migrant farmworkers. It is also clear in the literature that the gaps are related to pertinent questions of parent involvement practices of

migrant farmworker families and practices of educators working with diverse groups. While some studies have look at parent involvement and migrant workers, those studies have mainly involved families of older children and thus more work in the area of early education is needed. Head Start's goal of involving families can be improved through studies of parent involvement practices of diverse groups and considering the roles that early educators play in engaging families.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This qualitative study was designed to gather in-depth data on migrant farmworker parental belief and views involving their children's early education, and aims to explore teachers' practices of parent involvement. Migrant farmworker families are one population that has been minimally studied in published research because of the multiple barriers they face in their complex lives (Lopez et al., 2001). Because migrant families are an understudied group, this inquiry took a qualitative approach. Qualitative studies provide opportunities for exploration of groups less studied, provide verbal representation of data (Babbie, 2007; Cresswell, 1994) and provide descriptive details on processes, relationships, and situations (Peshkin, 1993). The use of ethnography was chosen because it allows for "thick description" of data (Geertz, 1973) and is one method commonly used with culturally diverse groups.

This chapter will first provide a brief overview of the ethnographic approach and introduce the ethnographer. Second it will describe the region and the sites of the study including data on parent involvement at the three sites. Third, describes how the research obtained access to the community through: volunteering in the program, obtaining access to the community, recruitment procedures, building trust and giving back to the community. Fourth, demographic and descriptive data from the parent and teacher are presented in tables and written text. Finally, the method of analysis and focus groups for member checking will be presented.

#### **Ethnographic Approach**

##### **Ethnography**

The method of ethnography has often been chosen to study cultural groups. Ethnography is based in the tradition of anthropology and fieldwork, best used in the comparative study of

cultural practices (Malinowski, 1922). Malinowski acknowledged that a good ethnography sensitized the reader to the beliefs, values, and practices of people in other cultures and societies (Harvey & Myers, 1995). In this tradition, ethnography was an important for this study in that it captured parents' beliefs and views towards education, their communication with educators, and the life circumstances that influence their views on education in the United States. It further captured the views of teachers working at Migrant Head Start, and how they understood the topic of parent involvement related to migrant families. The ethnography as an approach was ideal for a study of migrant farmworker parents and the teachers who teacher their children. It provided rich data that allowed a depth of understanding of the beliefs, views, and practices of the two groups within one setting through the use of in-depth interviews and observation.

Ethnography allowed for exploration of the settings, interactions, and phenomena that occurred, though participant observation. It gave the researcher opportunities to coexist with the community during the research process by “being in the world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This approach allowed the researcher firsthand knowledge, or witnessing of processes and experiences that, in turn, increased the rich detail of the study and provided a greater perspective on how migrant farm worker families of Mexican origin view construct roles in their children's education, parent and teacher communication practices, and the determinates of life context that influence parent involvement. Ethnography was a good fit for this study for the “thick description” of testimonies that came out of the analysis of the in-depth interviews and observations that were used for this study.

## **Data Analysis Approach and Methods**

### **Modified Grounded Theory**

A grounded theory approach as described by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was adopted in the analysis, but modified to take cues from existing theories (Seaman, 2008), referred to as a “modified grounded theory approach.” The grounded theory approach allowed for the continual collection of data along with the process of analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) and the use of the theoretical lenses. In grounded theory concepts are the basic units of analysis and from those concepts categories are further developed through grouping of the concepts. Concepts are further developed based on their properties and dimensions of the phenomenon, the conditions, actions and the consequences under which it is expressed (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). During this process categories can be related in support of a particular theory. In this study a modified grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006; Seaman, 2008) was adopted to allow for the voices and lived experiences of parents and teachers to determine the usefulness of the theories, or the modification of the theories from the findings.

### **Coding and NVivo**

The coding and analysis was performed based on the approach by Corbin and Staruss (1990) and aided by the use of NVivo 10, a program developed by Qualitative Solutions and Research International (QSR). Open coding was first used for each of the teacher and parent interviews. This process allowed for breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and creating initial categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Within the NVivo 10 program, theses were the initial categories that were created during the first analysis of the transcripts. Second axial coding gave definition to important categories that emerged (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Seaman, 2008). Third, initial categories (themes) were defined focusing on important categories

and selective coding of sub-categories following the approach of Corbin and Strauss, (1990). The use of NVivo 9 also helped to merge data categories into larger encompassing categories and refine the data sub-categories (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

## **The Ethnographer**

### **Investigator Authenticity**

I am a former Michigan Migrant Head Start employee who worked for four years at a Migrant Head Start center in the state (not one of the selected sites), as a teacher and former director. Through this previous work, I was already knowledgeable about the sites of the study, programs structure, teachers and staff, and migrant families. I already knew a few of the staff at these three sites and shared a connection with them having previously worked in the program and attended state meetings and trainings. I later held the position of project manager on a Federal Head Start grant that helped Migrant Head Start teachers get associate and bachelor degrees in early childhood education. In this work I had the opportunity to visit all the Migrant Head Start centers in Michigan and talk about education options with their teachers.

As a researcher inquiring into a linguistically and culturally diverse population, I was advantaged by my fluency in Spanish and somewhat knowledgeable of the culture based on the 5 year period I had lived in Mexico. My Spanish was primarily learned over that five year period prior to working for Migrant Head Start. That experience helped me tremendously in connecting with the families because I could speak to them in Spanish and had familiarity with Mexican culture. Being able to connect with families on a cultural and linguistic level helped to authenticate my work. That said, like many researchers who are outsiders to a community I faced my own challenges.

## **Personal Challenges**

Before I began contacting families for my study, and was merely in the process of being in the field and note taking, I felt challenged by my own fears of entering into this remote community with a voice recorder, a set of interview questions, and note pad in hand writing things down. I was aware that migrant families live in poor conditions of migrant housing, frequently sharing one room for the family to sleep in, and sharing communal showers and toilet facilities with other migrant workers. I expected that many of my participants would be working illegally in this country. Although I speak Spanish and had spent time in Mexico, I was also sensitized to the fact that these families were of Hispanic origin and may have experienced encounters of racism by other Americans. My own personal characteristics of being a middle class white woman in higher education contrasted with their lives in many ways. These differences made me aware of my position as an outsider in this community. But my faith in my work and belief in what I was doing gave me strength to overcome many of my insecurities in reaching out to this community. In this way, I began my work, slowly by first becoming a part of the program and visiting the centers and taking notes on the settings. Long drives over rural country roads in Northern Michigan led to three migrant Head Start centers which were the sites of the study.

## **Study Sites**

### **Northwestern Michigan**

Northwestern Michigan has had a sustained history of agriculture and is recognized as a national leader in fruit production. Initially the region was known for the lumber industry but as the production of lumber declined, the fruit industry began to grow (Garrett, 2012). By the 1920's larger farms began to replace smaller family owned operations in the region and many



growers began to import migrant labor (Absolute Michigan, 2012). Currently, Michigan's national rank is first in blueberry and tart cherry production and third in apple production (Department of Natural Resources, 2012) and the majority of this production comes from the Northwest corner of the Lower Peninsula. Migrant labor is vital to the local industry and economy. Today Michigan's agriculture industry generates \$7 billion dollars annually and much of the harvest depends on migrant labor (Absolute Michigan, 2012). Each summer many migrant farmworker families come to the region to work, and those with small children can enroll them in several of the Migrant Head Start centers in the region.

### **Migrant Head Start Centers**

Three Migrant Head Start centers, Arrow Head Lake, Boyne Farms, and Crystal Valley (names changed) were the data collection sites of the study. Of the sites, Crystal Valley was the one designated as the main collection site because it remained open longer than the other two sites. By designating one site the main site allowed the research to establish deeper relationships with the parents and Migrant Head Start staff for the purpose of implementing an in-depth study.

Migrant Head Start has a strong emphasis on parent involvement in the program through volunteering (Lubeck & deVries, 2000). Documentation of parent involvement through volunteering is kept on the number of volunteers and parents that visited the center during the program year. This is collectively called the PIR report which provides summaries of yearly data. The following table of centers and volunteers shows the number of volunteers at each of the sites, including parent volunteers during the 2011 and 2012 season. The table also includes the approximate funded enrollment of children for each of the sites. Please see table 1.

Table 1: Centers and Volunteers 2012

| <b>Center</b>   | <b>Total<br/>Volunteers</b> | <b>Parent<br/>Volunteers</b> | <b>Funded<br/>Enrollment</b> |
|-----------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Arrow Head Lake | 58                          | 25                           | 65                           |
| Boyne Farms     | 116                         | 48                           | 65                           |
| Crystal Valley  | 105                         | 69                           | 65                           |

The descriptive information in table 1, taken from the 2011 Program Information Report for Michigan Migrant Head Start (PIR, 2011-2012), gives an idea of how many parents become involved in the program in some capacity. However, it does not provide much information on the varying ways families volunteer. The report indicates that these are the complete set of volunteers for the season, including classroom volunteers, those participating in parent meetings, cleaning the center, and any other type of volunteer work that parents might be involved in at the center.

### **Year of Drought**

The summer of 2012 was one of the worst droughts in US history. Michigan was one of many states declared a natural disaster area by the US Department of Agriculture (2012). In addition to being affected by the drought, Michigan experienced unusual weather patterns which brought about extreme heat in early March. This early warming caused many of the orchard fruits to blossom early; which resulted in damage of the fruit producing buds when normal colder temperatures bringing frost and ice returned to the region. In Michigan over 90% of the cherry harvest was destroyed, in addition to sever damage to peaches, pears, and apples (News Advocate of Manistee, 2012). The damage limited crop production in the state, which had a direct effect on the migrant labor.

During the State-wide Parent Policy Council Meeting for Migrant Head Start, held in July, in Lansing the weather was discussed as having impacted child enrollment in the program because fewer migrant families came to Michigan. One parent at the meeting spoke up and said that she had talked to families back in Texas who typically migrate to Michigan but they decided not to this year because they were worried that there was not enough work and because of the anticipation of a weak fall harvest. A PBS documentary reported that the devastation had left growers advising workers not to drive north and that emergency housing had been needed for many families (Jacobson, 2012). The lack of work resulted in fewer families coming to Northwestern Michigan and enrolling children in the Migrant Head Start centers. During the State Parent Policy Council Meeting for Michigan Migrant Head Start, the State Family Service Specialist communicated to the group that only 26% of funded enrollment had been met in June. During the final parent meeting of the season held in September the impact of the weather on the crops, thus affecting the program, continued to be part of the discussion. In the final meeting it was reported that although enrollment overall had improved somewhat, Migrant Head Start in Michigan only met 54% of their funded enrollment state-wide according to the State Director of Migrant Head Start. Although the drought effected the number of families enrolled at the Migrant Head Start centers, and impacted the amount of work families had during the 2012 season, the researcher was still able to identify enough parents and teachers willing to participate in the study.

### **Obtaining Access to the Community**

As previously mentioned, my access to the Michigan Migrant Head Start Program initially stemmed from my involvement in the program as a project manager for a Head Start grant and as a former employee at Migrant Head Start. Over the course of those years, I became

acquainted with other teaching staff and center directors around the state. A few of these staff still continued to work in the program and knew me and about my previous involvement in Migrant Head Start. One of the long standing directors, Margarita (name changed), has been a center director for over 13 years. Margarita was instrumental in helping me access the Migrant Head Start programs in the Northwest region of the state. My long standing acquaintance facilitated my access into her center (Crystal Valley) by introducing me to the families and staff, as well as assisted me with communications with the two other centers as I began my initial volunteer work at the sites.

### **Volunteering at the Centers**

From June through October, I immersed myself in the three programs as a volunteer to gain familiarity with the daily operations of the centers and learn from observation and casual conversations with the teaching staff, families, and other personal. As a volunteer, I primarily worked in the classroom and helped out during parent meetings and events such as literacy night, clean-up day, and other center activities. The duties I performed ranged from translating at parent meetings, working individually with children, working with teachers, and even cleaning and helping prepare food. Once, I even assisted teachers and kitchen staff to prepare an authentic Mexican meal to be served at a parent meeting. Reaching these centers, particularly Crystal Valley and Boyne Farms, was a long drive down rural back roads, surrounded by National Forest. Often I would drive over a hundred miles just to attend a parent meeting or spend the day at the center volunteering. But the time and effort enhanced what I learned, built trust, and was allowed me to eventually give back to the program.

### **Recruitment of Teachers**

My first contacts with teachers were at the centers primarily through volunteering in the classrooms. I approached my volunteer time with the teachers as a helper and as a professional who had previously worked as a Migrant Head Start teacher. I spent time in the classrooms of each teacher who participated in the study as well as with others who were not involved in the study. Primarily, I read to children, work individually with children on literacy related activities, playground times, and meal times. Initially engaged in conversations related to the classroom and the children and later I would mention my study. All of the teachers I asked individually to participate agreed to the interviews. At the Crystal Valley center and Boyne Farms center the Education Specialists helped by coordinating the interviews during times when the children were napping.

### **Recruitment of Parents and Initiating Contact with Families**

My access to the parents of Migrant Head Start was facilitated through involvement with the parent meetings, and family literacy nights, and other evening activities. Participating in these meetings included translating and helping families with paperwork. It was also during these meetings that the center director introduced me to the families and gave me time to introduce the study and recruit parents interested in participating. I would introduce myself and break the ice by saying that “although Spanish was not my first language it was my favorite language because I enjoyed the sound of the language when spoken.” I would also tell families about my previous involvement as a former teacher and director in Migrant Head Start to further gain trust. I would tell them that this study was a requirement to finish my college degree, and give them time to ask questions about the study. Some of the parents did ask questions. After questions, I would ask if anyone was interested in participating, then I would pass around a signup sheet for their names

and contact numbers. I stayed for the remainder of the parent meeting and engaged in conversation with the families and staff present. At two of the centers the meetings concluded by playing a game in which everyone present would hold hands in a circle and try to pass a hula-hoop from one person to another. I participated in the activity with the families and we laughed together as we tried to complete this task. From all three of the Migrant Head Start centers I had an adequate number of participants who gave their contact information and showed interest in participating in the study.

### **Building Trust with Families and Giving Back to the Community**

As I conducted more interviews, I learned various ways to connect with families on a more personal level through my family and by providing them education resources. My older daughter played soccer with a group of children outside the migrant camp one night while I interviewed, and she watched younger children on a couple of occasions. I found that talking about my children was a great way to connect with parents. On a couple of occasions parents asked me for information about obtaining a GED. Because I work in the local school district I was able to assist them with information about GED preparation and testing. Another married couple who wanted to settle in the community over the winter asked me about the schools. Because of my occupation as a teacher in the district, again I was able to share knowledge of the local school district.

As summer ran into early fall, I returned to my teaching position at the alternative high school where I worked. I still continued to work with the centers by attending parent meetings and volunteering on weekends, and I began to involve my high school students. Working with the Director of Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start we developed a partnership. A Couple of teaching staff from Crystal Valley came to visit my school to talk to my high school students

about the Migrant Head Start program. We made board books in class for the children, which could be used in the preschool classrooms or given to the families. In October, the alternative school was visited by a group of exchange students from the Netherlands and with my students and the exchange students we organized a two day volunteer trip to the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start. On this occasion we brought together my high school students, the exchange students, and the young children from Migrant Head Start. These volunteer efforts not only created a wonderful experience for all involved but brought in over \$6,000.00 in in-kind donations to the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start. I learned that a dissertation can mean more than just my own work; it can mean an impact on a community in a positive and productive way.

### **Participants**

There were 33 parents who gave contact information and showed interest in the study during the parent meetings when the study was discussed. Parents were distributed across the three centers, 14 parents from Crystal Valley, 11 parents from Arrow Head Lake, and 8 parents from Boyne Farms. Fourteen parents ultimately joined the study, three fathers, ten mothers, and one grandmother. Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start had a total of seven parents, Arrow Head Lake had four parents, and Boyne Farms had three parents who participated in interviews. The target number of parent participants was four at each site. The variation was due to the fact that at Crystal Valley three of the first participants did not want to do voice recorded interviews. So others were chosen who were willing to be recorded because the recordings provided richer data and voice. At Boyne Farms only three parents were able to be contacted.

The teachers who participated in the study were all either asked by myself during volunteer time and/or the Education Specialists at each center helped to identify teachers interested in participating. In total six teachers and one assistant teacher were asked to participate

in the study and all of them followed through with the interviews. In total there were two teachers from Arrow Head Lake and one assistant teacher, two teachers from Boyne Farms, and two teachers from Crystal Valley. The target number was two teachers at each center, and that was met at two of the centers and exceeded at the third.

In the sections to follow I will provide more detailed information on the origins, language, work histories and patterns as well as education of parents. I will also provide information on teachers, teacher experiences and background, bilingual abilities of teachers, teachers' perceptions of parent relations in the educational environment (Tables 3.1- 3.7)

## **Descriptions of the Participant Families**

### **Origin of the Families in the Study**

Earlier studies of the migration trends of Latino migrant farmworkers have shown predictable migration patterns. Massey (1987) documented migration of farmworkers from particular sending communities in Mexico to receiving communities in the United States. Within the last two decades, migrant farmworkers have become a more heterogeneous population, including indigenous groups from provinces in the Southern regions of Mexico, as well as other Mexican Nationals, and American citizens (Romanowski, 2003).

The migrant farmworker parents studied in Northwestern Michigan were diverse in origin. Table 2 provides an overview of parents region of birth and language. Of the 14 parents interviewed, three of the parents reported being born in America. Two parents were from indigenous communities in Oaxaca, Mexico, and spoke Mixteco as their native language one was from an indigenous community in Chiapas, Mexico, and spoke Tzotzil, the native dialect. The remaining eight participants were from various other communities in Mexico. Language changes



were apparent in indigenous families who reported Spanish rather than the native dialect being spoken in the home. Language shift (Makihara, 2005) was also observed in three of the families who spoke primarily Spanish and some English in the home (Table 2).

Table 2. Regions of Birth and Language

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Birth Region</b> | <b>Language</b> | <b>Spouse's Language</b> | <b>Current Home Language</b> |
|-------------|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| America     | USA                 | Spanish         | N/A                      | Spanish                      |
| Rosa Maria  | Mexico              | Mixteco         | Tzotzil                  | Spanish                      |
| Jovana      | Mexico              | Mixteco         | Mixteco                  | Spanish                      |
| Juan        | Mexico              | Tzotzil         | Mixteco                  | Spanish                      |
| Tomasa      | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Brayan      | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Fernanda    | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Reyna       | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Chrisanto   | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Santa       | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Rosalinda   | USA                 | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish                      |
| Sancha      | Mexico              | Spanish         | English                  | Spanish/English              |
| Isabella    | USA                 | Spanish/English | Spanish/English          | Spanish/English              |
| Zolij       | Mexico              | Spanish         | Spanish                  | Spanish/English              |

Although diversity of the population was observed in the study, unity existed among the parents who emphasized the importance of their cultural and language heritage and wanting their children to be aware of their Mexican roots. “They should know about Mexico- their roots, ‘*Que sepan cómo es México, cómo – sus raíces,*’” said Santa, a Mexican born migrant worker with

three children in Migrant Head Start. In addition to a shared language and cultural identity, families shared the obligation of working in the fields.

### **Migrant Labor Profile**

“I take them to work so they can know how hard it is being in the field and to be working. Maybe like that they’ll finish high school and, you know, go to college and study something so they won’t be working in the field,” said America, a mother of four, eight months pregnant with her fifth child, and still working in the field at the time of the interview.

Table 3 provides an overview of parents’ migration pattern, hours worked, and whether both parents work. . Although the 2012 drought brought on less work for migrant labors in Northwestern Michigan compared to years in the past, parents reported working an average of 8 to 12 hour days, with the exception of two parents who reported no set hours. A few parents did comment (during the interviews) that they had had some days this year when they were idle because of lack of work due to destruction of crops. All parents interviewed reported that both parents in the home worked in the field with the exception of America, a single mother who lived with her mother and step-father. There were three pregnant women interviewed, two who were eight months pregnant; all reported working. All the parents interviewed reported migrating to either Texas or Florida during the winter months, with the exception of one parent who reported that the family was resident workers. Resident workers tend to settle in Michigan year around and work all year in the state. (See Table 3).

Table 3. Migrant Labor Profile

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Winter Work Location</b> | <b>Daily Hours Worked</b> | <b>Both Parents in Migrant Labors</b> |
|-------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| America     | Florida/Texas               | 12                        | No (single parent)                    |
| Rosa Maria  | Florida                     | No set hours              | Yes                                   |

Table 3:Cont'd

|           |          |              |     |
|-----------|----------|--------------|-----|
| Jovana    | Florida  | 10-12        | Yes |
| Juan      | Florida  | No set hours | Yes |
| Tomasa    | Texas    | 8            | Yes |
| Brayan    | Texas    | 8            | Yes |
| Fernanda  | Texas    | 8            | Yes |
| Reyna     | Texas    | 8            | Yes |
| Chrisanto | Florida  | 8            | Yes |
| Santa     | Florida  | 8            | Yes |
| Rosalinda | Texas    | 10           | Yes |
| Sancha    | Florida  | 8            | Yes |
| Isbella   | Texas    | 10           | Yes |
| Zolij     | Michigan | 8            | Yes |

### **Education and English Language Ability**

All the parents in the study reported having some education in either Mexico or the United States but overall education levels were low (Table 4). Only five of the 14 parents had finished high school and of those, two had finished high school in the United States and three had finished high school (escuela secundaria) in Mexico. Only the two participants who attended school in the United States reported speaking English very well. All the other parents reported speaking a little English or none at all. In general education levels and English language abilities were low among the sample.

Table 4. Education and English Language

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Attended School</b> | <b>Grade Completed</b> | <b>English Language Ability</b> |
|-------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| America     | United States          | 8                      | Very well                       |
| Rosa Maria  | Mexico                 | 9                      | None                            |
| Jovana      | Mexico                 | 6                      | None                            |
| Juan        | Mexico/US              | 10                     | A little                        |
| Tomasa      | Mexico                 | 13                     | None                            |
| Brayan      | Mexico                 | 12                     | A little                        |
| Fernanda    | Mexico                 | 12                     | None                            |
| Reyna       | Mexico/US              | 6                      | A little                        |
| Chrisanto   | Mexico                 | 9                      | A little                        |
| Santa       | Mexico                 | 9                      | A little                        |
| Rosalinda   | Mexico/US              | 11                     | A little                        |
| Sancha      | Mexico                 | 12                     | A little                        |
| Isabella    | United States          | 12                     | Very well                       |
| Zoliy       | Mexico                 | 9                      | A little                        |

### **Family and Child Profile**

Table 5 provides demographic information about parental ages, number of children and their ages, as well as the amount of time children have participated in Migrant Head Start. The ages of the parents in the study ranged from 19-39. America's mother, Reyna, who helps raise her grandchildren, was age 52 at the time of the interview. America had been a teen mother. Her oldest daughter, Zulema, was 15 at the time of the interview and America was 14 when she was born. Isabella was also a teen mother, being 18 when her son was born. Both Isabella and America were children of migrant farmworker parents. The number of children of the parents

who were interviewed ranged from 1-4, but three of the mothers were pregnant at the time of the interview, including America who was expecting her fifth child. All of the parents interviewed except for two had their children in the Migrant Head Start program for at least two years. Several of the parents had much familiarity with the program and five of them stated having over 6 years of experience with it. The overall range of the years parents had sent their children to Migrant Head Start in Michigan was 1-15 years (Table 5).

Table 5. Family and Child Profile

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Age of Parent</b> | <b>Number of Children</b> | <b>Age Range of Children (years)</b> | <b>Years in Migrant Head Start</b> |
|-------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| America     | 30                   | 4                         | 3-15                                 | 15                                 |
| Rosa Maria  | 22                   | 2                         | 2-3                                  | 2                                  |
| Jovana      | 30                   | 3                         | 3-9                                  | 2                                  |
| Juan        | 24                   | 2                         | 2-3                                  | 2                                  |
| Tomasa      | 28                   | 3                         | 9 months                             | 2                                  |
| Brayan      | 33                   | 3                         | 9 months                             | 2                                  |
| Fernanda    | 29                   | 1                         | 3                                    | 1                                  |
| Reyna*      | 52                   | 4                         | 3-15                                 | 15                                 |
| Chrisanto   | 37                   | 3                         | 5-10                                 | 6                                  |
| Santa       | 31                   | 3                         | 5-10                                 | 6                                  |
| Rosalinda   | 30                   | 2                         | 2-3                                  | 4                                  |
| Sancha      | 36                   | 2                         | 3-8                                  | 2                                  |
| Isabella    | 19                   | 1                         | 9 months                             | 1                                  |
| Zoliy       | 39                   | 3                         | 3-9                                  | 9                                  |

\*Reyna is a grandmother

## Teacher Participants

### The Migrant Head Start Teachers

The teachers in the study represented all three of the Migrant Head Start centers and there were two teachers from each of the three locations, and one teacher assistant from Bear Lake who participated (Table 6). They were all female and ranged in age from 22 to 59 years of age. Six of the seven teachers interviewed were lead teachers in the classroom. Adrianna was the only assistant teacher who participated in the study. All of the interviews were conducted in English and transcribed in English (Table 6).

Table 6. Teaching Position and Age

| Name     | Center          | Teaching Position | Age |
|----------|-----------------|-------------------|-----|
| Olga     | Crystal Valley  | Teacher           | 40  |
| Adrianna | Arrow Head Lake | Teacher Assistant | 25  |
| Betty    | Arrow Head Lake | Teacher           | 26  |
| Shelly   | Arrow Head Lake | Teacher           | 22  |
| Mary     | Boyne Farms     | Teacher           | 59  |
| Tina     | Crystal Valley  | Teacher           | 27  |
| Naomi    | Boyne Farms     | Teacher           | 22  |

### Relationship with Parents, Language Use, and Years in MHS

Table 7 shows teaching staffs' language use with parents, how they rated their relationship with parents on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being strong, and the number of years they have worked in Migrant Head Start. While the teachers who reported either speaking Spanish, or speaking both English and some Spanish with parents all rated their relationship with families high (8 or 9 out of 10); only one teacher who was English-only speaking reported a strong relationship with families (8 out of 10). The English-only speaking teacher that reported a strong

relationship had further worked in the program the longest of any teacher, 13 years. The other two teachers who were English-only speaking with parents rated their relationships with families the lowest, 4 and 5 out of 10. Please refer to table 7 below.

Table 7: Relationship with Parents, Language, and Years in MHS

| <b>Name</b> | <b>Language Spoken with Parents</b> | <b>Relationship with Parents rated 1-10</b> | <b>Years Working in MHS</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Olga        | Spanish                             | 8                                           | 8                           |
| Adrianna    | Spanish                             | 9                                           | 2                           |
| Betty       | English/Some Spanish                | 8                                           | 1                           |
| Shelly      | English/Some Spanish                | 8                                           | 2                           |
| Mary        | English                             | 8                                           | 13                          |
| Tina        | English                             | 4                                           | 4                           |
| Naomi       | English                             | 5                                           | 1                           |

### **Education Backgrounds of Teachers**

Of the seven teaching staff who participated in the interviews, all but one reported having some college. Three of the teachers reported having a BA degree, two held AA degrees from community colleges, and one reported having had some college. Only one of the teaching staff interviewed (an assistant teacher) had a high school degree. All but two of the teachers had taken a college class related to parent involvement. Please refer to table 8 below on education backgrounds of teacher.

Table 8: Education Backgrounds of Teachers

| <b>Name</b> | <b>College Degree</b> | <b>Parent Involvement Class</b> |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Olga        | Some College          | Yes                             |
| Adrianna    | High School           | No                              |

Table 8: Cont'd

|        |    |     |
|--------|----|-----|
| Betty  | BA | Yes |
| Shelly | BA | Yes |
| Mary   | AA | Yes |
| Tina   | BA | Yes |
| Naomi  | AA | No  |

## **Data Collection Procedures**

### **Parent Interviews**

The parent interviews took place at migrant labor camps located on large farms, in the evening after work hours. Parents were first given a copy of the Institutional Review Board consent form in both Spanish and English. We read over the form together for comprehension and I ask them if they had any questions. All individual parent interviews were conducted by the researcher and all were audio recorded with the exception of three of the 14 parent interviews. Three of the parents declined to be audio recorded so the interviews were handwritten by the researcher. Parents were compensated 20 dollars for their time. However three parents declined the stipends saying they were only interested in helping out. Parent participants were asked to make up a name to remain confidential at the beginning of the interview. The interviews lasted about an hour and fifteen minutes.

### **Language Interviews and Transcriptions**

Parents were given the choice of English or Spanish before the interview began. Two of the parent interviews were done in English and the remaining 12 interviews were conducted in Spanish. Parent interviews in Spanish were transcribed by a native speaker through a



transcription service in California. The English interviews were also transcribed by a paid transcription service. All quotes in Spanish used in this analysis were back translated by a native Spanish speaker from the Spanish to English. The researcher analyzed the original Spanish text prior to the back translation of quotes used in the findings.

### **Teacher Interviews**

All of the teacher interviews took place at the Migrant Head Start Centers, with the exception of one interview at Boyne Farms which was held at a nearby cemetery immediately after work hours because the teacher wanted to sit outside during the interview. Consent was obtained by giving them the consent form and going over the form with the participants. The interviews were conducted primarily during the children's nap time at Crystal Valley and Boyne Farms. The Arrow Head Lake interviews were held following work hours but at the center. At the time of the interview teachers were asked to make up a name for the purpose of remaining confidential and in order not to be identified. All teacher interviews were audio recorded except for one of the seven interviews which were hand recorded. The teacher interviews were all done in English and transcribed by a paid transcription company.

Teachers were compensated 20 dollars for their time. The transcripts were reviewed for accuracy by the researcher. All data analysis was performed by the researcher from the transcriptions.

### **Trustworthiness of Data**

Trustworthiness of data was established through 1) extended time of participation in the program by the researcher, 2) talking to members of the community about particular findings, 3) extended observations, and 4) member checking (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The method of arriving at trustworthiness is described in detail below.

### **Extended Time in the Program and Talking to Members about Findings**

During the study I spent slightly over 100 hours in contact with the program. This included time volunteering in the classroom, attending parent meetings, attending activities, and having informal conversations with other teachers, parents, and staff. Before the focus groups for member checking and during the period in which I had only begun to look at the data, I shared with a couple of parents and staff members a few particular findings. This initial feedback helped me to better understand some of findings and confirm results. The extended time in the community also gave me a good understanding of the program through observations and listening to parent and teacher/ interactions and conversations.

### **Participant Observation**

Participant observation was on-going throughout the study. Its use along with interviews helped to gain a better understand of the data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2007). In this study the researcher used participant observation mainly by volunteering in the centers, attending parent meetings at the centers, attending parent meetings at the Statewide Parent Policy Council Meeting in Lansing. Participant observation helped to describe settings and gain information through observation technique which has enriched the description of the setting, participants, and other events associated with the study.

### **Member Checking**

Additional parents and teachers were recruited for separate focus groups to further address the trustworthiness of the data. The member checking was conducted after some preliminary analysis had taken place by the middle of October. Member checking had to be addressed at this time because the centers were closing and the teachers and parents would be gone for the season. Both Arrow Head Lake and Boyne Farms closed for the season in August.

Typically, these centers in the past had remained opened well into October, November, or even as late as December. However, because of the bad harvest, lack of work, and migrant families pulling out of Northwestern Michigan, the centers were closing early for the season. Only Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start Center remained open into the fall that year. The participants for the member checking were selected from the parents and teachers at Crystal Valley.

### **Parent Focus Groups**

For the parent focus groups, participants were recruited from the initial pool of 14 parents who had given contact information and shown interest in participating in the study. But they were not the same parents who had participated in the in-depth interviews. Because of the small sample size and due to the fact that I could not bring all the parents together for the focus groups, I chose new participants because I felt that the new participants for a focus group would provide a fresh perspective on findings and act as an external reviewer of the member checking process.

The focus group session took place in the evening out at a migrant camp. The night I held the focus group with the parents they were packing and getting ready to leave the migrant camp. The parent focus group for member checking lasted over three hours. Mostly the first hour we spent time breaking the ice and talking about topics not related to the study and we were also waiting for the other parent to arrive. The parents were given a copy of preliminary findings of themes with some sample quotes from parents which represented major ideas that emerged from the data.

### **Teacher Focus Groups**

Teachers for the focus groups were recruited with help from the Education Specialist at the Crystal Valley Center. Because the other centers were closed, and because I did not want to

rely only on the two teachers I had initially interviewed at Crystal Valley, again I (with help from the education Specialist) recruited three teachers who had shown interest in the study initially, but had not participated in the in-depth interviews. As with the parents, I felt that by using new participants in the focus groups I had a fresh perspective on the finding and an outside perspective. There were three participants in the teacher focus group which took place on the last day the center was open in mid- October. Two of the teachers were Hispanic and one was a native English speaker. I summarized major and key finding from the interviews and presented this information to the teachers.

### **Validity and Credibility**

Member checking helped to determine consistency in the data by providing additional information, confirming results, summarizing information, and checking the adequacy of the preliminary findings of the interviews (Guba & Lincoln, 1985).

Through the member checking major themes and sub-categories were endorsed through focus group participants' insight in both the teachers and parent focus groups. On a few occasions the focus groups were essential in adding depth and extending the findings. A few examples that describe how the data from the interviews was discussed and confirmed are given below.

During the teacher focus groups Alejandra and Erica (pseudonyms) were remarking on the many ways staff are flexible with parents to involve them in the program and make time for them. Alejandra remarked, "This year I did a home visit on Saturday and sometimes I do them late at night. Sometimes it is hard for the parents because they come here to work, the employer doesn't give time off but we have to be flexible." Alejandra's statement helped to richen the

understanding of flexibility, in that no one else had spoken about visiting families on the weekends for home visits.

Cindy an English speaking teacher who participated in the focus group also added to the discussion of translation (interpretation) in a meaningful way. She remarked about the use of interpreters that, “When we (teachers) don’t speak Spanish it is harder. I don’t feel like I get enough information when I have to translate.” This statement confirmed what parents and other teachers mentioned about the difficulties and limited communication when interpreters are used.

Parent focus groups also added to the confirmed results and in a few instances added meaning to the data. For example, while Ricardo was discussing the work schedules of parents as a barrier to parent involvement he added, “the parents who work in the warehouses are the ones who least volunteer.” This confirmed that work is a barrier to parent involvement but also it was new information because none of the other parents had mentioned the warehouses and the work schedule of this particular work setting before.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Introduction**

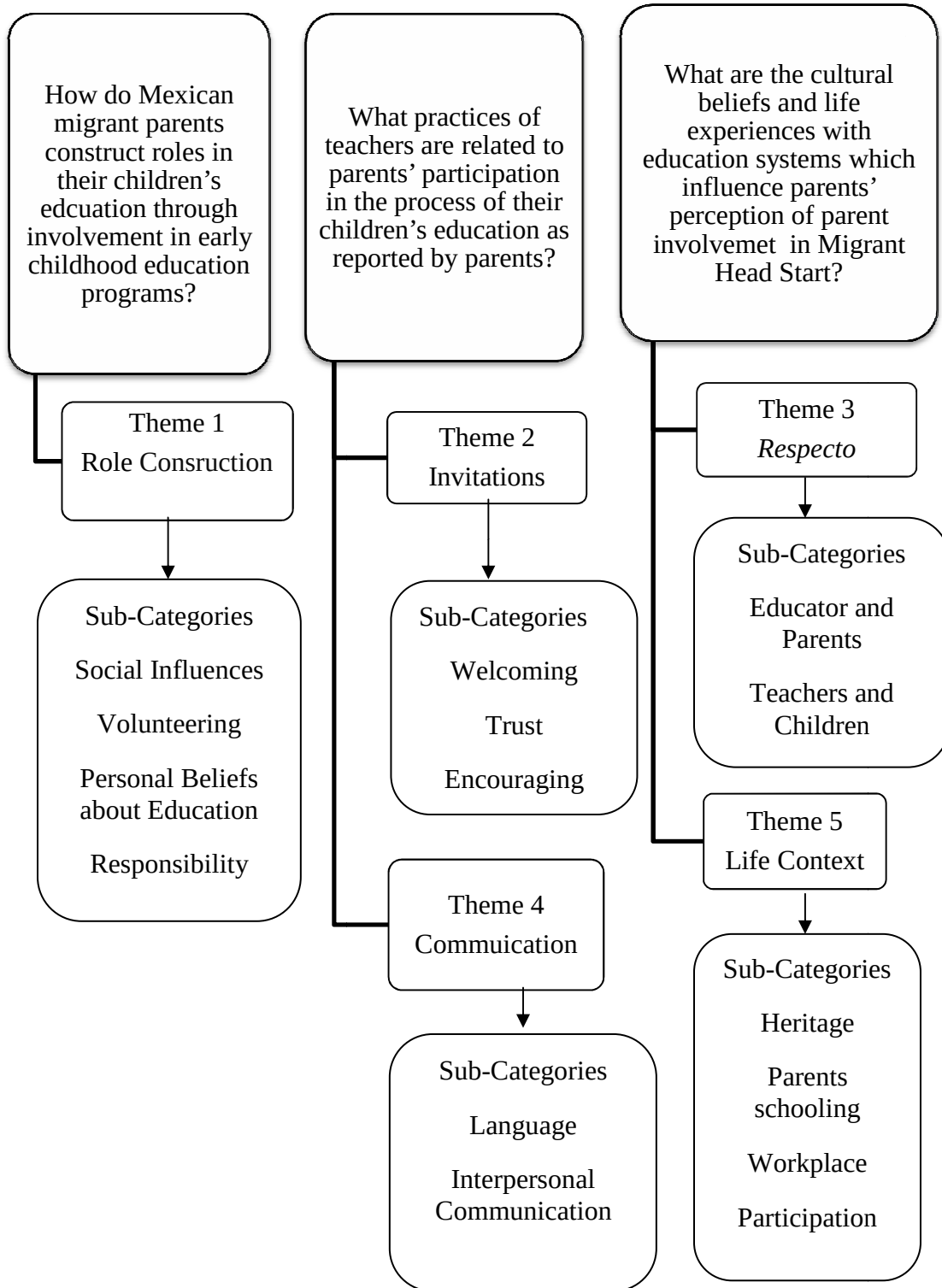
This chapter presents finding which resulted from qualitative analysis of interviews on the topic of parent involvement in Migrant Head Start. The findings from the interviews are organized into two sections: 1) analysis interviews with Migrant Head Start parents, and 2) finding associated with the migrant Head Start teachers' perspectives on parent involvement. Secondly a section which interprets and analyzes teacher and parent findings in relation to parallel research questions and themes. The findings from the interviews with both parents and teachers are present with figures and written text. Last a summary will conclude this chapter.

#### **Part 1: Results of Parent Interviews**

##### **Major Themes from Parent Interviews**

Part one of the findings section presents the results of the in-depth interviews of migrant farmworker parents with children enrolled in Migrant Head Start programs. Research questions were qualitative in nature to allow for a deeper understanding of the pertinent themes being explored of parent involvement in the migrant family. Major themes that emerged from the interview responses included role construction, invitations and communication of teachers, respect and life circumstances. The following figure (Figure 1) provides an overview of the research questions related to the study and how these questions were responded to, based on the coding scheme using a modified grounded theory approach. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: role construction, invitations, respect, communication, and life context. Within each major theme several sub-categories were apparent based on parents' responses during the interviews (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Major Themes of Parent Study



## **Theme One: Role Construction**

Role construction is defined as what parents believe they are expected to do in relation to their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). These beliefs influence how the avenues in which they become involved in their children's education. Role construction is a range of activities that are influenced socially, by cultural values, the individual, and other influences (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). In this study parents reported constructing roles: 1) through social interactions of extended family and others, 2) by volunteering, 3) through personal beliefs about education in the US, and 4) through a sense of responsibility.

### ***Role Construction: Social Influences***

Social influences played a part in how families constructed roles in their children's education. Extended family and other social networks were found to give parents direction in raising their children and in the children's education. Some parents commented about the extended family members (including family in Mexico) that helped them with their thinking about their children's education. Other parents interviewed discussed teachers at the Migrant Head Start centers and other education entities as having influenced their thinking on child development and education. A few parents mentioned that it was only among the immediate family that their decisions to be involved in their children's education were formed.

### **Extended Family**

Four of the parents interviewed mentioned the role of extended family in having an influence on how they constructed roles in their children's education. For these families extended family members were involved by participating in the program. Extended family was found to encourage and support the parent, as well as talk directly to the children about the importance of education and attending school.



America was the only single parent interviewed and for her the role of extended family may have had the greatest influence on her and her children's lives because she lived in a family unit which included herself, her children, her mother and step-father. She constructed motivational roles through her mother's influence and belief that school was important. She commented on what her mother would say about the importance of finishing school as a means for a better life for the grandchildren, "Because the same thing she told us, she tells them too, and she tells me, you know, keep them in school, tell them they have to go to school, finish school so they won't be working the fields."

The other three parents interviewed, all Mexican Nationals, likewise commented about the role of extended family in Mexico with whom they spoke regarding the importance of education and keeping the children in school. "Yo hablo con mi mama, I speak with my mother," Rosalinda mentioned. "My mom is in Mexico, and she tells me, that 'children need to learn, they need to go to school in order to learn.'"

During the interview, Santa mentioned how her sister in Mexico always asked how the children were doing in school. Her sister helped Santa construct roles through conversations about schooling with her and directly with the children. "I have a sister that asks me and –she tells the children. She asks me how the girls are, how they are doing in school. Everything is asked. And then she gives them advice about studying so they can be successful and not struggle in school."

Fernanda also mentioned having her sister (her daughter's aunt) in Mexico to talk to about education. She mentioned how she would talk directly to her 3 year old daughter about school. "When she speaks with her she tells her she's going to school to learn to write and things like that."

### **Teachers or the Immediate Family**

It was also observed that some families did not have extended family members either in the US or Mexico to talk to about their children's education. These parents mentioned teachers or themselves as being the person(s) most influential in their children's education.

A couple of parents mentioned teachers as being the ones who motivated them to be involved in their children's schooling. Juan spoke about the teachers at Hart Migrant Head Start as a positive influence in motivating the family to be involved. Jovana also mentioned that teachers had helped her, "Sometimes we get a good teacher who encourages us about our children's education." She went on to talk about one of her older children who had a disability but had gotten a lot of ideas about helping her son from the Special Education teacher in the Hart Public Schools.

Some parents commented that it was only within the immediate family in which they found support. Sancha mentioned that she was on her own at a young age, and she and her husband were the only ones involved in making decisions about the children's schooling.

### ***Role Construction: Volunteering***

Parents in the study spoke about volunteering as a way of making time to be involved in Migrant Head Start for the purpose of participating in their children's education. In general, the parents understood the various ways that they could volunteer in the program, and even though many commented that time was a factor in their decisions to volunteer, when they did they felt that they enjoyed the experience of being involved in the school. Rosalinda summed it up, "There are many opportunities for us. Help in the center, read to the kids, lull babies, play games, decorations for the classroom. And they have always told us that they appreciate a lot the volunteers when they go."

In general three categories emerged from the interviews on why parents believed that volunteering was a meaningful and beneficial part of being a parent in Migrant Head Start. These were: personal growth through volunteering, having the opportunity to spend time with their children, and being able to be useful and give back to the Migrant Head Start.

### **Parents' Personal Growth through Volunteering**

Three of the parents who had volunteered in the program mentioned that they had learned a lot about child development and had personally grown through the process of volunteering. Migrant Head Start typically gives opportunities for parents to learn about child development, decision making regarding the program's policies and procedures, and teaches other life skills; as a part of the work they do to assist and develop families in poverty. America mentioned that she has learned through volunteering with her husband in a Migrant Head Start program in Florida. "Years back in Florida when I used to be with my first husband I guess, we used to go there to volunteer for a lot of things because you learn a lot of things when you go there, to the meetings."

Fernanda who had the role of Secretary of the Parent Policy Council at the Migrant Head Start center in Hart, commented on her leadership role and the opportunities it provided to share with families and learn. She mentioned her involvement, "The only way that I participate is collaborating with the parent committee. This excited me because I like to share with people and learn different things."

Chrisanto had also participated for three years as the President of the Parent Policy Council at the Bear Lake center. He talked about attending the Statewide Parent Policy Council Meetings in Lansing and the experience he had. "I went to the meetings in Lansing and thought it was important and that one learns a lot when one gets to go to those meetings. It was very good

because they explain to you what is going on with the program and the ways in which the parents can support the school.”

### **Volunteering to Spend Time with Children**

All of the 14 families who participated in the study reported that both parents in the household worked in the fields except for America who was a single parent and as such, the sole head of household. Because of the fact that they all worked, volunteering in the classroom seemed to be a feasible way that parents could spend time and learn about what was going on in the classroom. Several of the parents interviewed mentioned volunteering in the classroom to spend time with their children. “When I have time I go and eat with my children and to see how they are getting along in the classroom and with the other children and teachers. Sometimes I help out on the playground,” said Jovana.

Santa also mentioned that by going to the school to volunteer it gave her time to spend with the children and have lunch with them. “Many times we go, I mean, I go to school to spend time with the children or sometimes I go at lunch time to eat with them.”

Tomasa mentioned that her son also liked it when she went to the school to volunteer. She mentioned that he enjoyed showing her his classroom work. “Sí, mi hijo el mayor, a él le gusta mucho que vaya cuando tienen incluso fiestas y eso. -Yes, my son, the eldest, he likes very much that I go when they even have parties and events of the sort. He likes that I go and shows me everything he has in his chair (where he sits at meal time), everything he has in his classroom, he likes it a lot when I go.”

### **Helping the Program**

The final reason a few parents gave for volunteering in the program was to support the Migrant Head Start center. A few of the parents expressed that they were thankful to have the

Migrant Head Start program for their children and they felt that by making themselves available to volunteer they were giving back to the program that had helped them out while they worked.

Juan understood the importance of being able to give in-kind contributions to the program through volunteer hours. In-kind contributions are matching funds that need to be raised as part of the overall federal budget for Migrant Head Start. He noted the importance of volunteering as a way to help the program. “It is good to volunteer in the class because it helps the children and it also helps the program to have more money for the school.”

Chrisanto who had been involved in the Parent Policy Council as President for Bear Lake also recognized the importance of supporting the program through being involved: “I was in fact president to support the school and make sure it was fine with its issues, so that they wouldn’t close it and it would be open more time. There would be support in the school more than anything, that they saw there was support.”

I asked Luisa during the focus groups if she felt most parents had a good understanding of how the volunteer time actually contributed to the matching in-kind funding which in turn supports the program financially. Luisa, who was a first year President of the Parent Policy Council at Crystal Valley center, felt that there needed to be better communication among the parents about the importance of supporting the school and attending parent meetings. She stated that, “many parents don’t attend the parent meetings because they don’t recognize the importance of assisting the meetings and coming in to volunteer to support the school.”

### ***Role Construction: Personal beliefs about education***

In the study, parents constructed roles based on their personal beliefs about education in the United States. In general, most spoke well about the current education their children were receiving and valued education as a means for their children to get ahead in life. Specifically,

parents' were motivated to talk to their children and discuss education in the following ways: as a positive learning environment, bilingualism, as a path for upward mobility, a belief that there was more educational support in the United States for children. While most parents held positive views on education, at least two parents had negative views the education system in the United States.

### **Positive Environment for Learning**

A couple of the parents mentioned that the education at Migrant Head Start offered a positive learning experience in which they felt the children were in a socially friendly environment which gave them opportunities to learn new things at a young age. One parent mentioned that because the school taught in both languages, children could learn English at a young age. These parents spoke to their children about the positive influences of school and encouraged their children to attend school.

Santa mentioned how she would talk to her children about school being a positive place where they can meet other children and learn. She said, "I tell them that in school they are going to meet a lot of friends and discover many things. -that they are going to learn and they that they will be treated well." Similarly, Rosa would encourage her children by talking to them about the positive benefits of the learning environment. "I tell them that when they are with the teacher they are going to learn many nice things like drawing and playing."

### **Bilingualism**

Most parents embraced the idea that their children would grow up to be bilingual in the United States. They believed that by learning more than one language, their children's opportunities would be expanded. As Juan noted, "Apart from learning English our children should be learning Spanish so that they have more opportunity in life."

Rosalinda felt that the children benefited from having both languages. She talked about how she and her husband stressed the importance of learning English for the purpose of helping the family by having English ability. She remarked, “And my husband tells him, ‘so you learn English, son. So you learn English and teach your dad,’ he tells him. Then he- they make a strong effort and get up early in the morning, but that is the motivation that my husband and I give them.”

### **Schools and Upward Mobility**

All of the parents were adamant about wanting a different life for their children apart from the life of working in the fields. Most of the parents saw the education system in the United States as a means for upward mobility. They believed that if they could keep children in school the next generation would do well and have more opportunity and choices. Parents seemed to be very aware of the fact that education was a path out of poverty for the family. “It’s very important for them, so they learn to have a better future. And if one doesn’t study then one can’t find a better future,” said Chrisanto. They constructed roles based on their positive belief of education as a means for upward mobility.

America referred to her desires for her children to be able to do something that they like in life and be able to do more than just work but to “be someone.” She spoke of her views of schooling and the opportunity it provides:

Not just finish high school. I don’t just tell them, well finish high school you’ll get a job, whatever. You know, try to be someone in your life. And I always tell them something that you like, not something that you’re going to get paid a lot for, something you like to do, you know, because if you’re going to do something that you don’t like, you’re not going to be happy with your job.

Fernanda also talked about education as a way their children could have more opportunities compared to those who “don’t study”. “In order to have more opportunities because people that don’t study have very few possibilities to have a good job. Those of us that are not studying need to work in the fields, yet those that studied don’t need to be working in the field.”

She also elaborated on how her young daughter’s high aspirations motivated her to encourage her daughter’s dream and talk to her about the importance of school as a means to achieving that goal. “She always says she’ll be a doctor, and I always tell her that she’ll be taught how to become a doctor in school, because she says she’ll be a doctor.

### **More Support for Education in the US**

Three of parents talked about the benefits of school in the United States compared to schools in Mexico and that in the United States children were given more help in school from teachers and support to gain higher education. Tomasa felt that the teachers in the United States were more helpful and took more interest in children compared to teachers in Mexico, “Children have more support here from their teachers than they do in Mexico. They have more interest in them, in their schooling.”

Reyna mentioned how one of her granddaughters had received a scholarship which paid her way through college. She talked about how in the United States this kind of help was available, while in Mexico there was not so much support of this kind:

I have a granddaughter that studied four years in school. I don’t know how to say it in English, designer, I don’t know what it’s called. She studied four years and they paid for everything, only there isn’t much demand for that job in Texas. She needs to go to San



Antonio, to Austin, because there is demand. But they paid for everything, they even paid her because she went to school. That's how Mexico differs, they help more here.

America's oldest daughter had had the opportunity to be the central figure in the documentary film, about children of migrant farmworkers. Because she did the movie, she was given a scholarship for college upon completing high school. America talked about this in the interview, "Everything's going to get paid so that's why she really wants to finish school because she knows she's not going to be worrying about, well how am I going to pay college, or anything."

### **Balancing Education Opportunities and Safety**

Although most parents talked positively about the opportunities that their children may have in America, a couple of parents had concerns about safety of the schools and the life in the US. Jovana worried about the schools in the United States when asked; she mentioned feeling that in general life in Mexico was more trouble-free. "On one hand it was good. In the town where I was born there was a lot of freedom. There was not much food but we knew everyone and could go anywhere without worry. Here we worry more about the children."

### ***Role Construction: Responsibilities***

Responsibility was another theme that emerged under role construction. Parents were found to have strong beliefs of responsibility for their children's education and development. All of the parents talked about the importance of responsibility in the schooling of their children. Three categories emerged in how parents viewed their role of being a responsible in their children's education. Parents discussed responsibility in the following ways: nurturing and preparing children, being responsible for school related activities, and being a role model as well as the first teacher of their children.

### **Nurturing and Preparing Children**

At least three of the parents talked about responsibility within the context of preparing a nurturing environment in the home and helping children learn responsibilities to prepare for the day. They also talked to their children at home about being responsible in school by behaving well and accepting school as a duty.

Rosa mentioned preparing the children for school as well as having time for them and teaching responsibility. “I bathe them and feed them and make sure I delegate time to play with them. In the home I make sure they pick up their toys and I tell them not to behave poorly.”

Rosalinda saw her role of being a responsible parent by pointing out the importance of keeping the children in school even on days when they showed resistance in going. “It is a big responsibility to have to - when sometimes there’s a boy that doesn’t want to go to school and cries when he gets on the bus, one stays saying ‘why send him? I better get him off.’ But it’s always better to tell the boy ‘you must go to school in order to learn.’”

### **Being Responsible with School Related Activities**

Some of the parents considered responsibility as being involved in school related activities. They described doing things like talking to teachers, having the children follow through with school related homework activities, and teaching children at an early age to be responsible for school.

Juan, like some parents mentioned the importance with being consistent in sending the children to school every day, and also emphasized the importance of talking to teachers and spending time with them at home. We know we must send the children to school every day and ask the teachers how they are doing in school.

Tomasa believed that the most important thing was that the children had time to work on their homework at home and that they did not miss school. “I think that the major responsibility

is that they begin to be responsible. For example, the most important thing is the homework, that they don't miss school and that they go daily. I think that is our major responsibility."

### **Being a Role Model and First Teacher**

One parent in particular discussed his views as a father and emphasized the importance of responsibility and instilling this value in his own children. "Es muy importante la responsabilidad. -Responsibility is very important. Yes, being responsible is more than anything, more than everything," said Chrisanto.

He also talked about his role as a father and being the first and most important teacher for his children in the home. "La responsabilidad es enseñarles, - The responsibility is to teach them, teach them also that we are the first teachers and then in the school are the other teachers."

Chrisanto went on to acknowledge that it was important for him that his son saw him as a responsible person. He wanted his children to be proud of him for being involved and dedicated to their school and education:

What encourages me is to support the school and support my son so he sees that his dad is responsible or that one as a son sometimes expects that the father gets there and say, 'that's my dad' and they feel good about one going to support there. It is what makes me keep going, seeing my son happy because he sees me there.

### **Theme Two: Invitations**

According to the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995, 1997) the construct invitations, is a parents' perception that the school wants them to be involved. Invitations are opportunities or school requirements of parents presented in a way that is warm and welcoming and that encourage parents to be involved.

Evidence from the interviews showed that parents thought well of Migrant Head Start's teachers and staff. They discussed their propensity for the teachers, and overall had the considered the teachers to be inviting in their interactions with parents. Invitations have been found to play a key role in encouraging parents to become involved with their children's education (citation needed). The invitations were summarized in three main categories: 1) kind and welcoming, 2) trust and feeling at home, and 3) encouraging parents to become involved. A few differences were found among the centers in how families' perceived school climate as being inviting.

### **Welcoming to Families**

Most of the families agreed that the staff at all three centers were kind and welcoming. "Pretty nice, I mean they're like nice persons with me and my daughter. Every time I go, they are always saying, you know, like how are you? I think they're pretty good with that," said America.

Reyna whose grandchildren attended Arrow Head Lake, a program with mostly English speaking staff shared that she felt the staff were kind even though she could not necessarily speak the language. "First of all the ones in front are very kind. They are very attentive with me when I go to get the boy in the room, the teachers as well. Even though we don't speak because I don't understand them, but really, I haven't seen anything that I'd say I dislike, everything is fine." Reyna's comment is telling in that she does not really comment on the positive of the program, but merely states she has not seen anything she dislikes. She also makes it clear that she can't communicate with the children's teachers. Arrow Head Lake had more Spanish speaking staff this year compared to past years, but still lacked a solid bilingual presence.

### **Trust and Feeling at Home**

At the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start, the parents spoke most fondly of the program's teachers and staff and even went so far as to say how they felt at home at the school. I witnessed some of these interactions firsthand while attending the parent meetings. The center director, Margarita, a Mexican-American woman from Texas, who had been with Migrant Head Start for over 14 years, was very friendly with the families and made it a point to go around and talk to families individually before and after the parent meeting. Her center was also the only one that served homemade Mexican dinners (Comida Mexicana) during the parent meetings. The teachers and staff would serve the parents at the tables while the parents relaxed and socialized, before the parent meeting. The other centers also served dinner at the parent meetings but it was buffet style and not necessarily Mexican food. Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start was an exception to the rule. It appeared that this gesture alone to serve families at the table nurtured trust, feeling at home, and being invited.

Fernanda, a parent from Crystal Valley talked about being invited to participate. "Yes, they invite us to the activities they hold, like for example the one last Friday. And they have also invited us as volunteers, if we can go and volunteer in the class." When asked about what encourages her own participation, she replied, "Because one feels at home with them because more than teachers they come to show as friends and orient us if there is something we don't know or things of the sort." Fernanda's testimony reveals not only the trust she feels with the staff at Crystal Valley, but also shows that because she feels at home at the center, and that the staff care about her personally, and as a result she is more willing to be involved. Crystal Valley was the site in the study with the most Spanish speaking staff, and the only site with a Mexican-American director.

Juan also shared a sense of being at home with the teachers and staff at the Hart Migrant

Head Start. He said, “We feel as if we are at home. Last year the center even helped us find work.” Juan, who comes from the indigenous culture, Tzotzil, from the State of Chiapas in Southern Mexico also mentioned having trust in the staff because they did not judge people on appearances, culture, or religion. “It is not important how we are. If we go to the center dirty from work or the children have old cloths. They still treat us well. In the schools they don’t judge us for our culture or religion.”

### **Encouraging Parents to Become Involved**

Most of the parents from all three sites mentioned that they believed that the teachers encouraged them to become involved and participate in the center’s activities. Head Start’s emphasis of parent involvement requires teachers and staff to encourage parents to participate (Lukbeck & deVries, 2000) and teachers and staff at all three centers seemed to encourage parent involvement. “The teachers invite us to visit the school to see what the children are doing and how they are advancing in the school,” said Rosa. Parents seemed to have gained an understanding from the teachers and staff about how the program benefited by volunteering and that also it was good for the children to have the parent involved. Rosalinda said, “The teachers motivate a lot for us to go and volunteer. Also in the way that one should also get involved because it helps the children. They have always told us that they appreciate a lot the volunteers when they go.”

### **Feelings of not being included**

Not all parents had welcoming experiences, some parents felt excluded. A couple parents mentioned that some staff made them feel unwelcomed in the school on occasions. Sancha was troubled because of a misunderstanding between her husband and a few of the school staff, and she did not feel the teachers made much of an effort to involve her family because of this issue. When I asked her about feeling invited at the school she simply replied. “-

No, nomás como por ejemplo,- No, not anymore, only for example, in the notes they send us.” Her statement also reveals that the written communication had little impact on her feeling that the school welcomed her at the center.

Another parent felt mistreated by staff. Reyna described one of the staff member as “giving her trouble” by refusing to enroll one of her granddaughters. “I’m talking about a year ago, or two years ago, that there was another one, she was Mexican. I didn’t like her or I don’t know, I had personal issues with her, the girl could not get in school because of the conflicts.”

### **Theme Three: *Respecto***

A number of parents talked about respect. In Hispanic culture respect takes on a different meaning from how it is understood in mainstream American culture. In Mexico children are taught a strong sense of mutual respect in relationships (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Respect or *respecto* also has a different dynamic in regards to relationships between the young and the old in that children are taught to show respect for parents, educators, or other adults (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdez, 1996). Santa commented, “I tell them that they shouldn’t answer back or argue with elders. To respect them, because they are older and they must also respect younger children. - I tell them, ‘if you want to be respected, respect.’ And I want them to be good children so they don’t have any troubles.” Santa’s views place value on authority and elders in the community, and for children to respect younger children as well. The passage describes her belief that children need to learn these behaviors and roles in life as an important part of their education.

On the one hand parents felt respected by teachers and staff at the Migrant Head Start, but on the other hand a few parents’ comments indicated that they did not agree with the ways teachers were socializing their children with regards to respect. Respect was talked about in two

major ways in the study: respect parents felt in the school and respect between teachers and children.

### **Respect between Educators and Parents**

Most of the parents in the study agreed that the staff and teachers at Migrant Head Start treated them with respect. For a couple of parents respect was tied to speaking Spanish. The use of Spanish indicated that communicate in the native language contributed to parents feeling respected in the school. Juan mentioned, “I feel like they respect us because things we tell them are kept private and we also like that the teacher speaks Spanish.” While Migrant Head Start Policy requires staff to maintain confidentiality of personal issues of families, for Juan it was also important that teachers and staff keep private what parents shared with them.

Several parents mentioned that the school respected the families’ values and culture. For some parents respect meant that teachers and staff were respectful of parents regardless of their different cultural values and position in life, or personal situation. Reyna talked about how for her, respect was not necessarily tied to language but that the teachers and staff were respectful of parents’ values and positions in life who came from different cultural backgrounds, or may not be able to read or write but were nevertheless supported within the program. She spoke about an indigenous man who became president of the parent policy council:

Yes, I feel they do respect us because, for example, I don’t know English but there are even more people aside from me like the ones that were there. I will give you an example, like the one who is going to be president. That man doesn’t know, he seems from Oaxaca, I don’t think that man even knows how to write... do you understand me? I know how to read and write and deal with numbers, all I lacked was the English. And like I said, they respected his values even though he doesn’t know how to read. If the man wanted to be president and you supported him then you approved of it. It’s like



when I told them, do we need to know English to occupy those positions? And they said no. So those are the values that are given to us in school. Even though we're Indians from the mountains, from wherever, they take us as equals in the school. Whether we know or not how to read or write, they don't look out to see if we have all that, but yes, they respect our values.

### **Respect between Teachers and Children**

Cultural perspectives on-and behaviors around-respect interfered with parent and teacher relations and their comfort in connecting with the school. A couple of parents talked about the dynamics of respect between teachers and the children. They viewed the American teachers (English only speakers) as having a different understanding of child rearing compared to Mexicans. Santa summed it up by saying, "In the schools here sometimes children have more voice or talk more with the teachers."

Chrisanto discussed his observations of teachers. He viewed the teachers as not having enough command with the children and putting themselves on an equal level as the teachers:

Sometimes we have seen that here the Americans, they make themselves equal, right? They make themselves equal as though they were both - either both of them were children or either both were adults. Children and adults make themselves feel equal, so there is no respect. If one replies, the other one answers back too. I have taught my children that if they are being told things to stay quiet and not say anything. If it's an older person, no, don't try to argue with them.

### **Theme Four: Communication**

The importance of communication between teachers and parents is articulated in the theoretical concepts of the Cultural Historical Approach by Vygotsky (1978) which impresses

the importance of interrelatedness and social interactions. One of the most recognized barriers to parent involvement in the literature for Latino families is communication with educators and school personnel due to language barriers. Communication was discussed by parents in two categories: language use and interpersonal communication.

### ***Communication: Language Use***

Language could be considered in two ways, in its' relation to cultural identity or as a tool of communication (Portes & Salas, 2011; Tyler, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). During the interviews, it became evident that even though Migrant Head Start attempts to hire adequate bilingual staff, language was still a problem in communicating for some of the families with English only speaking teachers. The three centers all had a number of bilingual staff, but the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start had the most teaching staff who spoke Spanish, while Arrow Head Lake and Boyne Farms had fewer bilingual teaching staff. The three categories that emerged from the discussion on language were: favorable views of Spanish language use, negative views of English language use, and use of an interpreter for communication.

#### **Favorable Views of Spanish Language Use**

All of the families had positive views of Spanish speaking staff and teachers at the Migrant Head Start centers. Spanish language use was tied to words such as respect, being a good teacher and helping out. Jovana, a mother from Crystal Valley Center, commented on the following. "In the school many of the employees are Latinos. They speak the same language as us. If they didn't speak Spanish it would be very difficult to fill out paperwork with them."

#### **Negative Views of English**

Over half of the families commented that they had experienced some frustration or discomfort at not being able to communicate with some of the teaching staff at the centers.

Fernanda commented, “She only speaks English and I only greet her when I’m dropping off the girl. And when it’s the conference we need an interpreter in order to be able to communicate.”

Other than a barrier to communication, one parent viewed it as a barrier to volunteer. Reyna described how she did not want to go to the school at times or to volunteer because of the language barrier:

I don’t go because they only speak English there. I can speak a little English but I can’t reply to things with it. That’s why I don’t like to go as a volunteer, if there were Mexican teachers I would because then I could talk to them. That’s why I tell them they should have teachers in Spanish, because there are two teachers for each classroom, two to take care of the children.

Tomasa compared communication with two of her children’s teachers while making the point that the one who spoke Spanish was good, while the other who spoke English was not good: “I can say that Moisés’ is good. Giovanni’s is not very good because she only speaks English, she doesn’t speak Spanish. Moisés’ teachers speak Spanish and it’s easier for us to communicate with them. And with Giovanni’s it’s the motive only, they don’t speak Spanish.”

### **Use of Interpreters**

Some families seem for the most part neutral about the use of interpreters. In fact they seemed content that the school had a number of bilingual staff which could help them communicate with teachers and other English speaking staff. Chrisanto pointed out, “In regards to the language it is fine, because there are many Latinos. They know how to speak Spanish and they help us interpret ourselves with the teachers if they speak English. They help us interpret and there is no problem. Everything is fine as it is so far.”

Chrisanto had been a parent at the Arrow Head Lake Migrant Head Start for six years. We continued talking and he spoke of an earlier time when there had not been many bilingual

staff at the Arrow Head Lake center and how in the past it had been more difficult to communicate: “Before there were no interpreters, only a lady but no, almost all of them only spoke English,” he continued the conversation, ... “It was more difficult communicating with them because one doesn’t understand, doesn’t understand much English, only the basic thing.”

### **Communication: Interpersonal Communication**

Evidence was found to support interpersonal relationships between teachers and parents.

During parent meetings at the Migrant Head Start centers, parents seemed to connect with teachers in friendly conversation. In most of the parents felt that communication was good between the school and the families. “Very good. It’s very good. I’m a person that talks a lot with everyone in the school and am always received well. When I go I try to talk with all of them, but it’s very good,” mentioned Rosalinda.

Tomasa felt that through the conferences they were able to connect one-to-one with the teachers and that the conferences were informative. “They do conferences with each parent about the children to tell us what calls their attention about them, what funny things they do or what they notice they are more focused in, they also let us know,” she said.

While most parents felt that communication was good, one felt that there was a lack of communication. She and her family had had some issues with the school. Sancha mentioned that the center did not do a good job talking to them about an incident concerning her daughter. “Well, no, not really... The teachers don’t inform us about everything that happens in the school, like reports that they do on the children, they don’t inform us.”

### **Theme Five: Life Context**

Certain aspects of life were found to eternalize parents' beliefs and values on education, raising their children, and parent involvement. Vygotsky acknowledges that people are products of their own culture including social class, circumstances, race and variations of group identity (1978). Life circumstance is also defined in the Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (2005) as life context: knowledge and skills of parents, economic status, and family culture. For migrant families language and culture heritage and work of migrants were areas of life circumstances discussed. The major themes of life context were: 1) importance of cultural aspects of language and cultural heritage, 2) barriers to parents' own schooling, 3) work as a motivation to keep kids in school, and 4) barriers to parents' participation and volunteering in the Migrant Head Start program.

#### ***Life Context: Importance of Language and Cultural Heritage***

All of the parents expressed strong opinions about the importance of preserving the language and cultural heritage for their children. They recognized Spanish language and Latino culture as being a fundamental part of how their children were being raised. "Our culture influences how we raise our kids through food and customs and the celebrations that we celebrate," commented Zoliy. Parents also commented that they didn't want their children to forget their language or their cultural heritage. Santa talked about wanting her children to know about her customs and not forget their language. For migrant farmworker parents, culture, customs, and language were critical aspects of their life which they wanted kept for their children.

El español. Que no olviden sus raíces- Spanish. That they don't forget their roots. ... it does not matter where they were born ... but that they don't forget their roots. The

festivals and the customs of ours like the customs and the united family. Because they are from here but that they also know that they are Mexican-American.

### **Migrant Head Start Supporting Language and Culture**

A few parents commented that they felt the school did a good job at recognizing and supporting the children's language and culture. Teachers' support of all children's language learning was viewed as support of the culture and family. One parent talked about how the school supported her children's learning, "In the school they tell us that it is important that our children speak the three languages, Spanish, English and Mixteco. They also tell us that it is important that we don't lose our cultural values."

Fernanda similarly talked about shared values that the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start had because the majority of the employees were Latinos: "I think that the school, since the majority are Latinos, I think that the same values we have as Mexicans the school has them too. And in that we go with the same education." Because of the strong Latino presence at Crystal Valley, Fernanda felt that similar values were shared between the school and the families because of cultural identity which made the parent feel connected.

### ***Life Context: Barriers of Parents' Own Schooling***

Only 5 of the 14 parents who participated in the study had completed a high school degree in either the US or Mexico. Some of the parents from Mexico described negative experiences attending school in Mexico and receiving little support financially to complete education in a society where transportation to school is the responsibility of the parents. Others mentioned disengagement and lack of interest on the part of their own families in Mexico. On

the other hand, families in 'El Norte' didn't fare well either in their schooling. Only one of the five parents who had attended high school in the United States held a high school diploma. In this section discussion will focus on two major themes in the past schooling experiences of migrant farmworker parents. The discussion is divided into two sub-sections: difficulties finishing school in the United States, and perceptions of education in Mexico.

### **Difficulties Finishing School in the United States**

High School completion posed challenges to migrant/Latino families as was evident in this study. Parents who attended school in the United States face barriers largely around language. Of the five parents who attended school in the United States, only one of them had completed a high school degree. The main reason the parents in this study had not complete school centered on the language barrier. One other parent was unable to complete school due to an unexpected pregnancy.

Three of the parents mentioned the challenges they had when they moved to the United States and began school and experienced language barriers. Juan had completed the 10th grade as a recent immigrant but because he lacked English skills he dropped out of school and began working in the fields. Rosalinda also attended school for a short time but was faced with the difficulties of learning English. Reyna talked about the difficulties she had entering the schools in the United States because she did not speak the language:

I got to go to school here when we crossed the border and we got together the documents... Only three in the family went to school, we were eight. Three of us got to go to school. But I didn't like it because when I went to school they were mostly from Mexico that didn't know English. And the teacher, he spoke to us only in English. I told him, listen, we came to learn English but why don't you speak to us in Spanish for a little bit? No, he told me he had to be only speaking English so we would learn it faster. And I

disagree. That's how it's done with children. Let's suppose you are going to teach a boy who is just entering first grade words like apple. All those words one already knows, but no, he only spoke to me in English.

One parent who had been born and raised in the United States, had been doing very well in school until she got pregnant and was forced to drop out. America discussed how it got hard for her to finish school after her pregnancy:

I only went to eighth grade. I mean it was, that was good in school, you know. I would get my A or B on the roll and like that. Then I got pregnant when I was 14 and I kept going to school, but it was just hard for me to go to school and then work and, you know, get home, do my homework and then get up really early in the morning, you know, and change her because I would take her to the daycare and then go to school.

### **Perceptions of Education in Mexico**

From the parents who attended school in Mexico, only three out of nine had received a diploma from high school (*escuela secundaria*). Several of the parents described the difficulties they had in the school system in Mexico. While a few talked about not having financial and moral support from family, a couple of others mentioned that the schools were stricter and the obligations of schooling were different compared to the United States. Jovana talked about her experience with Mexican school which she viewed as strict and not child friendly:

It was an obligation to go to school. Sometimes the teachers would hit us with a switch from a cherry tree or with a ruler and the parents would support the teachers. That is why many wouldn't finish school and they would come north to look for work. That's life. On one side of the boarder they hit us and on the other side there is no work.



A few parents mentioned that they felt that society was different in that parents and the government place fewer demands on children to go to school. Sancha discussed her views regarding the demands for schooling by government entities and family:

The government there doesn't demand that children have to go to school like they do here. It's very different. Now I don't know, but when I went that's how it was. Because the parents from earlier times didn't send us to school because they felt like we had to go. They never said anything like- "Go to school, you must begin your studies. They weren't paying attention to whether we went to school or not. They didn't participate in school, or went to see how we were doing, if we were doing fine, or what grades we had.

The lack of involvement that is depicted in this quote and discussed by some of the parents demonstrates that the experiences that some of these parents have not prepared them for school involvement. The role of the Migrant Head Start in promoting parent involvement for migrant families may be essential in reshaping parents' sense of place in their children's education (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

### ***Life Context: Parents' Work as Motivation to Keep Children in School***

The majority of the parents mentioned that their experiences as migrant workers were a motivator to keep their children in school. They gave examples of the hardships working in the field and of their hopes for a better future for their children. They talked to their children about the arduous work they do working in the fields and tried to instill in them the promise of a better life forged by staying in school and getting an education.

America spoke about taking her children to the fields sometimes, even the young ones to see and the older ones to help out and work. She not only used her work in the fields as a

motivator for her children to finish school but she also encouraged them to go to college and seek a better life:

I mean, keep telling them you have to finish school, you have to stay in school. Tell them, if you want to be doing what I'm doing right now then, you know that's not going to be easy. It's hard with five, well with four right now and then five kids, it's just hard being in the field so I always tell them to stay in school and try to, you know, be something. Because there are two things, you know? You can finish school and that's it, but there is also college, you have to go to college and try to be someone.

Jovana also shared that she and her husband spoke to the children about the work they did and presented school to them as a better option. "Sometimes we talk to our children about how hard it is the work that we have to do. So we tell them that being able to go to school is a beautiful thing because they can play and learn things and they have friends there." The belief that school provided an opportunity to have a better life apart from migrant labor was apparent in how the parents contrasted their occupation in life with their desires for a better future for their children.

Chrisanto also believed that his children should use their parents and their struggles as an example of what to push against or move away from: "I tell them that they need to go to school. Then I encourage them by telling them that they don't want to be like us, working in this job, and that if they are schooled more they can have a better job than us, and that is the goal to encourage them so they put effort in school."

### ***Life Context: Barriers to Parent Participation and Volunteering***

For the most part, the majority of the families interviewed had a strong understanding of what they could do to volunteer in the center, and they recognized the importance of being

involved in the program and their child's education. However, the demands of their work often override their ability to volunteer or participate in school functions except on rare occasion. All of the families interviewed had attended at least one parent meeting during the summer of data collection. Three categories emerged pertaining to the involvement barriers parents faced: work schedules, pregnancy, and parental lack of interest.

### **Work Schedules**

The majority of parents cited the most common reason for not being able to volunteer in the school was because of their work schedule conflicts. The long hours and obligation to farm work during planting and harvesting times left little time for volunteer work. Fernanda summed it up by saying, "The only thing that impedes sometimes is work. When one wants to work and they have some event and one can't go."

### **Pregnancy**

Three of the mothers mentioned pregnancy as being a reason why they did not volunteer at the center or participate more. One of them mentioned a difficult pregnancy, while the others mentioned just being too tired and busy with a baby on its way. Rosalinda describes the problem, "Right now I have not had time to volunteer because of the pregnancy. Sometimes I feel pretty tired but I try not to miss the parent meetings so that I am aware and know what is going on and so that I don't get behind in what they are saying." Although these mothers all expressed a commitment to being involved in the program, because of being pregnancy, it was hard for them to be involved.

### **Parental Lack of Interest**

Lack of interest by parents was rare. One parent mentioned that he felt they (the parents) did have time to volunteer but that they did not want to make the time. Chrisanto mentioned that,

“They teach use there (referring to the parent meetings) and many of us say ‘we don’t have time’ but really we do have time but we don’t want to give the time.”

Chrisanto makes the point that some of the parents may not recognize the importance of parent involvement. He points out the involvement in the program leads to being taught new things. His comment reflects the importance of parents’ having opportunities to acquire “school readiness” skills and gaining an understanding of their role in their children’s education (Chrispeels & Rivero, 2001).

### **Summary of Parent Section**

Part one of the findings presented the results of the in-depth parent interviews. Major themes that emerged from the interviews were role construction, invitations and communication, respect, and life circumstances. Parents in Migrant Head Start constructed roles which were both typical and unique. Role construction of migrant farmworker parents was found to be shaped by traditional ways of parent involvement such as volunteering in the classroom and social influences of teaching staff. However, parents were also found to construct roles in unique ways through communication and contact with extended family and by using their work as a motivation to encourage their children in school which differed from traditional ways of role construction.

Invitations are described by how parents felt accepted and welcomed by staff at the Migrant Head Start. Most of the families felt that educators at all three sites were welcoming and respectful in parent and teacher relationships. There was evidence that Spanish language and shared culture helped deepen trust between parents and teachers at one site with mostly Spanish speaking staff of Mexican heritage. Language also played a role in how parents’ communication practices functioned with English speaking educators. The findings suggest that parents were

more comfortable with teachers who spoke Spanish. Some parents discussed the limited communication that they could have with teachers who spoke only English. The findings were mixed in how comfortable parents felt using someone to interpret or translate for them.

Respect was talked about in referring to parent-teacher relationships and child-teacher relationships. While most parents commented that most of the teachers were respectful of them and their cultural heritage; a few parents commented that their understanding of respect between teachers and children differed from their views and the views of English speaking (American teachers). *Respecto* a sense of how adult-child relationships and parent-teacher relationships should transpire was questioned by a few parents. These parents disagreed with how some of the American teachers interacted with children on a level that was more equal, but did not represent for them proper child-adult relationships.

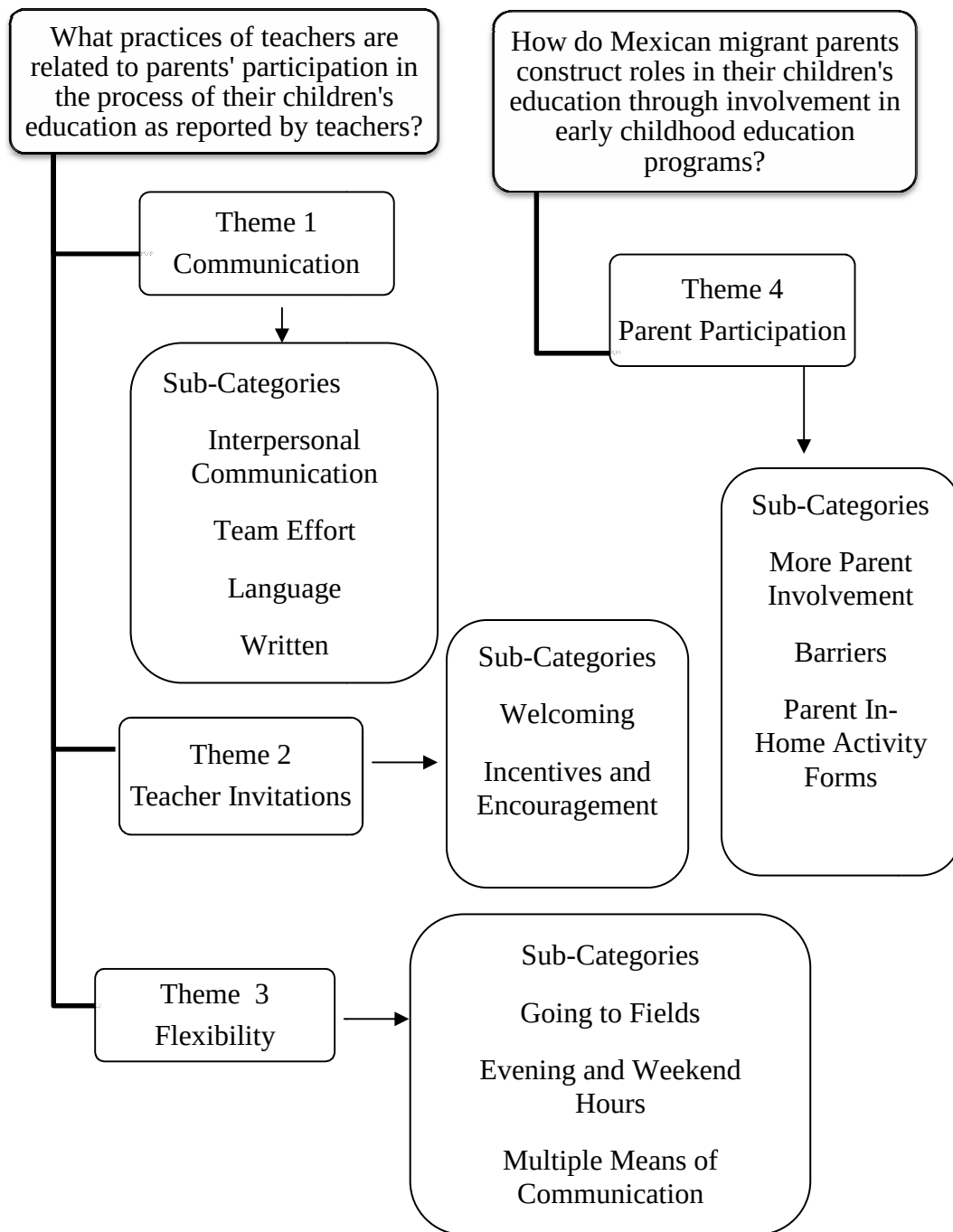
Life context included the cultural aspects of language and cultural heritage parents own schooling, perceptions of education in the US and the work place. The parents in this particular study stressed the importance of their children maintaining their native language as part of their cultural identity. All of the parents wanted their children to learn English. Parents also discussed their own schooling either in Mexico or in the United States. Their own struggles either learning English in schools in the United States or not having the financial means and support to finish school in Mexico were part of these parents' struggles to acquire education. The next segment of this chapter (Part 2) will be the teachers' results of the study.

## **Part 2 Teacher Results**

### **Major Themes from Teacher Interviews**

Part two of the findings section presents the results of the in-depth interviews of Migrant Head Start teachers. Teacher interviews were intended to discuss parent involvement from their perspective of working closely with migrant families. Major themes that emerged from the interview responses were: communication, invitations, flexibility, and teachers' views of parent involvement. The following figure (figure 2) represents the research questions and major themes that emerged from the interviews with teachers. The themes were developed through the coding process using a modified ground theory approach. Please refer to figure 2 below.

Figure 2: Major Themes of Teacher Study



## **Theme One: Communication**

Cultural Historical Theory is grounded in the perspective of language as a social tool for communication (Vygotsky, 1978). Parent involvement can be explored through the social construction of language by emphasizing family engagement with a focus on relationship building and knowledge transmission. This study explored communication as a means of developing relationships with families and encouraging family involvement in Migrant Head Start. Teachers discussed the individual and group efforts to communicate with families in four ways: 1) interpersonal communication, 2) team effort, 3) language, and 4) written communication.

### ***Interpersonal Communication***

All seven teachers identified interpersonal communication as a means of extending relationships with families. Interpersonal communication manifested itself in three ways from the interviews: through extended conversations with families, direct communication, and through frequent contact with families. One bilingual teacher indicated that she thought sharing the same language was important in making connections with families and establishing communication. English-only speaking teachers acknowledged communication barriers with families because of Spanish-English language incompatibilities. Language (Spanish native language of parents and teachers' language practices) will be discussed in its own section following this discussion of interpersonal communication.

Five of the seven teachers talked about the importance of speaking directly with families as a means of establishing good two-way communication. According to the teachers, direct communications with families (phone calls and face to face) were more effective than sending



home written communications. Shelly described direct communication practices as calling parents or talking to parents when they came to pick up their children:

If something's happening and we're doing a written communication we always make sure that they're getting a phone call, too. If it's important, if it's about their child other than what we did that day, if its health wise we make sure that they get that phone call."

"Parents are always coming to pick up their kids, and whenever they're here we're making sure that they know what's going on, and they tell us what's going on in the home.

Extended conversations showed evidence of interpersonal communication. One teacher, Mary, a 14 years veteran of the program, said that her familiarity with a particular family over several years gave her the opportunity to converse in more depth with this family. She thought that because she had been the teacher to four siblings of a particular family that the parent was more willing to talk to her in detail because of their familiarity with her and because they had developed a relationship over the years. In one particular home visit, with an English speaking family, this teacher shared that the conversation had lasted 30 minutes longer than a typical home visit. She also suggested that the mother had opened up with her about some things that were going on with her child:

You know usually you get to the question that says, 'do you have any concerns about your child?' and its no. But with this parent when asked, at first she said no. Then she said, 'well, yeah, I want to talk about this issue I'm having,' and she went into more details. So getting back to the question I do think we develop good relationships with the families.

Frequency of teachers' contacts with families is an important finding with respect to teachers' two-way communication. Four of the teachers discussed the importance of frequent communications with families. Adrianna is a second year assistant teacher from a migrant family. She raises an important point about opportunity and communication. The bus rides to the camps each day provided time to communicate with families regularly about a range of things concerning the school:

Well normally, if there's a parent meeting or if there's anything wrong with their child or something, I just tell them and I explain to them. I let them know what's going on just by talking to them." "I'm on the bus to take the kids and usually, I read what they collect from the teacher. Say they sent Francisco a letter saying he has to get shots. I read the letter if it's open and I tell him – or, they usually tell me it's for the doctor. So when I give it to the mom I say, 'This is for you, but it's to state that your daughter – son or daughter has to go to the doctor.' So I try to figure out what it is. That way I can know and that way if the parent's like, 'Well, what is this?' I can tell them.

Having a bilingual teacher staff on the bus, familiar with paperwork further provided families someone they could talk to about the requirements of the school, which families may or may not be familiar with. Adrianna used these opportunities to allow families to ask questions and gain information.

### ***Team Effort***

Many of the teachers talked about working together as a team. They described communication between the home and school as coming from a variety staff. Betty is a first year teacher who reported speaking mostly English but some Spanish with families. She and a few

other teachers thought that the center worked well together with them as a team to communicate information to parents. Betty, says,

I think the strengths of the center are we work well together as a team. We make sure that we communicate well, our parents communicate well if there's an issue, whether it be positive or negative, from home and let us know what that issue is, how they deal with it, whatever, making sure that they tell us if we ask, 'Hey, we missed so and so yesterday. Where were they,' making sure that they give us a call or we call them and we see where we're checking up on him, making sure that we're checking upon the families and that they're okay and make sure that we help them out.

Likewise, Naomi, also a first year teacher talked about how different people at the center were involved in communication with parents. She talked about the different level of involvement of the people who held different positions at the center. "I think we're very good about informing them on what's going on. For example, we had aprons that told when our parent night was and people on the bus wore the apron so other parents can see it, and also we got letters sent home and things like that."

### ***Language***

Teachers indicated that language use with parents, Spanish and English, presented challenges for staff that spoke only English. Bilingualism in communication can facilitate better relations between teachers and parents, when parents speak a home language other than English. Of the seven teachers who were interviewed two of them were Spanish speakers while the other five were native speakers of English. Language was discussed in the context of four major themes: 1) language barriers, 2) home language, 3) facilitating language barriers, and 4) non-verbal cues.

## **Language Barriers**

Lack of Spanish ability in speaking with families was a barrier to effective communication for English-only speaking teachers. All of the English-only speaking teachers who participated in the study mentioned the language barrier as something that inhibited good relationships and communication with families. Naomi described her struggle to get close to families. “But it’s also really hard to have a better relationship because I don’t speak Spanish and some of them don’t speak English, and that’s where I struggle personally, with the family relationship.”

Tina also commented that a relationship with families was difficult because she was always speaking to families through an interpreter and not directly with them. She expressed her concerns with having to speak through another person. “It’s the communication barrier. I can’t speak their language. I can’t speak with them, so I have to have a translator, which makes it very – you can’t get personal – I mean you don’t want to have it personal, you want that professional relationship, but yet, I always have to speak with somebody, and that’s kind of hard.”

The language barrier also appears to also create obstacles for the development of trust among parents. Shelly a teacher who speaks mostly English and a little Spanish, also pointed out that the families may also find it impersonal to speak with someone through the use of a translator. “I think that a big one is the language barrier, that some of them might not feel comfortable.” For parents it might be hard to feel comfortable in these situation during conversations about their children.

## **Home Language Use**

While the English-only teachers express their frustrations with not being able to speak the language with parents. Both Spanish speaking teachers who participated in the interviews thought that their use of Spanish was an asset for effective communication with families.

Adrianna told that she felt families opened up to her when they realized that she was able to communicate in their language. “And they do look at you like, ‘Ooh, you can speak Spanish.’ So yeah, I think bilingual staff is needed.” Olga also made a similar comment about Spanish language use. “When we talk to them I feel like they have more trust in us face to face because they know who we are and that we speak their language.” Some current studies on Latinos families in education settings have discussed the importance of cultural familiarity and shared language in building trust or *confianza* for Spanish speaking families (Portes & Salas, 2011).

### **Facilitating Language Barriers**

Teachers and staff developed certain practices to facilitate communication where language barriers existed. Teachers reported making efforts by attempting to write in Spanish, trying to learn the language, making eye contact, using gestures with the family during translations, and having the presence of other bilingual staff to rely on at the center. In some cases there were mixed reports of the effectiveness of translating and having translators available all of the time during working hours. Mary discussed her efforts to try and write her daily activity reports in Spanish. She thought that even though she did not speak the language well, that it would be important to the parents to make the effort. “I try really hard to put some of my stuff in Spanish. Otherwise it looks like you’re not trying to learn the language, which is important, so I do try to write what I can think of to write in English, and I try to translate it myself.” Betty also commented about trying to make an attempt to use Spanish in the workplace, “I’ll go get my little dictionary and look it up. I’m like, “Hold on just a second. Let me look it up in my dictionary.”

### **Nonverbal Cues**

Nonverbal Cues were efforts that several of the English-only speaking teachers brought up as ways they used to soften the communication barrier. These were typically described as eye

contact, smiling at families, nodding and using other gestures. Naomi mentioned that it was important for her to make eye contact with parents. She said that even though she could not talk directly with the families she would try to use non-verbal communication with them.

Well, when I have a translator with me I always look at the family. I don't look at the translator, I look at the family. I'll glance over at the translator and make sure that they're catching what I'm saying also, but I always look at the family and I always shake their hand and I always tell them thank you and, just try to use any kind of welcoming slash encouraging words that I can.

### **Translation**

Translation (while some staff referred to the word translations in describing use of a third person to interpret or communicate between parents and teachers, the work is really interpretations in the oral form of communication) was the fourth sub-category of the language theme. Staff had mixed reports on how effective they felt translations/interpretations were in communicating with families. Some mentioned that they felt families just did not feel comfortable with translators, while others mentioned that because of the number of bilingual staff available it was not a problem to communicate effectively. Shelly mentioned that she felt the family service workers at the center did a good job translating and she commented that because they shared the culture with the parents they were able to ease the conversation between parents and teachers. Naomi mentioned that she felt because there was plenty of bilingual staff that most of the time there were bilingual staff available to assist the English only speaking staff. She commented the following, "It's pretty easy because every classroom, 90 percent of the time, has a bilingual in the classroom. There are times when we're short staffed where that's not an option, but most of the time there is a bilingual person in each classroom."

### **Written Communication**

Written communication at Migrant Head Start was described by all teachers as one of the most widely used forms of communication between teachers and parents. Written communication took many forms, daily or weekly activity reports on children (in both Spanish and English), memos about meetings and special activities, center newsletters, accident reports, and other forms which are part of the federal requirements for enrolling children in the program.

Betty summed up some of the forms during the interview:

We communicate with them by sending home weekly messages with them every week.

And what the – the weekly messages contain is special events, thank yous, what we've been working on, what your child has been learning. Our family service specialist does a newsletter each month and we write a little paragraph to the parents about what we've been doing that month and any special events that may be coming up that they might want to be aware of.

### **Conflicting Findings and Written Communication**

Within the group of teachers there were some conflicting findings on the effectiveness of written communication. While some teachers noted that communication through memos and letters may not be most effective practices with migrant farmworker parents, a couple of teachers felt confident that this was an effective method. My experience as a Migrant Head Start teacher and director gave me insight into literacy of migrant families. While some, like the families in this study, have secondary schooling and can read and write, many others have minimal writing skills. I remember in my personal experience doing paperwork with families and having them sign with an X.

Shelly thought that written communication was not problematic, "It's a lot of written communication. "We found out within the first week of being open that all of our parents can

read. So we do a lot of notes, and they write notes back to us, too.” On the other hand the majority of the teachers felt that written communication was problematic. These teachers discussed the contrary that some of the parents might not be able to read what goes home. Mary felt that some of the parents were not completely willing to speak out about not being able to read written communications in either Spanish or English because of limited literacy. She shared her thoughts:

Some of them don’t know how to read the Spanish, and possibly being embarrassed that they can’t read. A lot of people, even if you’re English speaking, and you can’t read you kind of hide it, but if you don’t know that they can’t read, you’re sending home these notes, and they’re just looking at them, not knowing what they mean because they don’t want to ask for help.

Betty commented that families may feel overburdened with the amount of paper work that goes home to parents. She talked about the in-home activities that she would send home to the families. She remarked:

The only thing we had trouble with is our in-kind activities we send home. I think a lot of the parents get overburdened with so much paperwork that they don’t want to send them back to us right away or they forget about them. So it’s been really hard to keep them coming in and ready to go because it’s – I just think they feel overwhelmed.

While teachers gave different opinions on the importance of written communication, the majority felt that it was problematic for some of the parents. Although all of the written communications were translated into Spanish, literacy may be a barrier for some families in receiving these notes, memos and newsletters. Delgado-Gaitan (2004) points out that with Latino families issues of written communication need to not only insure that the meaning of the



correspondence is properly translated, but also to ensure that the purpose of the communication is delivered.

### **Theme Two: Teacher Invitations**

Invitations are practices of teaching staff that make parents feel welcomed and a part of the school community. Within this theme there emerged two sub-categories which were discussed by the teachers 1) welcoming parents, and 2) incentives and encouragement.

Welcoming parents referred to actions teacher took to make parents feel comfortable at the center, incentives and encouragement describes ways that parents encouraged families and welcoming included greeting families and making them feel comfortable in the center.

#### ***Welcoming Parents***

Welcoming parents according to teachers in the study included, how the teachers greet parents, make them feel at ease in the classroom, and show them around the classroom. While the majority of teachers described what they would do in relation to making parents feel at ease and welcomed at the center, a few teachers commented that they felt more could be done to welcome families.

Although Betty only spoke a little Spanish, she mentioned using gestures to welcome families into the classroom. She commented that: “I make sure to welcome them into the classroom, whether it’s gestures or saying, “Come on into classroom,” with my voice, making sure that they feel welcome. I say, “Go ahead and have a seat,” or, “Come on in.” She also shared that by having a positive attitude helped families’ feel welcomed at the center. “So just making sure you’re positive, your body language positive, your words are carefully chosen and making sure that you let them know you’re not forcing them to do anything. It’s their choice, just like you give a child a choice.” Shelly mentioned that she would often show parents their

children's work when they would come in to visit the classroom. "When they're here we like to bring them into the classroom, too and show them pictures that we've taken and show them the portfolios that we've done." For Shelly, creating a welcoming environment meant that she could communicate with them when they visited the class by showing them around and making them feel comfortable in the class, and being positive about their presence. She also mentioned not putting pressure on families to feel obligated to come in and volunteer.

A few teachers mentioned that more could be done to welcome families. Betty commented:

We always welcome them, but I feel like maybe we could take it a step further to welcome them. We have family nights, but a lot of when we tell them they can come in is through written, so we should kind of verbalize that more to make them – we always make them feel welcome when they're here, but we should kind of verbalize more that they can stay as long as they want to. They know they can, but then it's always nice to be told that you can come in anytime.

Another aspect of concern about providing a welcoming environment was expressed by Naomi. She suggested that some parents may feel obligated to come in to the school but not necessarily because they want to. "I would like them to feel more welcomed, encouraged, and not feel obligated to come back, but I'd like them to come in because they want to come in."

### ***Incentives and Encouragement***

A few teachers talked about ways they encouraged parents to come into the centers or to provide incentives for families to encourage more involvement. Some staff commented about bringing in food during volunteer days, and they would cook for the families at parent meetings as incentives for parents to attend meetings or mentioned planning special events for families.

Mary mentioned things that she felt had been effective with families over the years. “They used to offer English as a second language to the parents. This was quite a few years ago. They also used to have it where parents were invited to come in, and learn how to do scrap booking.”

### **Theme Three: Flexibility**

*Flexibility with parents was found to be valuable and necessary part of working with migrant farmworker families. Teachers often mentioned in the interviews that the ability to address the needs of migrant farmworker families required them to be flexible in reaching out to families. Flexibility was discussed in three ways: 1) going to the fields to meet with parents, 2) meeting with parents in the evenings and on weekends, and 3) using multiple means of communications with families.*

#### ***Going to the Fields***

Three teachers noted that by having teaching staff actually go to the fields where the parents were working, or by providing flexible hours for the purpose of meeting with families in the evenings or on weekends were ways of helping parents to feel that they could interact with staff more freely. These teachers felt these efforts to communicate showed parents that the teaching staff at Migrant Head Start was caring and attempting to communicate with families to build better relationships. Adrianna, an assistant teacher, commented about the value of going to the fields with her Education Specialist to talk with families demonstrated the commitment that the center staff had for the families. She also commented that she thought visiting families in the fields also gave teaching staff the opportunity to experience the families’ lives and work hands on:

Sometimes, some of the staff go out to the fields and they let the parents know about stuff, too. Two weeks ago, I got to go with my Education Specialist to the fields and it's a really nice experience. I experience that every day because my husband works in the field and my parents work in the field, but it's nice to see that other people do care and they actually get to see how they're working, and I think that's pretty nice.

### ***Evening and Weekend Home Visits***

"We are flexible," said Alejandra, a Hispanic teacher of 10 years who participated in the focus groups. She agreed that working with the families one had to be flexible. She also talked about how some staff do home visits during the weekend when the center is closed and also in the evenings. "This year I did a home visit on Saturday and sometimes I do them late at night. Sometimes it is hard for the parents because they come here to work, the employer doesn't give time off but we have to be flexible." The majority of the teachers talked about being flexible with parents and it seemed to be a part of the culture of Migrant Head Start.

### **Multiple Means of Communication**

Most of the teachers talked about using multiple means to communicate with parents. These methods included notes, face to face conversations, making calls and sending out letters and daily activity sheets. Tina, a 4-year Migrant Head Start teacher who spoke only English, added her views about the multiple ways teachers and staff communicated with parents. Like many of the teachers interviewed, she enumerated the varying modes of contact between teachers and families. "Communicating with them, sending out letters, making phone calls, family Nights, or open houses." Similarly, Olga reflected on the various ways she communicated with families. "I do phone calls once in a while and encourage them to call us so they can get information about

their kids and we can answer questions. Usually we communicate face to face, notes home, and telephone.”

Some teachers mentioned that communication needed to involve support for some families in understanding information. Some suggested that although the center use multiple ways to communicate, some of these methods may need more support in helping families fully understand the paperwork and getting the message across. “We send stuff home all the time. We are throwing new stuff at them all the time. To get information to the parents we don’t have a lot of time to say this is what this is for so they understand. The handling of information,” said Tina.

Tina’s views appear to overlap with similar discussions of other staff about whether parents have a full understanding of written communications. It seems that even though most of the communications are translated in Spanish and English, teachers thought that parents may still struggle with fully grasping messages during school to home communications.

#### **Theme Four: Parent Participation**

Parent participation is an important part of Head Start’s parent involvement initiatives. Families are encouraged and expected to be involved in the programs planning and decision making according to Head Start policy (Vinovskis, 2005). Head Start also provides opportunities for parents to learn about as well as learning about their children’s education and home school connections. Although some evidence was found that showed parents were participating (mostly with attending parent meeting) all of the teachers mentioned that they would like to see more involvement in the program. Teachers discussed involvement in three ways: 1) wanting to see more parent involvement, 2) barriers to parent involvement, and 3) in-home activity practices.

### ***More Parent Involvement***

Most of the teachers mentioned that they would like to see more parent involvement the centers. They felt that parents needed to take advantage of the opportunities that Migrant Head Start offered related to parent involvement. “I would definitely like to see more involvement of them ... because I think it’d be good for them to actually see what their child is doing, because we could tell them but I think it’s better for them to see for themselves so they have a better understanding of what goes on in our classroom,” Naomi stated. Her remarks clearly show her expectations for parents to connect with the classroom learn about her child’s development. Tina also mentioned her concern about parent involvement. “My thoughts are that there is not enough. There should be more. I think we might have had a few come in this year, like two, and I would like to see more, and not even for a whole day, but just to come in for an hour or something would be nice.” She also went on to say that it would be beneficial for families to come into the classroom to learn what was going on and about the child’s education.

Adrianna saw mixed reactions from parents on their level of involvement. She felt that while “more than half of our families participate” in some way though, many families were reluctant to become involved in the program. She added the following: There are some that are kind of like, ‘Why do I have to go?’ but they still come, but it’s more like, ‘Do I really have to go?’ And then there are other parents that you don’t even have to ask them twice. They just say, ‘Yeah, I’ll come.’ Those look like they’re more encouraged and they want to see how their child is doing at the center.

While this example illustrates Adrianna’s views of how some of the parents may respond to involvement in that some were more willing than others to volunteer. Teachers also acknowledged that parents faced many challenges in becoming involved in their children’s

education mainly because of their work schedules. The next section will describe barriers in more detail.

### ***Barriers to Parent Involvement***

Teachers who participated in the interviews recognized the barriers that parents faced in becoming more involved in their children's education. "They tell us we're here to work. We'd love to volunteer if we have time, but we don't have a lot of time because we work," said Betty of barriers to parent involvement. The life of migrant families is often one that inhibits much of their involvement in their children's education. Teachers identified two kinds of barriers that prohibited them from becoming involved in the school: 1) work, and 2) transportation.

#### **Work Schedule**

All of the teachers mentioned work as being the primary reason why parents did not volunteer in the program. The long work days and the demands of finishing work while the harvest was ready, left little time for parents' to come to the centers and be more involved. "Sometimes they're super tired of work and sometimes they just wanna rest," Adrianna said, when giving her opinion on why some parents may not attend parent meetings, volunteer or do other activities to participate. Teachers were clearly aware of the challenges for parent and their unrelenting work schedules, another teacher Mary added:

I think sometimes they're busy with work, and I know that some of them work 10 or 12 hour schedules, so it gets slipped up on, but like when we had our Panda Bear picnic, I made little postcards that we sent at the beginning of the week, and then on the dailies we wrote that we were going to be having the activity, but I didn't get a turnout.

Mary's remark indicates that sometimes parents were just not able to come in and participate, especially during work hours. Irrespective of the fact that teachers tried to be

welcoming and encourage parents, long work hours limited parents' ability to come in and parent involvement is not always successful.

Naomi also observed the conflicts of work scheduling and conflicts with participating in the program, but she mentioned on days when families don't have work or in the evenings at special activities she saw more parent participation. "I think a lot of them don't because of work, but I've noticed that when they aren't working, they will come to give their children more, they'll come to parent meetings or RIF (Reading is Fundamental) for example. RIF had a pretty good turn out this year.

### **Transportation**

A couple of teachers mentioned transportation as a barrier. For some families transportation was another issue that prevented parents from being able to volunteer. A few parents talked about how she felt transportation was a barrier for some families. They expressed that some parents could not come into the program if they only had one car and the other parent had the car for work or if cost involved in driving into the center impacted the families' finances. The teachers interviewed really seemed to understand some of the families' hardships. Betty discussed this matter:

So how are you gonna get from here to there if you don't have transportation and they don't have – they have money from their jobs, but it all goes, ... towards the – like household expenses, your rent, your food. They don't have the money to put gas in the car to come out.

### **In Home Activity Practices**

Although participation for many parents with children in Migrant Head Start was limited because of work, transportation, or other life circumstances, teachers' use of the Parent Activity Form provided parents with an alternative for participation and to make the home-school



connections. Teachers reported that parents' suggestions on the Parent Activity Form allowed parents to generate in-kind contributions in the home for their time spend working with their children at home and making suggestions for individual classroom work. In-kind contributions in turn also support replacement of direct cost by providing matching funds for the program.

The Parent Activity form was distributed to parents on Friday by hand or taken home by the child and returned on the next school day. With the form parents were able to give suggestions on areas they saw as valuable for their children's education and/or wanted their child to be working on in the school. . Teachers called this information 'data' which informed teaching practices. This strategy was often but not always successful. A couple of the teachers mentioned that the Parent Activity Form sometimes did not make it back to them. However, five out of the seven teachers mentioned using this form on a weekly basis. Shelly summed it up in saying, "We ask them what they want to see in our lesson plans. Then, when they tell us what they want to see we always make sure that it's in the next lesson plan. And we make sure that there is a parent idea every single week. That's actually required through Telamon." Betty indicated that this data helped her track the parents who became involved, "That helps because it helps me see which parents are getting involved and how they're getting involved, and then it also helps me see the weaknesses that I may have or how I can get them more involved into the program."

Through use of the Parent Activity Form families assisted teachers in learning about the interest of the families have for educational and developmental care of their children. These activities were beneficial in that they promoted home-school connections and allowed parents to participate in the program and schooling of their children from the home.

### **Summary of Teacher Section**

Part two of the findings presented the results from in-depth interviews with Migrant Head Start teachers. Major themes that emerged from the interviews were communication, teacher invitations, flexibility, and parent participation. Communication involved discussions of the many ways in which teachers' conveyed information to parents. Written communication seemed to be the most common form of communication. However, teachers also acknowledged that written communication was problematic in sometimes because they felt that the parents were overwhelmed with paper work and might not fully comprehend the written form. Language was identified as a barrier by 5 of the 7 teachers who spoke only English. The 2 teachers who were native Spanish speakers discussed the benefits of being able to connect with families through language. They expressed that communication was better because of the ease at which they could just speak to them and in shaping closer relationships.

Teachers also elaborated on ways that they were flexible working with parents in the program and discussed parent involvement. The teachers elaborated on different ways that they tried to accommodate the families in the program by making time in the evenings to meet with them and also seek them out in their place of work. These ways highlight the dedication that educators in the program really have for the families in going out of their ways to accommodate them. The next segment will conclude by comparing some of the teachers and parent findings on similar themes from the study. Teachers commented that they would like to see more parent involvement, but they also acknowledged that involvement was difficult because of the work. They discussed that the In Home Activity From which went home once a week was a good way for parents to be involved in what goes on in the classroom at home. The next section will discuss the parent and teacher findings related to similar themes.

## **Parents and Teachers: Intersection of Experience and Perspectives**

In this chapter findings have been presented from 14 migrant farmworker parents, and 7 teachers interviewed on the topic of parent involvement practices in Migrant Head Start. The purpose of these interviews was to gain an understanding of the beliefs, views, practices and life circumstances of the migrant family that influence parent involvement. By having both teachers and parents participate in the study, it allowed for similar questions asked to both parents and teachers. This final section will make a few points about findings from the teachers and parents on common themes in which parents and teachers were in agreement and moreover where they different in their interpretations of certain topics. These themes included questions related to: 1) invitations, 2) communication, and 3) parent involvement practices.

### **Invitations**

This study looked at the construct of invitations as it relates to the influences of schools and teachers in creating a welcoming atmosphere that fosters parent involvement practices (Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). In general, teachers and parents were in agreement as to their perception that teachers and staff were welcoming, warm, and friendly with the parents across all three centers. American, (a parent) commented on how she felt when she would go to the center. “Pretty nice, I mean they’re like nice persons with me and my daughter. Every time I go, you know, they are always saying, you know, like how are you? I think they’re pretty good with that.” America’s comment reveals that she feels welcomed each time she goes to the centers and greeted warmly by staff. Isabella, a parent, commented the following, “My experience is that they are very kind and they know what to do when a child is crying.” Most of the parents described the teachers and staff at Migrant Head Start as a place where they felt welcomed by teachers and staff. Teachers held similar views when they talked about welcoming families.

Teachers described welcoming the families in cheerful and positive ways. All of the teachers seemed to enjoy the work they do and spoke warmly and expressively about welcoming the families into the program. Betty (a teacher) mentioned some of the ways she would interact with families even though her Spanish was limited and she could not speak with many of the families. She remarked “Making sure that they feel welcome and inviting them to the classroom and make sure you’re positive. Also make sure that you’re asking open-ended questions but you’re being sensitive.” Overall, these findings indicate the teachers and families had similar views about the environment of the center being a friendly and welcoming place. While teachers described their actions as being positive and inviting towards the parents; the parents were also in agreement that they felt welcomed by the center teachers and felt that the centers were positive places.

Trust as related to invitations was mentioned by parents and tied to language. One of the teachers who spoke Spanish also talked about shared language and trust. At Crystal Valley, the center with a strong Latino presence, many of the parents’ discussed trust. Bayran, (a father from Crystal Valley) remarked about dropping his children off at the center with confidence and trust. “When I go to the school, I feel like I have left my children with family. I feel good about leaving them there. No siento desconfianza.” Olga (a Hispanic teacher) at Crystal Valley commented on how she felt language made a difference in how the families felt comfortable at the centers. “When we talk to them I feel like they have more trust in us face to face because they know who we are and that we speak their language.” Here she comments on the connection between language, trust, and making families feel invited. Parents tended to have views that language not only facilitated communication but also strengthened parents’ sense of trust in the

program. Olga statement suggest the language spoken by teachers moreover helps families feel welcomed and trustful of the program.

### **Communication Practices between Teachers and Parents**

The Cultural Historical Approach emphasizes the importance of social learning and relationships between people which prioritize language as a symbolic tool of communication (Vygotsky, 1978). Language and communication can be understood in different ways. Parent and teacher communication has been defined as the meaningful exchanges around the topic of children's learning (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Communication when teachers speak a language other than the home language of families complicates parent and teacher communication practices (Bernhard et al., 1998; Carreon, et al., 2005; Ramirez, 2004). In this study teachers and parents described differently communication practices, but agreed that language was a barrier in communication. Teachers tended to list off different ways they communicated with families and described the use of written communication as common practice.

A couple of teachers shared how they viewed communication practices. Tina (a teacher) discussed different means to communicate, "The use of the notes, phone calls or like we're doing today, the parent-teacher conferences, home visits, and we do portfolios, which kind of communicates through pictures of what their child is learning or doing in the classroom." Tina mentioned a variety of ways she communicates with parents including using art work during conferences to share information with children. Shelly (a teacher) at Arrow Head Lake emphasized the use of written communication. "It's a lot of written communication. We found out within the first week of being open that all of our parents can read. So we do a lot of notes, and they write notes back to us, too." While many of the teachers in the study emphasized the importance of written communication or the many ways they communicated, the parents hardly

talked about different communication means but focus mostly on communication within the context of language use.

The parents mostly talked about verbal communication between teachers and parents focusing on language use (Spanish and English). For these families, communication was based on how well they could speak, greet, and talk with the teachers and staff at Migrant Head Start. The many ways the teachers communicated and written communication forms were hardly mentioned. This gives reason to believe that perhaps for migrant farmworker families of Mexican origin, verbal means of communication are preferred. This could also mean that for families' language and communication were issues they struggled with when they did not speak the same language as their child's teacher.

Fernanda (a parent) described her experiences with her daughter's teacher. "When the interpreter is present, to her I can say what I want and the same goes for the teacher. She can tell me about my child. But when she is alone I can only greet her. We can't have another kind of conversation, or ask questions, or tell her some things specific." Her comment is telling in that she clearly points out that for her and other families who only speak Spanish there are certain times when the communication is happening and casual conversations are not allowed between parents and teachers.

Teachers also acknowledged the struggle they had with being able to communicate with parents. Betty's (a teacher) comment below practically parallels the sentiment of Fernanda above when she describes the same kind of dilemma when she can't speak to a parent who drops into her room. Betty remarked, "And I'd say for me the hardest thing, too, is the language barrier, because I'm still learning Spanish. They'll sometimes come and talk to me and I'll say, "Uh, no Española." Or I'll have to pull somebody in and be like, "You've got to translate for me because

I don't know what they're saying." English speaking teachers, like Betty in the example above found communication to be difficult because of the language. Parents also struggled with the language barrier in communicating with the teacher.

### **Parent Involvement Practices**

There are many forms of parent involvement and different ways that parents process their involvement in their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). This study focused on mostly school based parent involvement practices, and the influences or deterrents in the process of parent involvement. The study found that both parents and teachers viewed parent involvement as important and teachers felt that more involvement was important but also recognized that parents worked long hours that made it cumbersome for them to be involved at times. The results found that parents and teachers recognized that work was the greatest barrier to parent involvement, especially for classroom volunteering which takes place during the day when the centers were operating and the parents were working. Naomi described parent involvement in the classroom:

Well, we only had one parent that actually come into the classroom and volunteered for a long period of time. Some will stop in, but mostly a lot of them are just at work. But we did have, I believe three different parents that went on our field trip with us when we went to Lewis Farms.

A few parents talked about classroom volunteering during the day, but mostly just stopping by the center at lunch time or coming in if the weather did not allow for migrant work. Most of the parents and teachers stressed that the work schedule did not allow for day time participation. On the day I interviewed Isabella it was pouring rain. She talked about maybe going to the center to volunteer. "It's going to be a volunteer day tomorrow but I'm not sure if

I'm not going to work, if I don't have to work I'm going to be in volunteering doing activities with the kid, maybe read to them." While teachers recognized that it was difficult for parents to volunteer during the daytime hours because of work, parent interviews confirmed that classroom volunteering was difficult.

Both teachers and parents spoke about the In Home Activity Sheets. Tomasa talked about the in-home activities that were sent home by the teachers. "We give ideas to them that go into the child's individualized plan. I put the activities on the plan and send it in and they put it in his daily plan in the classroom." These home school connections seemed to be an effective way for busy parents to gain access to their children's schooling and be able to be involved by providing input. Teachers also mentioned the activities as being effective in getting parents involved but it was unclear from the study how many parents were participating on a regular basis with the in-home activity forms.

One teacher and one parent seemed to agree in their view that not all the parents were involvement but it was the same ones who were involved. "I would say about 40% participate. Almost always the same ones participate. Sometimes when they don't work they participate." Olga mentions that only the same parents do the participating which suggesting that many others were not involved. Chrisanto (a parent) who was president of the Policy Council for three years at one of the centers shared his views about some parents who were not involved. "They teach use there (referring to the parent meetings) and many of us say 'we don't have time' but really we do have time but we don't want to give the time.

## **Summary**

This chapter has sought to lay out the finding from in-depth interviews of 7 Migrant Head Start Teachers and 14 Migrant Head Start parents. It is first divided into a parents section and



teacher section in which the major categories and sub-categories have been organized and laid out according to major themes from the research questions. The third section discussed some of the important themes that emerged from the data that were talked about by both teachers and parents during the interviews. The final chapter will discuss the findings in relation the theories and literature and give concluding thoughts for future research.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to explore the beliefs and practices of parents' and teachers' that influence parent involvement in Migrant Head Start program. Because little research has previously been conducted on the experiences of migrant farmworker families of Mexican origin and their experiences with early childhood education settings, it was anticipated that this study would expand knowledge of this understudied population. This final chapter will first provide a summary of the findings of the study organized by the three major research questions. Second, the chapter will provide a discussion of the major themes that emerged from the study consistent with the theoretical lenses, the literature, and discuss variations in the findings related to this population. The third section will identify and discuss the limitations of the study. The final section will provide conclusions emphasizing implications for policy and future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The central purpose of this study was to better understand how parent involvement practices among migrant farmworker parents of Mexican origin are influenced by cultural belief patterns from the home and teachers' roles at school. In total, 14 migrant farmworker parents were interviewed for this study and 7 Migrant Head Start preschool teaching staff were also interviewed. The study involved three Migrant Head Start centers in Northwestern Michigan. The findings from this study have been organized according to the three research questions that guided the study.

*Questions 1: How do Mexican migrant farmworker parents construct roles in their children's education through involvement with early childhood education programs?*

In the first research question I sought to determine how migrant farmworker parents construct roles for involvement in their children's education. The analysis of teacher and parent data from the interviews informed the inquiry as to how parents' construct their roles through participation in the program in traditional and nontraditional ways. The barriers faced by migrant farmworker parents' in becoming involved in the early education of their children were also highlighted in the study.

Parents' reported constructing roles in the education of their children through a range of vehicles including social networks, volunteering, personal beliefs about education, and responsibility. All of the families in the study reported being involved in some way with the school through volunteering or attending parent meetings. Pertinent social groups were vital in helping some parents to recognize the importance of their children's schooling. These conversations with extended family and others (primarily teachers were mentioned second to extended family) created patterns of influence related to parent involvement and these contacts provided social support in their thinking related to their children's future and schooling. Parents also reported that extended family members worked to talk directly to their children about education. Parents reported taking a role in their children's education through volunteering in the classroom when time permitted, and being present for parent meetings and other activities. They also discussed the importance of responsibility. For several parents responsibility was an important aspect of being a parent and by having a child ready for school, interacting with center personnel, and attending meetings they felt that they were fulfilling their duty and role of a responsible parent. Parent's motivation to encourage their children in school also stemmed from their personal beliefs that education was a path out of poverty. All of the parents in the study expressed views that education was important. Parents held beliefs that attending school in the

United States provided their children the opportunity to become bilingual, educated, and have a better future. They also saw it as a means to further their education by eventually obtaining a college degree.

Teachers discussed the different ways in which parents become involved in the Migrant Head Start program and the barriers that migrant families face. Most teachers recognized that many parents gave time and energy to the program by attending parent meetings, school functions, conferences, and doing in home activities (sent home by teachers) which were used to help in classroom planning and to contribute in-kind funds. However, teaching staff also mentioned that parents' work influenced the amount of time they could be involved. They believed that parent involvement was difficult for migrant farmworker parents because of the nature of their work. Most of them mentioned that because parents are only in Michigan for a short time and that during that time they are expected to work long hours to secure the harvest, that most migrant farmworker parents were not able to dedicate a lot of time to parent involvement. Most teachers believed that although families tried to be involved, more parent involvement was needed.

*Question 2: What practices of teachers are related to parents' participation in the process of their children's education as reported by both teachers and parents?*

The second research question discussed the practices of teachers that made parents feel welcomed in the school. The question also addressed the quality of teacher-parent relationships and communication within a bilingual preschool setting. Major ideas that emerged from the interviews were parents' perceptions of the school as an inviting place, language communication, and interpersonal relationships. Teachers also discussed invitations, language communication, and flexibility for communicating with families.

In general, parents in the study mentioned that the teachers and staff were welcoming, trustful, encouraging of parents to become involved. Most parents felt that teachers and staff agreed that the centers were welcoming places for families. A couple of parents at the Crystal Valley Migrant Head Start mentioned attending functions and volunteering because they felt ‘at home’ in the center and trusted the staff. Most of the families felt that the teachers encouraged them to become involved in the center’s activities and volunteer in the program. Parents also had negative experiences. At two locations, two different parents, one at each of the locations mentioned having had a negative experience with center staff and not feeling welcomed at the centers. In these cases parents felt that a certain person had something personal against the center. They mentioned that the center staff respected parents’ family and cultural values and were non-judgmental of migrant families and in general felt encouraged by teachers to become involved in the program regardless of their background. The Migrant Head start overall, seemed to encourage parental involvement.

Teachers tended to have a good sense of what they can do to make parents feel invited in the school. Teachers described making initiatives to invite parents to meetings, trying to learn some of the language so that parents would feel more comfortable and showing the parents’ children’s art work and inviting them into the classrooms. Some of the teachers commented that they felt that more could be done to make parents feel more welcomed in the school. One teacher mentioned that it could be important to ask the parents what they would like to do and how they would like participate in the program. Some of the teachers also felt that more could be done to bring parents into the program and gave examples like having more activities in which parents were involved and not just watching or listening but being an active participant. Language was also cited by teachers as a barrier to communication and building relationships with families.

Language use by parents and particularly by teachers was an important topic for both groups. On communication, parents primarily spoke about Spanish and English language use, interpreters, and interpersonal relationships. Families held favorable views of teachers who spoke Spanish some commented that the Spanish speaking teachers were ‘good teachers’ Most parents felt that because each center had Spanish speaking employees it made communication easier. Even though they recognized the effort that English speaking teachers made to communicate, language was still a barrier in making families feel comfortable. Some parents expressed concern about not being able to have extended and informal conversations with teachers, and one parent commented that the language barrier was the reason she did not volunteer. Parents seemed to express mix views on the use of interpreters in helping get communication across. Parents understood that interpreters were necessary, but some of the parents talked about being frustrated about not being able to speak without the interpreter present. Moreover, interpreters were sometimes only available during times in which formal parent-teacher conferences were arranged. It seemed that only during individual encounters with English speaking staff especially when it was their children’s teachers, that some parents reported not feeling at ease with the communication process.

English speaking teachers were the most hampered by the language barriers, and as such were able to understand how much of a stumbling block it was. Some of the English speaking teachers understood the families not feeling comfortable with them when they could not speak the language or when they had to rely on someone else to interpret the discussion about the child. They recognized that some of the families may also not be comfortable with this method of communication.

Flexibility was a third theme discussed by teachers related to teacher practices that give families a positive perspective of the program and staff. Teachers also commented about corresponding with parents through multiple means of communication such as through phone, written communication, face to face, and even meeting parents in unconventional places and times to make communication flexible and to accommodate families. In general the teachers felt that the centers' effort to communicate with families on a regular basis was a team endeavor by all center personal and that staff made sacrifices to meet parents at times and locations convenient to families. Part of the reason parents may have had such favorable views of the program teachers and staff, apart from language barriers, may be because of the efforts of staff to accommodate families.

*Question 3: What are the cultural beliefs and life experiences with education systems which influence parents' perceptions of parent involvement in Migrant Head Start?*

The third research question aimed to address the cultural beliefs and life experiences with education systems that shaped parents' perceptions of involvement in their own children's education. The major findings that came out of the interviews with families were respect and life context. For migrant/Latino parents *respecto* was talked about in relation to parent and teacher interactions and children and teacher interactions. Most parents felt that school personnel were respectful toward families. Several parents commented that the school was respectful of the families' culture and family values. A few parents commented that respect was related to speaking and keeping information shared between educators and parents as private.

A second theme that emerged related to cultural behaviors between adults and children. A couple of parents talked about the relationships between children and English speaking teachers as lacking in respect, compared to how they understood adult – children relationships. They

commented that in Mexico there is a focus on respect between adults and children and that Americans have a different understanding of this dynamic. They felt that Americans interacted with children in such a way that undermined their cultural teachings by encouraging children to argue with adults and question things too much. They felt that teachers interacted with the children in ways that diminished the authority and respect of parents and elders.

Life circumstances referred to the aspects of a parent's life that stem from their beliefs, views, and experiences that influence parents understanding of their children's education. In this study, parents discussed language and culture, barriers to their own education, work, and barriers to parent's participation in their children's education. All of the parents in this study expressed strong opinions about the importance of language and culture in their lives and the lives of their children. They wanted their children to continue to learn Spanish (or their native language) and know about their cultural heritage. Parents felt that because there were enough Latino and Spanish speaking employees at the centers that their culture was, for the most part, represented in the school. Although many of the families had not finished high school (only 5 out of 14 participants) they had all attended school and many had been close to finishing school. Some parents discussed the difficulties in finishing school in the United States when they had moved from Mexico during their teenage years and had to learn English. The parents who attended school in Mexico also shared difficulties in completing school due to the family's financial constraints or not living close enough to a school when they were at age to enter high school. Some parents felt that society in Mexico did not place demands on educational attainment, and thus dropping out was an acceptable thing to do. Work was also mentioned as something that parents used from their life to motivate her children in school. They felt that if their children understood how hard they had to work, that the children would rather attend school and make a



better life. Some parents also remarked that work was a barrier to volunteer in the schools. But a few parents mentioned that pregnancy and lack of motivation to volunteer as other barriers to being involved.

## **Discussion**

In this section the findings of the study are discussed in light of the theories that guided the research and the current literature on parent involvement practices and Latino families. This section will look closer at and highlight the themes of: 1) role construction and extended family, 2) nontraditional role construction and migrant labor, 3) language as a tool, 4) written forms of communication, 5) language as cultural identity, 6) and respect and perceptions of education.

### **Role Construction and Extended Family**

The Hoover-Dempsey Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (1995; 1997) describes role construction as parents' beliefs about what they should do to be involved in their children's education and the actions they take relevant to their children's schooling. Roles of parent involvement may be subject to social influences like the expectations (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 2005). These include beliefs about group and individual responsibility, rights, and obligations as well as social expectations and scripts that guide group members' behaviors in various situations (Walker, Wilkins, Dallaire, Sandler & Hoover-Dempsey, 2005). The findings of this study indicate that extended family plays a central part in the role construction process by their ongoing involvement in parenting activates and beliefs of education. Parents who had extended family in the immediate environment received support in parent involvement activities through participation in the Migrant Head Start program; and families mentioned having extended family in Mexico who guided their beliefs of parent involvement and education practices. Some research on culturally diverse groups has pointed to the importance of

communalism or interdependence of social groups (Tyler, et al., 2008) and the role of extended family in child rearing (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Pearson & Hunter, 1990).

Several of the migrant parents in the study talked about having extended family members who motivated and influenced their parent involvement practices. Extended family did this through their motivational support, shared involvement in school, attending parent meetings, and providing additional child care so parents could attend meetings. Similar findings revealed diversity of family structure and parenting involvement among African American families (Pearson & Hunter, 1990). Among Nicaraguan households, extended families also played a greater role in the upbringing of children who lived with close extended family members (Menard-Warwick, 2007).

Distance was not a factor in the role construction and involvement of extended family. While many of these parents were residing far away from their extended family back in their homeland, it was evident that the connections they experienced to these extended family ties were strong and of importance in their thinking and perceptions of their children's education. These conversations (although distant) were influential on the family's engagement in program participation and involvement in children's schooling. The values of America schooling which focus on individualism and the notion that one must achieve without depending on others may contrast parents' home values of communalism and interdependence of people (Tyler, et al., 2008).

Latino families are strongly rooted in family connections *familismo* and maintain frequent interactions with kin (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Valdez, 1996). There is also considerable value on co-parenting between parents and extended family and godparents among

Latino families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). Within the sample of migrant farmworkers who participated in the study, extended family ties were found to be directly linked to children's schooling and influences on parenting. Extended family also offered supportive voices that both the parents and the children relied on more so than outside social relationships as a supportive voice in the education of their children. These extended family ties are essential in shaping ideas, behaviors, and expectations, related to involvement in children's education and how parents' constructed their roles (Hoover-Dempsey, Wilkins, Sandler, Jones O'Connor, 2004). Parents emphasized the benefit of these influences and conversations in helping them to think about and act on their children's schooling. It is important to consider the role that extended family plays in role construction within ethnic minority groups such as migrant/Latino families, where family relations are prioritized over individual beliefs or actions (Valdez, 1996). The Cultural Historical Approach identifies each culture as having a set of "psychological tools" mediated through cultural experience and dialogical engagement (Portes & Salas, 2011; Vygotsky, 1978). Within cultures that have strong family and community ties, it may be important for educators to gain a better understanding of the role that extended family members have and their influences on parent involvement practices specifically in how it influences parent involvement practices. Conversations about culturally based values and belief systems in relation to parent involvement practices and the role of extended family of diverse groups could aid in educators understanding and perception of the child development and parent involvement practices. The role of extended family in constructing roles in their children's education was prominent in the current study and is worth further exploration in various other cultural groups.

### **Nontraditional Role Construction and Migrant Labor**

In the theoretical model, Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995; 1997) asserts that certain aspects of life context influence parents' to decision making related to parent involvement. Some examples of these life-context variables include socio-economic status, skills, time, energy, as well as cultural background (Hoover-Dempsey, et al., 2005) which influence parent involvement practices and role construction. Similarly, Vygotsky (1978) discussed the notion of people being products of their own culture including life circumstances, race, and cultural identity. Findings in the current study show that life circumstances unique to the migrant family provide a diverse understand of parent involvement.

Studies on Latino families and other immigrants have found that these groups place a high value on education for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Ogbu, 1990; Perez-Carreon, 2005). However, evidence indicates that traditional practices of parent involvement (such as volunteering in the classroom and helping with homework) do not always align with what some cultural groups consider forms of involvement (Durand, 2011; Lopez et al., 2001). While the current study confirmed that many parents were involved in the Migrant Head Start program in traditional ways, it was also found that parents viewed practices such as feeding and bathing as parent involvement. Other studies on Latinos and parent involvement have confirmed such activities as being consider practices of involvement (Olmendo, 2003; Valdez, 1996). In particular, many parents spoke of their role of work as a means to instill in their children the importance of education.

The current study showed that life circumstances influenced parents' perception of education and practices of parent involvement. Pomerantz, Grolnick, and Price (2005) discussed parents' roles in orientation towards achievement as an approach in the process of influencing

children's' attitudes and beliefs towards school. In reference to their life circumstances, migrant parents in the study were found to constructed roles of parent involvement based on their beliefs and attitudes that their children may have a better life if they understand that education is a means to more opportunities and work choices. In the current study, parents referred to a range of modeling strategies related to the work place which contrasted the hard work in the fields with the benefits of being able to attend school. Similar findings were also found in Lopez (2001) case study of a migrant family with academically high achieving children. The family also took their children to the fields so that the children would learn the difficulty of the work they did and gain from real-life lessons the realization that without education they may be working in the fields (Lopez, 2001). Bempechat (1992) reported that parental practices, beliefs, and socialization patterns foster student achievement by influencing children's attitudes and motives that are essential for school learning. The findings of this study, similar to the work of Lopez (2001), call for a better understanding of how parents' of diverse groups including Latinos use their life circumstances to influence children's attitudes towards education. For migrant/Latino families and other minority groups understanding of the traditional as well as the nontraditional approaches to parent involvement and the life circumstance maybe vital in further exploring parental role construction and perceptions of education.

### **Language as a Tool for Communication**

The current study showed that Migrant Farmworker families held strong views about being able to communicate in their home language with center teachers and staff. A few parents even report negative views of teachers who could not speak Spanish and commented on having only minimal contact with English speaking teachers. In contrast, Spanish speaking teachers in the study also reported the connectedness they shared with the families; while English only

teachers talked about their disconnectedness in not being able to communicate freely and openly with families. Other studies have found that poor communication between low-income parents and teachers to be a barrier to engaging families (Lawson, 2003). Communication has been found to be even more inconsistent when parents and teachers do not share a common language (Bernhard, et al., 1998; Ramierz, 2003; McWayne, et al., 2008).

The work of Vygotsky (1978) describes language as the most important symbolic tool for mediating communication. Many schools and preschool programs today in the United States have needs for bilingual staff for the purpose of effective communication with non-English speaking families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Ramirez, 2003). Translation and interpretation of information should provide meaningful communications with families but one finding in this study suggest that sometimes communication practices even when bilingual staff was present were sometimes problematic. A few of the parents from one center (which in the past had only a few Spanish speakers employed) mentioned how things had gotten better at that center compared to when there were fewer Spanish speakers. Although the presence of more Spanish speaking staff was uneven through the sites used in the study, having adequate Spanish speaking staff was important to parents who spoke a language other than English in communicating with teachers as they faced a number of difficulties in communicating as needed, not always efficient. These findings are consistent with other literature related to the problematic communications between parents who speak a language other than English and English speaking teachers in schools and other institutions of learning (Bernard et. al., 1998; Perez Carreon et. al., 2005; McWayne, et. al., 2008; Ramirez, 2003). While the use of interpreters is a necessary tool for making connections with families, teachers also acknowledged that use of interpreters lacked personal connections

and weakened the content of the discussion between parent and teacher. However, for other families communication with English-only speaking teachers was difficult.

Linguistic tools of communication are complex with non-English speaking families and English speaking teachers. One method commonly suggested in the literature is the use of interpreters to make families feel more comfortable and assist in sharing meaningful information (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Teachers acknowledged the challenges working with families that speak a language other than English. Many of the English speaking teachers found their jobs to be cumbersome because of their limited ability to communicate with families. Apart from communication being already difficult with the interpreter, the fact that teachers may experience a sense of disconnection with families was a real problem for schools trying to encourage parent involvement. Other problems were that translations could be too fast. One teacher mentioned that she would sometimes say something in many words and that it seemed to her that the translator had said it in less time and less words, suggesting the communication is rushed and not meaningful. Delgado-Gaitan (2004) states that apart from translating or interpreting information to families, programs should be striving to have meaningful exchanges around topics related to the child's learning and development. While having bilingual staff and teachers does facilitate communication practices, it is essential that educators working with families, whose first languages are other than English, provide them with meaningful and rich communication. However, the use of interpreters for communicating with families seemed to be adequate in some instances, but problematic in others. During the focus groups one teacher mentioned that sometimes during a parent-teacher conference, it seemed that she would talk a lot about something and the interpreter would say what she said in much fewer words. It is vital that schools consider the delivery of the message. All three of the Migrant Head

Start centers have bilingual teachers and staff, but it is clear that even in a program in which parents' native language is spoken by some of the educators and staff, communication is still a struggle. Migrant Head Start is a program with a strong philosophy for supporting family home language and culture (Lopez & Greenfield, 2004; National Head Start Association, 2000) findings suggest that families still struggle with solid communication and good relationships with teachers in linguistically supportive programs. This study suggests that even in a program like Migrant Head Start that offers strong evidence of supporting family values, language and culture (Lopez and Greenfield, 2004), there still exists conflict in communication between educators and teachers in regards to language.

The Cultural Historical Approach acknowledges communication as a symbolic linguistic tool and emphasizes language as central to thought (Connery & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). For programs that serve a large number of immigrant or Latino families, the tools of communication are limited when teachers and staff don't have the skills or resources to speak a second language fluently. Teachers not only lose connectedness with families through interpretation, but information may lose meaning through the delivery of the message. Schools serving non-English speaking families need to ensure that the messages regarding children are delivered in a way that families fully understand.

### **Written Forms of Communication**

In this study all of the teachers referred to written communications as the most common form of communication with families. Teachers were found to use written communication on a weekly and sometime daily basis in corresponding with families about information related to their children and the school. While written communication practices are common in education programs, it is important to note that families in this study rarely discussed the written



communication practices with teachers. They more commonly referred to verbal language use with teachers and the dynamics of communication using interpreters when needed. Studies have found that Latino families better relate to communication practices that are in person either face to face or over the phone (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Perez-Carreon, 2005; Tinkler, 2002). According to the Hoover-Dempsey Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (2005) describes invitation as things teachers do to make parents feel welcomed in the school, it also emphasizes the importance of communication practices. Vygotsky's notion of two-way communication refers to communication using language as a tool (Vygotsky, 1978). In this study it appeared that the written communication practices with migrant families lacked social connectedness or face to face communication which may be more influential as a communication practice with Latino.

This study also gave insight into the parents' own literacy levels either Spanish or English that may hinder written communications from being fully understood. Although all the families in this study had strong literacy skills, it was evident from some of the interviews of both teachers and parents that literacy may be an issue with some migrant families. Parent involvement and the use of written communication is an understudied topic among migrant farmworker families. However, Lopez et al., (2001) acknowledges in his work on migrant farmworker families and parent involvement that often going door to door to communicate with families is more successful than flyers or announcements. Migrant Head Start may need to reconsider the use of written communication and consider other strategies for communication or ways to supplement the written form.

### **Language as Cultural Identity**

The Cultural Historical Theory suggests that humans create and elaborate their own contexts with tools and symbols within their environment that reflect their culture (Moll, 1990;

Vygotsky, 1978). According to Vygotsky, culture is seen as a historical process that continues to develop across time and place in societies (Moll, 1990). The migrant parents in this study discussed Spanish language as an aspect of their cultural identity.

Isabella, a young migrant parent, remarked, “Well that’s the most important thing of being Latino is speaking Spanish.” For her language was more than just a tool of communication it was a symbol of her cultural identity. Most of the families who participated in the study mentioned the importance of their children maintaining their language as part of their cultural identity. Schecter & Bayley (1997) reported that for Mexican American immigrants, continuation of Spanish language was tied to participation in cultural identity. Parents sometimes emphasized the importance of Spanish as being the first language of their children and as part of their identity. Portes and Salas (2011) acknowledge that bi-literacy needs not only to be understood for its linguistic factors but as a cultural practice and a way of life. Mignolo (2000) emphasized understanding language as both a power struggle and a cultural practice. Language is more than something that educators use to communicate with parents, or a barrier to overcome, it is cultural practice rooted in identity.

Often public schools address language in terms of a ‘barrier’ when reaching out to families devaluing the home language (Bernhard, et al., 1998; Romo, 1986) and creating negative communication experiences for Spanish speaking families. Tyler et al., (2008) noted that the cultural values of Mexican Americans were omitted from the classroom context in general and from learning and instruction because educators did not consider these values to be aligned with academic success. Theilheimer (2001) found that immigrant parents held different views than those of their children’s teachers regarding schools and education. Although Migrant Head Start is a program that focuses on supporting home culture of families, including language

(Lopez & Greenfield, 2004) more can be done so that educators understand the significance of language for migrant families. It is vital for schools and programs working with young Hispanic children to value families' culture and linguistic background and support the development of bilingualism for children to maintain a strong sense of identity. Latino families must feel that their language is valued by institutions and schools. Because Spanish language maintenance is a way in which families can connect to their cultural identity (Mignolo, 2000; Schecter & Bayley, 1997).

### **Invitations and Trust**

The Hoover-Dempsey Sandler Model of Parent Involvement (2005) discusses the importance of families feeling welcomed within the school context. The theory suggest that qualities within the education setting that promote a warm and welcoming environment are associated with enhanced parent involvement (Green, Walker, Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 2007). Critical to the construct of invitations includes the notion that parents enjoyed talking with teachers and were comfortable asking questions and believed that the teacher really cared (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The notion of trust, social relationships and dialogical reactions are evident in the Cultural Historical Approach (Vygotsky, 1978). For the most part parents at all three of the Migrant Head Start centers spoke about feeling welcomed at the centers and reported the teachers and staff as friendly and warm. These findings suggest that the program does an adequate job in finding and hiring teachers and staff that are caring individuals and try to accommodate families. Also that Head Start promotes acceptance of family cultural and language as part of their programming. These findings are consistent with other studies that predict positive views of education programs and parent involvement based on teacher and school characteristics that provide a welcoming environment and foster warmth and trust

(Anderson & Minke, 2007; Lupiani, 2004, Walker et al., 2011). Interestingly, one center stood out in the analysis of data as having more effective invitations due to the added components of shared culture and identity.

In one of the centers, parents spoke the most fondly of the programs' teachers and staff. Parents in this center shared a sense of deep 'trust' with the teachers and staff which was not as evident in the other two locations from the testimonies. Parents went as far as to describe the center teachers and staff "like family" and mentioned the word "*confianza*" or trust more frequently. One reason for this may be that they had the most bilingual staff and was the only center in the study with a Spanish speaking Latina director. Parents also made positive remarks about their relations and their impressions with the staff and educators. Portes and Salas (2011) found solidarity and trust '*confianza*' as important aspects of Latino communities and other minority communities such as African American with cultural values that focus on communalism (Tyler, 2008). Trust in parents-teacher relationships was found in other studies on invitations (Adams & Christenson, 2000). The minority of teachers who spoke native Spanish made the connection between language, trust, and making families feel invited. In the current literature, findings suggest that a strong Latino presence within schools and institutions that serve a large Latino population is essential in building connections with families (Shah, 2008).

In addition to Latino representation influencing parents' perceptions of trust and *confianza* in the program, the presence of Latino staff may also influence the level of parent involvement practices. Shah (2008) found that when schools had Latino representation of teachers, administrators, governance levels, had an increase in the level of Latino parent involvement in the school. Table 1 from chapter 3 shows Crystal Valley as the center with the most parent involvement in the 2012 season with 69 parent volunteers, compared to Arrow Head

Lake with 25 parent volunteers, and Boyne Farms with 48 parent volunteers. These centers have capacity to serve approximately the same number of children. Because Crystal Valley had the most Latino representation in administrative and other staff, it may suggest that Latino presence encourages parent involvement. Families who share cultural backgrounds with educators and school personnel may feel more connected through the cultural representation and presence in the education program.

### **Respect and Perceptions of Education**

Cultural Historical Theory discusses people as being products of their culture and looks at human development as different from other species in that humans are products of their own cultural norms relevant to symbol and tools (most importantly language) and development is social by nature (Vygotsky, 1978). While most parents in the study felt respected by educators at the three sites, the findings indicate that parents stressed their preference in being able to communicate with Spanish speaking teachers in the first/primary language. For some parents teachers' use of native language communicated respect as well support. For some parents, stronger parent and teacher relationships were forged through this connection between respect and language.

Apart from the importance of parents' perceptions of feeling respected in the school environment as families, differences were found in how parents viewed respect in regards to child rearing practices. Some parents questioned the values their children were learning in the schools in relations to adults and respect and teacher/child interactions. Studies that have focused on Latino families and schools have emphasizes authority of adults and respect for educators as value of Latinos as a group (Bermundez & Marquez, 1996; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valdez, 1996). A couple of parents in the study mentioned that teachers from the United States lacked

respect in negotiating parent and child relationships and these interactions contrasted their cultural beliefs in the home. Olmendo (2004) had similar finding in her study of Latina mothers who viewed the schools as places that contradicted family values because educators did not instill the value of respect during teacher/child interactions. Another study of immigrant parents also found that teachers' and parents' cultural views of child rearing practices created divisions between teachers and parents in early education programs (Bernhard, et al., 1998). Traditionally, educators have not been prepared to recognize the cultural and linguistic potential of immigrant children and families but have been taught to focus on the deficits (Delgado-Gaitan & Trueba, 1991).

During observations for a particular parent meeting I also watched a staff member going over the developmental stages and milestones of child development with the parents as sort of a wrap up activity at one of the meetings. While this seemed like important information to give families, I noticed that many of the parents responded to the child milestones by say "it depends" as if they were not quite in agreement with the milestones but considered other factors that might influence development as milestones. While information like milestones and developmental stages may be important part of child developmental educational practices, it was not clear during the meeting if parents were engaged with the information and in some ways they seemed to challenge the chart of milestones. Perhaps their own cultural perspectives and beliefs on how children develop may influence their understanding of milestones and development, based on differences and priorities of how children should be raised. It may be critical to connect with families in areas of development and education that are meaningful to their culture, like instilling respect, influences of extended family, and Delgado-Gaitan, (2004) discusses these views of Latinos who understand education more in terms of proper behavior including respect for

educators and adults. More culturally relevant planning might interest families in attending parent meetings and becoming involved.

## **Limitations**

This study is important and significant because the researcher was able to access a community in which not much work on parent involvement in the early years has previously been conducted (Lopez et al., 2001). This study provides more insight into this populations it does have some limitations. This section will address the limitations to the 1) parent sample, 2) the teacher sample, and 3) general limitations.

### **Limitations of Parent Sample**

Migrant farmworker parents who participated in this study were all (with the exception of one) parents who were recruited from parent meetings. One parent was recruited by word of mouth. Families who were already active in the program and attending parent meetings, were also represented as the core group of participants in the study. These families may have opinions and views a little more knowledgeable and supportive of the Migrant Head Start program and parent involvement and may not represent all the views of the general population of migrant farmworker parents.

Another limitation is that all of the parents in the study were literate. All of the parents who participated had at least a sixth grade education and could read and write in Spanish. Two of the parents also were fully bilingual in both Spanish and English. Some of the teachers commented during the interviews about having difficulties with families not being able to read or understand written communication. Unlike the families interviewed in this study, many other families may be challenged by lower literacy levels and thus be at a greater disadvantage when written communications are sent home. Based on my field observations and experience in the

program, including a discussion with one of the center directors, it was confirmed that many families do not read and understand some of the paperwork because they lack basic or sufficient literacy skills.

Distribution of the parents from each center also represented a limitation in the study. Although the researcher was able to get parents from each of the three Migrant Head Start Centers in Northwestern Michigan to participate, center parents from two of the centers were more willing to participate and were easier to recruit compared to the third location where fewer parents were ultimately recruited. It was also clear that more parents from two of the centers, but at the third center there was more resistance and it was more difficult for me to recruit more parents for the study. This could have been because the center director of the third site resigned during the project and she was a key contact helping to facilitate recruitment. Families may not have felt as confident participating in the study with the changes going on at the center.

### **Limitations of Spanish Speaking Teacher Sample**

The teacher interviews were also limited because there were only two Spanish speaking teachers who participated in the study. It would have been interesting to have had more discussions with Spanish speaking teachers to further explore their views on communication with parents. The limited data on Spanish speaking teachers is a limit to the study.

### **General Limitations**

In general the study was also limited because there was only a very small budget for the research. This small budget made it difficult to cover expenses related to the study adequately, particularly related to gas costs. The study took place at three sites, two of which were almost 80 miles apart, there was a lot of driving involved on behalf of the researcher which was quite costly



during a summer of high gas prices. Future research could expand the findings of these emerging themes through replication with greater funding and resources.

## **Conclusion**

This study set out to explore how parent involvement practices among migrant farmworkers parents of Mexican origin are influenced by cultural belief patterns from the home and teachers' roles at school. The results were discussed according to how the study answered the research questions and the findings in light of the theories and literature. This final section will: 1) further converse on key finding from the study of the study, 2) talk about the implications within the education and early childhood context, and 3) suggest recommendations.

### **Key Finding 1: Role of Occupation**

These findings impart further insight into parent involvement practices among diverse populations and how characteristics of life shape parents motivational beliefs in establishing their children's attitudes towards hard work and schooling. The current study revealed that parental discourse and modeling of 'work' was used as a means to motivate their children educationally. Lopez, (2001) challenges the notion of traditional understanding of parent involvement especially for migrant/immigrant families and calls for educators to identify the unique ways in which culturally diverse parents are already involved. This study adds to the conversation on parent involvement and diverse groups in the United States.

Implications for Head Start would be for a better understanding of the unique perspectives that immigrant/ migrant parents have related to parent involvement and their role of motivating their children educationally. The multicultural principles of Head Start address the importance of programming which considers the family as the primary source for culturally relevant programming (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1991). A strong

understanding of how life circumstances and in this case, occupation of families, model parents motivational roles regarding their children's' education.

Recommendations:

- Explore in more detail how migrant/immigrant families use their culture and life circumstances influence how they act towards their children's education.
- Develop national conversation related to diversity and parent involvement practices.
- Provide teachers and Head Start staff more training related to diverse perspectives of parent involvement.

**Key Finding 2: Role of Extended Family**

A Second key finding of this study was the role of extended family in the education of children. For the migrant families, extended family was found to be directly involved in the household as well as a voice of encouragement for family involvement. Previous research has found extended family ties play an active role in the development of the child among culturally diverse groups (DeGamo & Martinez, 2006; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Pearson & Hunter, 1990). For ethnic groups that have strong cultural tie to family, future research on the role of extended family and parent involvement may provide to educators an understanding of the way in which *familismo* shapes the households of immigrant/migrant families. Of importance is gaining an understanding of how these social family ties may be significant in an ecological perspective to the child's development. This study provided insight into the roles in their children's education and provides evidence that they have nontraditional ways of looking at role construction and parent involvement.

Head Start performance standards call for building relationships with families by providing them opportunities for involvement and include family in the decision-making and involvement (Schumacher, 2003). Implications of this study for Head Start programming would call for exploration of the role of extended family in Head Start parent involvement practices and additionally how these extended family structures can be supported in program planning.

**Recommendations:**

- Extend family partnership agreements to include extended family when possible.
- Make conscious efforts to include extended family in Head Start participation.
- Build relationships with extended family partners.
- Acknowledge the role of extended family in the life of the child and encourage conversations and of the role of extended family.

**Key Finding 3: Communication Practices**

Interpretation of information either in written or verbal form was reported problematic by both teachers and parents. Language was a barrier to communication and quality parent-teacher relationships in some circumstances as identified by both English speaking teachers and Spanish speaking parents in the current study. A number of studies have explored the problem of language use between Latino families who are Spanish speaking and English speaking educators in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Perez-Carreon, 2005; Ramirez, 2004; Romo, 1984). Furthermore, for Latino families, language has been found to be a significant predictor of parent involvement (McWayne, et al., 2008); but a challenge to immigrant parents who lose some authority when they can directly communicate with educators (Perez-Carreon, 2005). A study of Chinese immigrant found that immigrant parents communicated less frequently, had more difficulty comprehending the communication, and were less satisfied with their children's school

(Dyson, 2001). The findings in the literature were supported by the findings of this particular study.

While this study took place in a Migrant Head Start which strives to foster a strong emphasis on home language and parent/teacher communication (Lopez & Greenfield, 2010), language barriers between staff and teachers were prevalent in the study. Written communications were discussed by teachers as being the most common form of communication between the home and the school. While the teachers acknowledged that written communications were always sent home in both Spanish and English, some discussed written communication as an ineffective means of communicating between families and teachers. Teachers described parents as overwhelmed by paperwork and perhaps not being able to understand everything that goes home. While a couple of teachers mentioned having a bus aid explain paperwork to families, it was unclear from the study to what extent families were receiving help in comprehending written communications or fully understanding the paperwork. The findings of this study reveal that communication efforts were wanting in both written practices and during face to face communications, including communications using interpreters.

Implications for Head Start programming would be to better understand the use of third person translators and interpreters in the Head Start setting. Programs should do self-evaluations on the effectiveness of language use in the classroom during parent/teacher communications. There also needs to be a better understanding of how written communication is used as a practice of communication between school and home particularly with families who speak other languages or may not have strong written communication skills.

Recommendations:

- More professional development for bilingual staff who are taking on the roles of interpreters.
- Use of pictures and visuals during parent teacher conferences which aid in interpretations during parent/teacher conferences.
- Strategies for teachers to adapt to foster communication between families and teachers speaking different languages.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of written communication both the quantity and quality of information the passes from school to home.

#### **Key Finding 4: Language Culture**

Cultural identity and language were discussed by parents as part of family identity, group identity being Latinos, and the continuation of that identity they wanted for their children. All of the families in the study acknowledged that learning English was critical for their children, but they were also adamant about their children continuing the linguistic heritage. Research related to language use and Latinos in the United States has found bilingualism to be vitally connected to cultural identity (Mignolo, 2000; Schechter & Bayley, 1997). Perez Carreon (2005) found language to be an instrument of both identity and power. Language was not only a symbol of their identity that they wanted their children to maintain but Spanish language appeared to deepen connections between parents and educators and staff at Migrant Head Start. Language as a cultural practice (Mignolo, 2002) not only was found to be significant to identity, but useful as a symbolic tool to instill elements of ‘trust’ *confianza* between educators and parents when cultural. The importance of language for immigrants with children in schools and institutions in the United States needs to be better understood in terms of how language as a cultural practice

plays into families' development goals of children as well as for bridging home to school connections with educators.

Another finding from this study related to culture and language was that 3 of the 14 participants were from indigenous cultures in Southern Mexico and spoke Mixteco and Tzotzil as their first languages. Changing demographics of migrant farmworker families reflect a more heterogeneous population and these changes are ever increasing in migrant labor (Romanowski, 2003). These new languages pose further complications in communicating with families who speak languages other than English or Spanish and have different cultural beliefs. One Canadian study on immigrant families found that teachers viewed child development practices of immigrant families negatively (Bernhard, et al., 1998).

The linkages among language, cultural identity and practice (Mignolo, 2000), was one perspective that emerged from the study related to child rearing practices and culture. Another cultural viewpoint which came out of the study was migrant families' understanding of *respeto* in teacher and child relationships which differed from mainstream American views on these interactions. The notion of *respeto* during adult and child interactions is supported by other studies on Latino families with children in the education system (Degado-Gaitain, 2004; Olmendo, 2004; Valdez, 1996). Some of the migrant parents discussed the lack of formality in interactions between children and English speaking teachers in the Migrant Head Start. They viewed these interactions as inappropriate and against their cultural beliefs. While programs such as Migrant Head Start makes tremendous efforts to abide by practices that support the home language and culture of migrant children and families (Lopez & Greenfield, 2004; National Seasonal and Migrant Head Start Association, 2010; Yadin, 2005). More can be learned about families' cultural views and how they influence the standpoint on what families of immigrant

children want educationally for their children. Data from a report by the Migration Policy Institute shows that currently there are over 18 million immigrant children in the United States (Van Hook, Landale, & Hillemeir, 2013). This number stresses the importance for educators to prepare themselves to better understand cultural practices of families from other countries. Head Start is one early childhood education program which is currently serving a large population of immigrant children. The increasing number of immigrant families with children entering early education programs calls for a border understanding of cultural views of education and child rearing. Teachers and educators would benefit from gaining a better understanding of the different perspectives and work to incorporate some of these family views into classroom practices.

#### Recommendations:

- Programs such as Head Start should engage parents with child development practices represented by the institution while encouraging parents to share their cultural perspectives related to child development.
- Encourage dialog between parents and teachers in Head Start and other early care programs with a large number of immigrant children so that teachers can incorporate parent's views into child development practices.

#### **Chapter Summary**

Finally, this study greatly adds to the emerging literature on parent involvement practices in early education programs and immigrant families. In particular migrant farmworker families of Mexican origin are a population which has been narrowly studied and this endeavor has provided more knowledge of their views on parent involvement practices. Furthermore, this

study explored the perspectives of teachers working with immigrant groups in early education settings. It cannot be expected that early education programs such as Migrant Head Start, which serve vulnerable populations, entirely moderate barriers such as poverty, mobility, and language. But more knowledge of the issues surrounding migrant/immigrant families accessing education will add to the national conversation around these issues and provides leads for further research and stronger teacher/educator practice.



## **APPENDICES**

## **Appendix A**

### **Protocol for Focus Groups**

#### **Krueger & Casey (2009)**

Present: Moderator (Investigator), assistant, and 6-8 Participants (parents during parent focus groups and teachers during teacher focus groups). Focus groups will be used for member checking of the data after interviews are complete.

#### **Focus Groups:**

1. The group will be welcomed and light refreshments will be served. The investigator and assistant will be introduced. Participants will make name cards and take a few moments to chat informally.
2. An overview of the topic. Parents and teachers will be informed on the topic and the investigator will explain their role in the study. Participants will complete IRB and one page demographic questionnaire.
3. Guidelines of the focus group setting. There are no right or wrong answers, only different points of view. Listen respectfully while others are talking. Investigator will guide the discussion and notes and visuals will be written down to further discuss key points.
4. Moderator will begin with the first open-ended question. Probes will be used such as, “can you please tell me more” “has anyone else had that experience.”
5. Group will have wrap-up discussion at the end to summarize key findings. The moderator will thank the group for their participation in the study.

## **Appendix B**

### **Parent Interview Questions**

#### **Parent Demographics**

**The first section of the interview will provide me with some background information on you and your involvement in the Migrant Head Start Program.**

1. Are both parents in the family employed in migrant labor? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many hours do you typically work per day? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What language did you grow up speaking most of the time? \_\_\_\_\_
4. What language is spoken at home? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What language did your spouse grow up speaking? \_\_\_\_\_
6. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_
7. How many children do you have and how old are they? \_\_\_\_\_
8. In what country were you born? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How many years has your family brought children to Migrant Head Start? \_\_\_\_
10. How many children have you had in Migrant Head Start? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Did you attend school in Mexico, United States, or both countries? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What is the highest grade level you achieved in school? \_\_\_\_\_
13. How well do you speak English? None, somewhat, well, very well.

#### **Interview Questions**

**Now I am going to ask you some questions about your involvement in your child's education and Migrant Head Start. These questions will be about how you view and participate in your child's education. There will be 7 questions in this section.**

- 1) What kinds of things do you do to help your child with school?
- 2) What do you do to encourage your children in school?
- 3) Who influences you most in learning about your child's education? (e.g. family member, teacher, friend)
- 4) Please tell me about things you do to participate in the program?
- 5) What is the parent's responsibility to the learning and success of their child in school?

- 6) Do you perceive differences between your families' goals in educating your children and the Migrant Head Start program's goals?
- 7) As a Latino, how do you feel your culture influences your view of education?

**Now we are going to talk about your experiences with teaching staff which you have had in Migrant Head Start related to becoming involved in the program.**

- 1) How would you describe your experiences with the Migrant Head Start staff and teachers when you visit the center?
- 2) How would you describe your experiences with the Migrant Head Start staff and teachers when you visit the center?
- 3) Is language ever a problem in communicating with staff? If so, how do the educators accommodate your language needs so that you understand? Are there any difficulties?
- 4) Do you feel welcome at the center? Have the teachers attempted to involve you in classroom or other activities? Happen often? What encourages you to be involved? What stops you from being involved or makes it difficult to be involved?
- 5) Does the center provide opportunities for you to volunteer and become involved at the center? If so, how were you invited to participate in the school?
- 6) Do you think the educators at MHS listen to your concerns?
- 7) How does your teacher communicate with you? What would improve (if anything) your communication with your child's teacher? What do the teachers do to make you feel respected?
- 8) Please describe your overall relationship with educators at Migrant Head Start?
- 9) Are you familiar with Head Start's policy on parent involvement?
- 10) What is your understanding of the things you can do to volunteer at MHS?

**Finally, I am going to ask you some questions related to your own schooling experience and how you view your experience compared to your child's experience in Migrant Head Start.**

- 1) Please tell me about your experience in school? Did you like school?
- 2) Can you tell me some of the reasons you came to school?

- 3) Did your parents participate in school? Did these teachers communicate with your family about school?
- 4) Were your teachers bilingual and did they need to be to communicate with you?
- 5) Tell me about a teacher who was helpful or influential to you? How was this person helpful to you?
- 6) How would you describe differences in your education experience and your child's education at Migrant Head Start?
- 7) How do you go about schooling your child at home and how is that different from the program?
- 8) In what ways is MHS consistent with your family and cultural values? In what ways is it not consistent with your family values?
- 9) Do you think schools in general support your family and cultural values?

## **Appendix C**

### **Teacher Interview Questions**

#### **Teacher Demographics**

**The first section of the interview will provide me with some background information about you and your experience as a teacher in Migrant Head Start.**

1. How long have you worked in Early Childhood Education? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How many years have you worked for Migrant Head Start? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the highest level of education you have completed? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Have you taken college classes? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Have you taken classes related to parent involvement in college? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your home language? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Do you have family who work in migrant labor? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What language do you speak with parents? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

**In this first section of the interview I will be asking about some of your background information and about your experiences in the Migrant Head Start Program.**

- 1) Describe the process for getting parents involved? Describe your average participating families?
- 2) How would you describe your communication with families? Do you need to use a translator? If so, please describe communication with a translator?
- 3) What means do you use to communicate with families and how effective would you describe these methods?
- 4) Do they seem encouraged to become involved in the program? What barriers might they face in becoming involved?
- 5) What practices are most effective in involving parents? Are there things you would like to learn to try to involve more families?
- 6) How would you describe the programs efforts to communicate with families? What are the strengths of the program or weaknesses?
- 8) What are your thoughts on the number of parents who volunteer in the center? What do you do to ensure the numbers of parent volunteers increase or stay the same?

9) Describe your overall relationship with the families in your class (rate this one to ten) and describe.

10) What parent participation data is used to inform parent involvement practices?

11) Does this data help you inform your practice as a teacher?

## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Protocol**

Present: Investigator and participant (teacher or parent) in a one on.

1. Determine time and place for interview.
2. Identify self and briefly discuss the topic to be covered and purpose of study. Guide the participants through the consent form and ask them if they have any questions on consent form.
3. Begin the interview. Be pleasant and at ease with the participants. Repeat the questions if necessary.
4. Confirm answers with “yes,” “ok,” “I see,” and ask them to give repeat answers if necessary. Motivate the respondents with key words like “thanks” or “this is useful information” Probe for answers by confirming what they say and asking them if they can tell more about the topic.
5. Thank participants for their participation. If appropriate, ask them if they would be interested in participation in a focus group for member checking Creswell (1994) and Strauss & Corbin (1998)



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