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**LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: FEELINGS OF  
BELONGINGNESS AND ATTACHMENT IN AN URBAN  
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**

by

Christel M. Hibbard Pond

A Dissertation

Submitted to the  
Department of Educational Services and Leadership  
College of Education  
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For the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
at  
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Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

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## **Dedications**

This dissertation is dedicated to my supportive and encouraging family.

To my three children who drive everything that I do. I love you. Thank you to my parents for helping instill the value of perseverance, for always understanding, and for their willingness to listen. Without their support I would not have been able to accomplish this goal. Thank you for always being there for me.

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## **Abstract**

Christel M. Pond

### **LATINO IMMIGRANT FAMILY INVOLVEMENT: FEELINGS OF BELONGINGNESS AND ATTACHMENT IN AN URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL 2018 - 2019**

Ane Turner Johnson, Ph.D.

Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the relationship between Latino immigrant family involvement and feelings of belongingness and attachment in relation to the school community. This study explored how Latino immigrant family voices described their feelings of belongingness and attachment by investigating the linkages between Latino immigrant family beliefs and social capital relating to school involvement and perceptions of belongingness. This study used theories of attachment and belongingness to understand the relationship between family feelings of belongingness, attachment, social capital, and family involvement in the school community. Findings of the study revealed that although Latino immigrant family members may often not see the importance of becoming involved in their child's education within the school community, they did value their child's education. Latino immigrant family members did benefit from translational tools, via written or oral communication, in order to bridge the gap between school home connections and build upon social capital and feelings of belongingness. Although there are cultural differences, Latino immigrant family members and educators embraced opportunities to be involved and to involve families within the school.

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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The Latino immigrant population is the fastest growing population in the United States (Wright & Levitt, 2014). The number of Latino immigrants is projected to increase dramatically by the year 2040 and become the majority population in the United States by the year 2050 (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). As a result, the United States must come to terms with the largest wave of immigration in recent history (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

Currently, one in four children in the United States has a parent who is a first-generation immigrant (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). Educators across the country now must accommodate the needs of diverse learners, many who endure linguistic challenges in the classroom (Karabenick & Noda, 2004). Furthermore, the rapid expansion of English language learner students in the United States has created myriad challenges to school districts, state, and national government agencies when meeting the needs of English language learners (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). There is currently a disconnect between meeting diverse student learner needs and the traditional Eurocentric classroom (Soumah & Hoover, 2013). Research suggests failure in meeting the needs of Latino students specifically in the areas of graduation rates and promoting student achievement while accommodating Latino student learner needs within the classroom setting (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Specifically, those students whose second language backgrounds, in addition to students who are impoverished, lack the support needed on multiple levels to succeed academically (Soumah & Hoover, 2013). Furthermore, Latino students have historically been overrepresented in disability classifications in school and

have received a disproportionate number of disciplinary referrals (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Latino immigrant students should have every opportunity to be successful in school despite cultural differences and challenges that may occur through immigration and transition processes.

Immigrant children often become separated from one or both parents when a family immigrates to another country (Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, & Páez, 2008). Often families are unable to immigrate to the United States simultaneously. Children who become separated from one or both parents through the immigration process face multiple challenges, including adapting to cultural differences, changes in the schooling process, and community differences (Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, & Páez, 2008). Absence of family involvement has been associated with decreased student achievement (Suárez-Orozco, Gaytán, Bang, Pakes, O'Connor, & Rhodes, 2010). Also, parents who are limited English proficient may have difficulty communicating with teachers and school personnel (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). Sometimes children of immigrant parents are able to communicate with teachers when their parents cannot communicate (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008). Immigrants also face challenges financially (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008).

As the Latino population rapidly increases in the United States, many Latino families face hardships associated with new language acquisition and cultural differences (Haack, Gerdes, & Lawton, 2014). Compounding these problems, according to Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney (2008), is that approximately one in three Latino children whose families have immigrated to the United States are living in poverty, which has also been linked to student achievement. In fact, 35% of Latino children live below

the poverty line (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Students who live in poverty have significantly lower grades, standardized test scores, and high school completion rates than their higher income counterparts (Balfanz & Legters, 2004; Guskey, 2011; Hopson & Lee, 2011). Immigrant students who come from low SES households are at the highest risk of struggling in school compared to immigrant students who live in high SES households where there is no indication of decreased student achievement (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). Students who do not speak English as their first language in their home are identified as English Language Learners (ELL), (Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2014). ELL students often share similar characteristics that may lead to decreased student achievement in school including, low SES, LEP, and cultural differences (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). Few empirical studies have focused on intervention strategies for ELL students who are at-risk academically in school (Solari, Petscher, & Folsom, 2014).

Currently 25% of all public school children are Latino and by the year 2030 it is predicted that culturally and linguistically diverse learners will make up approximately half of the public school population in the United States (Culp, & Schmidlein, 2012). Hispanic student learners are the largest group of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, a group which is predicted to account for 25% of the total U.S. population by 2050 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The increasing enrollment of culturally and linguistically diverse student learners present key stakeholders in schools with many challenges, including meeting the needs of those learners and attaining current standards associated with state testing requirements (Karabenick & Noda, 2004; Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). Latino students are at greater risk to start elementary school less prepared and to experience school failure and retention (Galindo & Fuller, 2010;

Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011). Research indicates that English language learners (ELL) are more likely to drop out of school compared to their English-speaking peers (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). In order to close the achievement gap in specific student subgroups, including English language learners, it is important to understand the risk factors related to those students (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011).

Immigration leads to changes in contexts, relationships, and family and community roles, which can lead to a sense of loss (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). According to Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco (2007), immigration is one of the most difficult changes a family can encounter. Historically, there have been three categories that define the term Latino/a, including geographic, political, and cultural definitions (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). The categories have become intertwined over time and the definition of what it means to be Latino has become unclear (Hayes-Bautista & Chapa, 1987). Therefore, in order to meet the needs of the Latino immigrant population, policy makers, school officials, and key stakeholders must recognize the unique situation that migrant families encounter, especially student education. Publicly, there have been debates about how children of immigrants have been neglected, particularly when embracing cultural differences (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007).

### **English Language Learners and Education Policy in the United States**

According to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, Public Law No. 107-110), the definition of an “English language learner” is a student who was not born in the United States or whose first language is one other than English, or a person who comes from an environment where the dominant language is one other than English, or whose



difficulty in speaking English significantly impacts the student's ability to meet the state's level of proficient achievement (Section 9101), (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011). The ELL student population is at a high risk of academic failure which also has an effect on individual schools where there is a high enrollment of students in that subgroup (Sheng, Sheng, & Anderson, 2011).

According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress (National, 2013), students who are eligible for free and/or reduced lunch, an indicator of low socioeconomic status, significantly underperformed in all areas of standardized testing compared to students who came from high socioeconomic backgrounds (National, 2013). Furthermore, students who were not considered to be among the minority subgroups outperformed students who face linguistic barriers (National, 2013). The New Jersey State funding report also indicates that students considered to be in the most disadvantaged subgroups, including those students who are categorized as English language learners, are underperforming in school (National, 2013). Specifically, only 36% of fourth graders in the state's most disadvantaged districts scored in the proficient range when tested (National, 2013). Latino students are severely lagging compared to their non-Latino peers. For example, in New Jersey, Latino students are struggling to excel compared to their peers. Without proper support and encouragement from parents and district personnel, including teachers, students will continue to struggle academically. Additionally, school districts face an enormous challenge of gaining financial support in order to fund professional development opportunities that could help educators to bridge the achievement gap for Latino immigrant students (Clune, 1994).

Latinos have experienced, as a group, a lower educational experience in school compared to other groups of students, including their White peers (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). The lack of cultural awareness among educators and poor student-teacher relationships, as well as home-school connections are of concern in regards to Latino student achievement (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). In order to be successful in school, Latino immigrants must adapt to cultural norms and transition to differences in American schools (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). The ways in which Latino students adapt to new languages, cultural norms, and American contexts contribute to success in schools (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). Many immigrant families may rely heavily on school personnel to educate their children on their understanding of school (Moreno & Gaytán, 2013). There is a disconnect between meeting the needs of Latino immigrant student learners and making connections to improve Latino family involvement in regards to school community relations. In order to support the success of Latino immigrants there is a need to understand how belongingness influences why Latino immigrant students and families may struggle with home-school connections.

### **Belonging and Community in Education**

Schooling in the United States represents the goals and values of the traditional majority, is inherently Eurocentric (Janzen, 1994), and has been slow to adapt to shifts in demographics (Janzen, 1994; Janzen, 2006). Differences in American culture, testing procedures, curriculum, and daily schedules are a few of the many differences that immigrant families encounter (Janzen, 1994). Traditional views on American schooling focus on schools as instructional sites where a set of skills and a common culture work to equip students with a set of skills deemed necessary to succeed in society (Giroux, 1988;

Janzen, 2006). In the past, traditional schools have focused on developing curriculum for those students who are not the minority and who do not face socio-economic challenges (Janzen, 2006). National and local officials, as well as key district stakeholders, rarely ask ‘why’ the goal of the traditional definition of school may be more beneficial to certain socioeconomic and cultural groups (Janzen, 2006). Currently, the concern over how schools should act as a place where social and cultural growth is embraced in a class-divided society has been ignored (Janzen, 2006). The history of schooling fails to embrace the traditions of uniqueness that different people bring to schools (Giroux, 1988). Thus, the majority of immigrant youth who recently moved to the United States have been secluded in school, resulting in a disconnect between Latino immigrant students and their peers (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007).

Han (2008) states that a child’s family environment has the greatest impact on student achievement. Furthermore, scholars suggest that more work must be done to identify culturally responsive ways to help Latino children to improve student achievement in school settings (Ceballos & Bratton, 2010). Students who feel connected to school may be able to face social inequalities that are related to barriers associated with low socioeconomic status and other challenges connected to urban communities (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012). Feelings of connectedness can contribute to student achievement and potentially impact the entire school community (Lemberger & Clemens, 2012).

It is essential that the social and academic needs of the quickly growing group of immigrant students are met in order to ensure access (Greenberg, 2013). First-generation children may attend early schooling in the country where they were born (Jiang &

Peterson, 2012). However, the longer that the individual student is exposed to culture in the United States, the more likely their identities will be molded to American culture and values (Rong & Brown, 2001). Due to the fact that immigrant children are exposed to American culture more so than their parents and members of their family, immigrant youth are more likely to learn English language faster than their families, which may inhibit parents' and families' ability to engage in the traditional educational system in a way that meets the needs of immigrant learners (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007).

An enormous empirical base supports the importance of parent involvement and a child's achievement in school (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Parent-school relationships, especially in elementary school, are essential for promoting both academic and social skills and may predict later success in school (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012; Powell, Son, File, & San Juan, 2010). Research indicates that family involvement at school can positively impact a child's achievement and development (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Studies have shown that schools have a major influence on how and to what extent families get involved in their child's education (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). Moreover, in schools where teachers and leaders work to engage families in the education process of their child the more success they have in involving families in the educational process (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). There is mounting evidence that links student academic success to parent involvement in school (Gaitan, 2012). In addition, relationships between parents, schools, and community organizations are essential to promote student achievement (Gaitan, 2012). Often, the way in which a parent becomes involved in their child's education is

culturally bound (Gaitan, 2012). Therefore, families who have experienced forms of education that differ when compared to traditional schooling in the United States may place different values and emphasis on education.

Feelings of belonging in school, defined as how an individual feels in relation to their environment, have been related to student achievement (Roche & Kuperminc, 2012). Specifically, feelings of belongingness pertain to how an individual feels personally accepted, included, and supported by other individuals as a whole within an environment (Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013). However, limited research has been completed to explain how families of immigrant youth and parents feel they belong in the school community (Gaitan, 2012). To an extent, individuals develop a sense of self and their identity from the social groups in which they belong (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Therefore, children and families may associate belonging with familiar social groups and may not become involved in school-based and community-based activities.

### **Problem Statement**

Research indicates that immigrant children are isolated in their schools and communities (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007; Poza, Brooks, & Valdés, 2014). Related to the exposure of immigrant youth to American culture, school-based experiences and encounters are a place of cultural changes for students, especially when they meet teachers who are from a different culture (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). Immigrant parents and families do not have the same exposure as their children, and as a result do not make the same connections to American culture as their child (Gaytán, Carhill, & Suárez-Orozco, 2007). The lack of exposure poses a problem in

providing a connection between Latino immigrant families and measuring feelings of belongingness in relation to current American traditional schooling goals and curriculum.

Family involvement encompasses many home-based and school-based activities (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). The lack of family involvement in school-based activities, particularly among the Latino population, lends concerns (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). In fact, research indicates that, “Latino parents may have even more influence on their children’s educational decisions than parents from other ethnic groups,” which includes immigrant family members (DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006). Children look to their members of their family for comfort and security. If family members do not feel connected to school-based activities and their place in a school, there is a greater chance that they will not become involved in their child’s education, which may impact student achievement in school and contribute a lack of a sense of belongingness. Therefore, Latino immigrant students and families may not feel a true sense of belongingness within the school community. Latino immigrant families may not be able to contribute to their child’s education because there is a disconnect between cultures and the schooling process.

Urban schools in the United States are struggling to meet the needs of diverse student populations, such as Latino immigrant students (Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, & Páez, 2008). There is a need to examine Latino immigrant families beliefs about their child’s education and community. In addition, Latino family descriptions could reveal ways in which immigrant children are supported within the educational system. It is essential that factors that promote and impede the learning process of Latino immigrant students be investigated, as well as expectations for learning in a school environment (Wright &

Levitt, 2014). Considering the high rate of Latino immigrant children living in poverty, it is crucial that parent's thoughts and beliefs are accounted for when it comes to their child's education.

In summary, although research has been conducted to explore Latino immigrant student achievement in school, there is a lack of research to document lack of parental involvement and absence in regards to student achievement (Suarez-Orozco et. al, 2010). Previous research investigating this problem includes English language learner proficiency, student gender, support from the school, economic struggles, and parent involvement. However, Latino immigrant family beliefs about how they view their role in their child's education, along with how they feel they can get involved in school and community activities have been neglected, particularly in regard to how this involvement contributes to a sense of belongingness within the school community.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the relationship between Latino immigrant family involvement and feelings of belongingness and attachment in relation to the school community. This study explored how Latino immigrant family voices describe their feelings of belongingness and attachment by investigating the linkages between Latino immigrant family beliefs and social capital relating to school involvement and parent perceptions of belongingness. This study sought to understand the relationship between family feelings of belongingness, attachment, social capital, and family involvement in the school community. The setting for this study was a small, urban elementary school in New Jersey, with a substantial immigrant population and a high number of families who live in poverty.

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant family members describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education?
2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?
3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families' sense of belongingness?
4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?

## Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used for the purpose of this study.

**Latino immigrant.** The term *Latino immigrant* is defined as individuals “who are foreign-born or have at least one foreign-born parent. (Most often, these children are not living in the United States illegally—a vast majority of children with one or more immigrant parents are U.S. citizens (Severns, 2012, p. 1).”

**English language learner.** The term *English Language Learner (ELL)* is defined as “A student who primarily speaks a language other than English and is in the process of learning English (Severns, 2012, p. 1).”

**Social capital.** This term is defined as “the importance of using social connections and social relations in achieving goals. Social capital, or resources accessed through such connections and relations, is critical in achieving goals for individuals, social groups, organizations, and communities (Lin, 2002, p. 7).”



**Belongingness.** The term *Belongingness* is defined as relatedness, sense of membership, support, and acceptance in an individual's view of community and self (Osterman, 2000).

**Place Attachment Theory.** The term *Place Attachment Theory* is defined as an individual's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional embeddedness in their physical environment (Brown & Perkins, 1992).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical lenses for this research included an emphasis on social capital theory and theories of belongingness and place attachment, particularly involving improving family participation in the school community and by providing an opportunity for family members to express their feelings about belonging in the school community. Social capital theory and social structures of relationships were used to help describe how individuals benefit from the understanding of social capital on both individuals and community networks. Multiple theories have addressed the concept of cultural or social capital, including Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1985) and Stanton-Salazar's theory of capital framework (1997), which also serve to describe culturally and linguistically diverse students' achievement outcomes (Brown & Chu, 2012). Empirical evidence has also suggested that physical and social characteristics, such as economic disadvantage and social capital, contribute risk for student development within communities (Caughy, Franzini, Windle, Dittus, Cuccaro, Elliott, & Schuster, 2012).

## **Social Capital Theory**

Louis Hanifan (1916) first identified social capital as companionship and social discourse among a group of individuals and families who make up a social unit (Aldrich, & Meyer, 2015). Since then, the concept has been adopted, to identify how involvement and participation in groups can have positive effects for individuals and the community that surrounds them (Portes, 1998). Bourdieu defined social capital as one of four types of capital, which include economic, cultural, and symbolic, that collectively determine the route of social life among individuals and the community in which they live (Bourdieu, 1985). Bourdieu further expands the definition of social capital as the different functions of established relationships where individual networks are expanded within a society (Bourdieu, 1985). Coleman (1988) expanded upon Bourdieu's definition to focus on the effect of social capital for individuals within different social networks. Coleman (1988) also concentrated on how social capital and social structures of relationships used to help describe how individuals benefit from the understanding of social capital on both individuals and community networks.

Research has suggested that the theory of social capital may explain why certain students perform differently than other students (Plagens, 2011). Putnam (1993) defined social capital as encompassing social organizations to explain how networks and norms function to mutually benefit individuals within a community. Often times, critics of social capital theory argue that social capital fails to describe social relationships in a concrete way (Plagens, 2011). Explanations about how social capital works are often inconsistent and lack detail about why social capital contributes to student performance in school (Plagens, 2011). According to Horvat, Weininger, and Lareau (2003), it is not

only network connections between families but the quality and the quantity of available resources that are important. Previous research has linked social interactions with community and school settings to social capital and individual feelings of belongingness (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013).

There are three necessary factors of social capital categorized as accessibility, availability, and activation (Lin, 1999; 2001). Individual exposure to different relationships and information influences an individual's access to social capital (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013). Could social capital theory explain why parents feel disconnected from their child's school or possibly why parents are not getting involved in school-based activities? Lin (1999, 2001) also suggested that there are certain reasons why social capital is not effective in explaining why the theory may contribute to the way that an individual makes decisions and may reinforce an individual's identity within a specific social group (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013). In addition, inequalities in the theory of social capital originate from several factors, which may include ethnicity, one's immigrant status, educational experience, and socioeconomic status (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013).

### **Attachment Theory and Belongingness**

Place attachment is connected to an individual's environmental perception (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Proshansky, Fabian, and Kaminoff (1983) defined place identity as "a sub-structure of the self-identity of the person consisting of, broadly conceived, cognitions about the physical world in which the individual lives" (p. 59). Individual perceptions may represent memories, feelings, values, attitudes, meanings in regards to physical settings that a person encounters associated with different places

(Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminiff, 1983). Place attachment framework also has multiple dimensions, including person, process, and place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Definitions of person-place attachment bonding remain scattered in current literature (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Scannell & Gifford (2010) proposed a three-dimensional framework that encompasses person, psychological, and place dimensions. The first dimension includes the person or actor and asks how the person may be attached and to what extent (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The second dimension includes the psychological process and how an individual internalizes attachment through cognition and behavior (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Finally, the third dimension of place attachment is the object of the attachment including place attachment associated with the nature of attachment of the place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Place attachment occurs at both the individual and group levels (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). How Latino immigrant families associate place attachment to the school community may influence their feelings of belongingness.

Research has indicated that students' self-concepts were associated with a sense of belonging at school (Brake & Bornholt, 2004). Furthermore, research has studied family factors that influence how students are motivated (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Attachment theory has been linked to early childhood education experiences and later developmental outcomes (Turner, 2005). Attachment has also been described as the emotional bond characterized by a reciprocal relationship between a system and a caregiver (Turner, 2005). Literature has revealed that feelings of belongingness in school are a major influence on student performance (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Schools can help to enhance individual student sense of belonging (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Feelings of belongingness in school settings relate to family associations with school

districts in ways that relate to how families feel and associate how they belong to the school community. Therefore, gathering information on how belongingness among Latino immigrant families in relation to the school community may contribute to efforts to increase student success in school.

Social capital theory and theories of attachment and belongingness may help to identify how Latino immigrant students and families struggle with home-school connections. Social capital theory places an emphasis on the importance of using social connections and social relations in achieving goals in social groups, organizations, and communities (Lin, 2002). Attachment theory describes an individual's behavioral, cognitive, and emotional bond to their physical environment (Brown & Perkins, 1992). Belongingness encompasses relatedness and acceptance of an individual's view of community and self (Osterman, 2000). Latino immigrant students who are given opportunities to be successful within home-school connections and in every aspect of the curriculum are more likely to be successful in school despite challenges that may be occur through immigration and transition processes (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The relationship that individuals have with places that surround their home of residence relate to feelings of belongingness and place attachment (Benson, 2014). Literature surrounding belongingness and place attachment demonstrates that place attachment relationships may develop through long-term residency but can also occur short-term (Benson, 2014).

## **Significance of the Study**

This qualitative case study has multiple implications for policy, practice, and research. First, in order to meet the needs of the Latino immigrant student population, we must gain an understanding about Latino family involvement. With the growing population of immigrant Latino families in school communities, there is a need to discover how feelings of belongingness relate to Latino immigrant family involvement and home-school connections.

## **Policy**

The results of this study will influence policy development in relation to the Latino immigrant population and school communities in school districts and at the national level. Exploring connections between school communities, Latino family feelings of belonging and parental involvement could expose strategies to increase student achievement. Furthermore, key stakeholders in schools may use the results to improve strategies for parent involvement. The implications of this study could influence policies at the local, state, and national level. The results of this study will help school districts and key stakeholders at all levels to define ways to propel Latino immigrant students and their families to optimize student success in school. Primarily, the acquisition and development of programs to encourage family involvement in positive ways throughout the schooling process will be an implication of this study, despite cultural and language barriers.

## **Practice**

This study aimed to reveal Latino immigrant families feelings of belongingness in the school community and as a result clarify possible misconceptions and perceptions surrounding cultural assumptions about parental involvement. Understanding how immigrant Latino families relate to the school community is essential for increasing student achievement. As a result, policy makers and school officials will potentially be able to develop a strategies from the implications of this study. Strategies to improve organizations include the development of an understanding of possible barriers that hinder parent involvement of Latino immigrant families and students. Through the development of an understanding of possible solutions to move organizations and all schools where encounter Latino immigrant students and families face barriers in regards to school connections and belongingness within the school-community.

## **Research**

Limited research has explored how Latino immigrant families feelings of belonging in the school community relate to parental involvement. Urban schools in the United States are struggling to meet the needs of diverse student populations (Carhill, Suárez-Orozco, & Pérez, 2008). This study may bridge the gap between home and school connections and have implications for future research. Future research will guide teachers and key stakeholders in developing ways to guide parent involvement and outreach measures for immigrant families across the US. This research study will guide future efforts of schools across the United States in order to help close the achievement gap for English Language Learners and those students who have recently immigrated to the United States. Students who struggle with language acquisition and families who feel

disconnected from schooling in the United States will have the opportunity to feel connected and belong to Americanized schooling. Furthermore, key stakeholders, such as teacher leaders, administrators, district personnel, local and government officials with vested interests in the ever changing dynamic of the school system in regards to immigration and student achievement in school will benefit from this study and the dynamic of parental belonging of such learners.

### **Delimitations**

As with all research, this study has some delimitations. One possible limitation of this research study is that family members who are interviewed or who volunteer to participate may be reluctant to share information about their feelings of belongingness due to lack of connection with school leaders, possible cultural differences, or the fear of exposing problems or concerns with the school system. Also, family members may not be able to articulate how attachment and belongingness factor into parental involvement. There may be a silence surrounding individual beliefs or cultural beliefs by the family members who participate in the study. In order to contend with possible silence surrounding cultural beliefs or perceived barriers associated with feelings of belongingness, a series of questions will be used to elicit relevant data.

In addition, a possible barrier included the style of responsive interviewing. In order to build a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee, responsive interviewing requires reciprocity suggesting that the interviewer reveal something about themselves (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Due to the fact that the interviewer will be working as the researcher, there may be limitations when asking the interviewer to share personal information with family members of students who attend the elementary school where



she works. However, because the interviewer has already built relationships with participants, there is already a personal connection and the limitation may not affect the interview and focus group process. The researcher as an instrument may impact the results of this study, primarily the fact that the researcher has a vested interest in the school, being the school principal, who interacts with students, parents, and families in general on a daily basis. In order to ameliorate the dynamics of power, a translator who has worked with Latino immigrant families over the past thirty years will translate during the interviews. I will stress the importance of confidentiality and explain the importance of the study which is to ultimately understand how best to help and support their family.

Attrition through the research process is another possible barrier. Family members who agree to participate in the research process may not understand the importance of the study or lose interest in the process. Therefore, data collection could be compromised. Another possible limitation is the language barrier that may occur throughout the data collection process. A bilingual school parent involvement coordinator will work with the interviewer in order to translate during both the focus group sessions and individual parent interviews. Will the interviewer be able to connect with the participants? Will the data collected in Spanish be accurately translated into English? There may be portions of the data collection process that are not accurately represented as the data is analyzed. In order to address any language translation and accountability concerns, a bilingual translator will review the data after translation occurs after both interviews and focus group data has been collected.

## **Overview of the Dissertation**

This qualitative case study will be organized into five chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction about the main idea of the proposed research and topic, as well as the purpose of the research, research questions, problem statement, significance of the study, key terms, and delimitations. The second chapter will include literature and research that will support the key concepts of the study. The third chapter will include information about the research design, data collection and sampling strategies, while also presenting information to address the area of data analysis including credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Chapter Four will address the findings of the research. Chapter Five will contextualize the findings in light of the discourse and provide implications for practice, policy, and further research.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review and Setting of the Study**

This chapter will include a review of relevant literature thematically organized in accordance with the major concepts framing this study. This includes literature around the school challenges that immigrants encounter, parent involvement and the relationship to student achievement, social capital theory, belongingness, and attachment theory. Lastly, Chapter Two will describe the school setting where the research study will be conducted.

#### **School as a Place of Attachment**

The school context is essential to promoting the development of children (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). Relationships between school personnel, parents, and students are important to promoting educational attainment of students (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012). Furthermore, research shows that a sense of school belonging can be increased through instructional practices as well as connecting the relationships between key stakeholders and parents (Byun, Meece, Irvin, & Hutchins, 2012).

School personnel should be involved in encouraging youth to talk about their family to provide connections between home and school to motivate immigrant students (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2015). By building relationships, educators may create an environment that supports Latino immigrant families (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2015). School attachment, having a meaningful connection with a school, a student is more likely to be successful in school (Diaz, 2005).

In order to strengthen feelings of belonging and cohesion within the school setting, key stakeholders should be aware of the dynamics which Latino immigrant

families encounter when experiencing a new school system and culture (Diaz, 2005). In relation to this study, there is a need to explore how and why Latino immigrant families may feel a disconnect within the school community.

### **Hidden Curriculum**

The concept of hidden curriculum represents a way of describing how schools reinforce the Eurocentric behaviors and attitudes of students and teachers (Jackson, 1968). Jackson was one of the first to propose the concept of the hidden curriculum by stating that the concept related to how schools “transmit” values, attitudes, and beliefs through the ways in which students are taught the curriculum and exposed to social aspects in school (Jackson, 1968). More current literature that surrounds the concept of hidden curriculum places an emphasis on how schools fail to address to needs of economically challenged and culturally diverse learners in meeting their needs within the school community, both socially and academically (Hlebowitsh, 1994). Giroux (2001) identifies the hidden curriculum as what is being taught and how an individual learns in a school as he also indicates that schools provide instruction as well as norms and principles experienced by students. With that being said, priority must be given to develop a plan by policy makers, both nationally and locally, and key district stakeholders so that the needs of economically and culturally diverse learners can be met. Students who are not engaged in school and who may not feel a sense of belongingness may not fully experience and relate to the curriculum that has been developed in the United States, as well as the traditional routines of schools in the United States (Clarkson, 2008). Related to this study, Latino immigrant families experience different forms of curriculum disconnect compared to their native countries and therefore are exposed to

cultural differences which may lead them to experience different experiences within the school community (Clarkson, 2008). Research indicates that Latino immigrants, primarily those who are of Mexican or Latino origin, face multiple challenges which include the lack of exposure to preschool programs, language barriers, and unfamiliarity with American culture and customs which relates to hidden curriculum and the disconnect that those families may encounter (Clarkson, 2008). The Latino immigrant population has increased dramatically in recent years and is projected to continue to grow dramatically in future years (Hernandez, Denton, & Macartney, 2008; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Therefore, further research is needed to explore the impact that the concept of hidden curriculum in relationship to Latino immigrant families feelings of belongingness in order to promote student achievement and belongingness within the school community.

Unfortunately, little has been done to meet the needs of Latino immigrant students (Wright & Levitt, 2014). Literature suggests there has been a failure by national and state public officials and local school stakeholders to indicate how the needs of these learners can be met in the classroom (Wright & Levitt, 2014). Traditional schools place an emphasis on meeting the needs of students who are financially stable, as opposed to students who face financial challenges and are considered to be low socioeconomic status (Janzen, 1994). Often, families who immigrate face challenges and struggles financially (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Literature fails to explore how to close to achievement gap for students who live in poverty and who struggle with language barriers (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2012). Literature also states that Latino families place a high importance on education but have not felt supported in traditional ways (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2012).

Curriculum needs and feelings of belongingness associated with Latino family involvement in the school community warrants further exploration in order to gain Latino family perspectives related to feelings of belongingness in order to improve Latino immigrant student success in schools (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014).

### **Importance of Family Involvement**

Literature presented over previous years has demonstrated that family involvement in school strongly impacts educational achievement of students (Morris & Taylor, 1995). Scholars have determined that strong educator-family relationships are necessary social relationships that benefit the growth of improving cultural gaps and student achievement in school (Ishimaru, 2013). Traditionally, schools have worked to include families in activities but have not taken into account the needs of students and their families (Pérez Carreón, Drake, & Calabrese Barton, (2005). Furthermore, prior research has not “adequately” addressed the context of family-school relationships and involvement (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). According to Morris and Taylor (1995), teachers often lack the knowledge and skills necessary to collaborate with parents and families effectively, which leads teachers to rely on accumulated life experiences when dealing with parents and may not be effective in engaging parents in the education process of their child. Furthermore, some studies have focused on home environments, while others have concentrated on family involvement in school (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). However, there is a need to determine why families are not getting involved. Research suggests that children in immigrant families may experience high degrees of isolation when placed in an environment, such as an English-speaking society (Hernandez, Takanski, & Marotz, 2009). Children and families from immigrant

households offer challenges which reflect the need for a review of policy and current practices (Hernandez, Takanski, & Marotz, 2009).

In order to be effective in their practices, educators must have knowledge about cultural differences, circumstances of families, and ways to optimize family engagement strategies (Hernandez, Takanski, & Marotz, 2009). Furthermore, parent involvement at home is directly related to a child's educational outcomes (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). However, family-teacher relationships can also foster student growth in schools (Morris & Taylor, 1995). Strong relationships between parents and school stakeholders are essential to improving student achievement and promoting positive growth in schools (Ishimaru, 2013). Latino family and parent feelings related to belongingness within the school community could provide insight to how and why parents may or may not become involved in school-community initiatives and events. Research also indicates that schools should be doing more to involve parents other than only inviting them to school events (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). Most family-school policies have not addressed group differences in regards to family involvement and how families are involved (Lareau & Shumar, 1996). The frequency of parent involvement in school has also been linked to a child's academic and social growth which is also a factor that should be taken into consideration (Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010).

Literature also indicates that family involvement is a broad concept that encompasses many elements, including home-based support including reading, homework, and monitoring of student progress (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). School-based family involvement activities may include attending conferences and events and volunteering at school functions (Donnell & Kirkner, 2014). Family

involvement in a child's education is a predictor of higher student achievement and academic success, social functioning, and high school graduation rates, despite ethnicity (Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). Literature indicates Latino families have a greater influence on a child's educational choices compared to parents from other ethnic groups (Semke, Garbacz, Kwon, Sheridan, & Woods, 2010). However, schools in the United States have been less effective in engaging Latino families, the primary reason being language differences between those families and key stakeholders within American schools (Wright & Levitt, 2014). The home-school disconnect has created a concern for Latino families and students and created a need for culturally sensitive programs which build upon Latino culture and enhance Latino family involvement (Wright & Levitt, 2014). Literature also suggests schools may face challenges in investing time, money, and staff resources in order to promote that school connectedness and Latino family engagement (Wright & Levitt, 2014). Exploring Latino family descriptions of family involvement in relation to the home-school community may provide information as to how parental feelings of belongingness contribute involvement within the school setting in order to promote student achievement and feelings related to social capital.

### **Parental v. Family Involvement**

Parental involvement focuses key relationships including relationships between schools, families, and between parents and children, and between families (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010). Levels of parent involvement varies by culture, language, and socio-economic status (Wong, 2015). Often, discussions about parent involvement focus solely on parents and not the whole family. Research on parent involvement often does



not take into account family background, cultural differences, and linguistic challenges which impact involvement (Powell, Son, File, San Juan, 2010).

There is evidence to suggest that cultural backgrounds such as those of English language learner families have different levels of family involvement as opposed to primarily family involvement when it comes to a child's education (Ishimaru, 2013). Although parent and family are often used interchangeably in literature, parent and family involvement should be referenced solely as family involvement to capture the entire support system available to students.

### **Social Capital Theory**

Schools in the United States are now frequently exploring ways to strengthen community networks in hopes to increase social capital networks by sharing a common goal to increase student achievement (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2012). Teachers and key stakeholders within school community organizations should stress the importance of family and school connections in order to promote social justice and promote positive social capital in order to increase student achievement (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2012). Researchers and scholars have explored different forms of capital and just like other forms of capital, social capital provides individuals with resources, information, and access that guides evidence of socioeconomic advancement (Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008). Furthermore, related to this study, minority students do not have access to social capital that has been passed down from generations as a result of immigration and this lack of equal access has caused a disadvantage (Martinez & Ulanoff, 2012). Therefore, the differences and inconsistency between family social capital may contribute to

continuous inequality in a student's educational attainment based (Grodsky, Warren, & Felts, 2008).

The discrepancies between social ties among parents creates a challenge for organizations, such as how schools are facilitating student learning on different levels and how connections are made to reflect the goals of the society where a family lives (Valdez, Mills, Bohlig, & Kaplan, 2013). Furthermore, research shows that students will benefit from their families' social ties when the family members are connected to the school (Valdez, Mills, Bohlig, & Kaplan, 2013).

### **Social Capital and Student Achievement**

Social capital may explain why certain students perform differently than other students (Plagens, 2011). Often times, critics of social capital theory argue that social capital fails to describe social relationships in a concrete way (Plagens, 2011).

Explanations about how social capital works are often inconsistent and lack detail about why social capital contributes to student performance in school (Plagens, 2011). In 1900, John Dewey's writing titled *The Elementary School Record* was traced to outcomes in education that were conditioned by social interactions (Plagens, 2011). John Dewey is known for recommending experiential learning which mirror real-life problems so that students are forced to work through and solve them (Plagens, 2011). Alexis de Tocqueville also recognized the benefit of social relationships in 1840 (Plagens, 2011). The first descriptive writing about social capital was written by J. L. Hanifan who mirrored the work of Dewey (Plagens, 2011).

According to Martin, Simmons, & Yu (2013), many research studies focus on Coleman's theory of social capital which encompasses the idea that a highly

interconnected network is key to form group norms among all actors within a community. Lin's (2000) theory of social capital suggests that heterogeneous groups within an individual's network impact social capital even more than homogeneous groups (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013). Individuals exposure to different relationships, information, and influences their access to social capital (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013). Lin (1999, 2001) defined the three necessary factors of social capital as accessibility, availability, and activation. Lin (1999, 2001) also lists the four main reasons why social capital is effective as, "(1) the flow of information is enhanced, (2) it may contribute to an individual decision-making (ex. Positive complement), (3) it may offer positive social credentials, and (4) reinforces an individual's identity within a social group."

"Inequalities in social capital derive from several factors, including ethnicity, immigrant status, educational background, and socioeconomic standing"(Lin, 2000)." Literature suggests school-based social capital has been linked to positive social and academic outcomes (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014). For example, connections made between school personnel and families promotes cultural awareness and insight into a student's needs (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014). Scholars argue that social capital holds the key to understanding inequality issues in education between school personnel and student success (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014). Low-income, Latino, and immigrant families face inconsistencies in home-school relationships (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014). Consideration of both Latino families' access to social capital and the processes through which it those processes emerge in school networks may provide the insight needed into how to structure school procedures to increase both academic and social attainment (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, &

Sorenson, 2014). More work within educational systems is needed to gain a better understanding about the formation of social capital within school communities (Shoji, Haskins, Rangel, & Sorenson, 2014).

### **Attachment Theory and Belonging**

According to Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich (2006), theories of attachment and belongingness relate to human geography. Furthermore, studies indicate that positive associations related to specific studies allow individuals to acquire a sense of belongingness (Brehm, Eisenhauer, & Krannich, 2006). An individual's feeling of belongingness relates to how an individual may be affected, and how their thoughts and behaviors are visibly connected in the attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Also, the object of attachment is something that should be explored which includes the place that encompasses that attachment (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Recent literature has suggested that feelings of student belongingness in school have been linked to positive academic outcomes (Johnson, 2009). A sense of belonging is especially valuable when a student transitions in order to promote coping skills in school (Anfara & Schmid, 2007).

According to Anfara & Schmid (2007), the environment of a school is responsible for changes, especially the decline, in student functioning following transition. However, there is a need to further investigate how Latino immigrant feelings of belonging relate to connectivity in relation to the school environment (Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013).

According to Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife (2013), the ethnic composition and diversity of a school in many ways impacts the opportunities that students have to create relationships with peers, specifically with other students with similar backgrounds. How students and families associate the sense of belongingness with other students and families within the

school community may influence their perception of belonging in the school community with relates to school connectedness (Georgiades, Boyle, & Fife, 2013).

### **Social Capital and Attachment**

Social capital encompasses the idea that people associate with groups of people who they feel most comfortable around. Individuals will align themselves with people who they associate and connect themselves with. Theories of attachment and belongingness surround the idea that security within the familiarity of different groups of people and places where they feel comfortable and where they belong (Martin, Simmons, & Yu, 2013). Research shows that places, regardless of when a person has visited or lived in, spark memories which can result in positive or negative associations within an individual (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Therefore, it is essential that feelings of attachment and belongingness in association with social capital theory are explored in order to gain an understanding of those feelings within the context of this case research study. The central tenets of both social capital theory (Bourdieu, 1985) and theories of belongingness and place attachment encompass the feelings to which people feel they can connect to different situations, places, and other people.

### **Latino Culture**

Family involvement has different meanings depending on different cultures (Hernandez, Takanski, & Marotz, 2009). There are differences in Latino culture with contributing factors being one's country of origin influenced by the experiences that an individual has encountered. Latino culture in reference to Mexican and Puerto Rican culture has similarities yet differences as well regarding family involvement. Culture has a recognized influence on family involvement (Arcia, Reyes-Blanes, & Vazquez-

Montilla, 2000). According to Severns (2012), an immigrant is an individual who is foreign-born. Therefore, this includes those who have immigrated from Mexico thus fitting the definition of being a Latino immigrant.

### **Latino Immigrant Barriers**

While a significant number of Latino students have been successful, Latino students as a group have received a lower educational experience compared to their peer counterparts (Moreno & Gaytan, 2012). In recent years, the United States has encountered a dramatic increase in immigration which has involves an extremely ethnically and culturally diverse population compared to recent decades (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012). Although immigration has been widely discussed in the media, less attention has been given to the impact of immigration on U.S. schools (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012). Due to the fact that the Latino immigrant population is the largest group in relation to the achievement gap, family involvement in relation to belongingness is an area that should be targeted in order to close the achievement gap and aid students who have immigrated in order to find a quality education within the United States (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012).

Literature has focused on family factors that influence how and why students are motivated in school (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Literature has revealed that school belongingness has a major influence on student performance in school (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). Schools can help to enhance individual student sense of belongingness (Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2010). According to Chu (2011), educators must consider cultural differences and the way that parents have taught their children outside of school. Multiple theories have addressed the concept of cultural or social capital, including

Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital (1997) and Stanton-Salazar's theory of capital framework (1997) which also serve to describe culturally and linguistically diverse students' achievement outcomes (Chu, 2011). Research needs to be conducted in order to address the gaps in research surrounding culturally and linguistically diverse students (Chu, 2011).

As stated in Dumais (2005), class differences influence the way that families interact with schools, but research fails to examine how the differences impact student achievement. Literature also suggests that it is essential that the social and academic needs, including feelings of belongingness, of the quickly growing group of immigrant students are met in order to ensure access (Greenberg, 2013). In addition, Latino students who fall under low socioeconomic status are less likely to participate in performance activities, such as choir or band, and in sports-based extracurricular activities (Peguero, 2011). Finally, research suggests that unique individual interests and motivating factors should be used as positive motivation to promote student success, educational opportunity, and school connectedness (Burnett, 2000).

### **Conclusion of the Review**

In this chapter, literature surrounding attachment and belongingness, social capital, parental involvement, and hidden curriculum were explored. Research has failed to identify Latino immigrant parent and family descriptions of their feelings of belongingness and attachment within the school community. Furthermore, parent involvement plays a key role in the academic success and student achievement. Minimal research has explored immigrant family descriptions about their relationship to the school community. Research also suggests that the concept of hidden curriculum focuses on

Eurocentric schooling but fails to identify how gaps in regards to Latino immigrant student success should be adapted to meet those learners' needs in school. This chapter was able to reveal the need for further explanation of Latino immigrant feelings of belongingness within the school community.

### **Setting of the Study**

The setting for the study is a small elementary school in an urban community in Lane, New Jersey. Elk Lake Avenue Elementary School is located on the historic barrier island of Lane, New Jersey. The school contains grades pre-kindergarten through five, located within two buildings. Grades one through five are housed within the building at Elk Lake Avenue Elementary School. The Early Childhood Center building is comprised of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. This seasonal shore town faces the Atlantic Ocean and has a year-round population of approximately 5,000 people but peaks to 250,000 during the summer months (New, 2011).

The school is considered an urban elementary school with 90% of students classified as economically disadvantaged (NJ School Report Card, 2016). Also, 47% of the student population's home language is Spanish, with the remaining students being primarily English speaking (NJ School Report Card, 2016). The student population of the school has been on a steady incline since 2008 increasing by 100 students to a current student enrollment of 450 students (NJ School Report Card, 2016). Furthermore, a large percentage of Latino immigrant students have parents who are first generation immigrants. Therefore, the setting for this case research study is appropriate in order to meet the needs of this study.



## **Context**

This study encompasses research that suggests that parent involvement and Latino immigrant family feelings of belongingness influence student achievement and how these feelings of belongingness relate to social capital theory within the school community. This study was influenced by the setting of this case study which is a small, urban elementary school where there is a high number of Latino immigrant families. The immigrant family members who care for the Latino students immigrated from another country to the United States.

The context of this study was appropriate because the school is considered an urban elementary school with 90% of students classified as economically disadvantaged (NJ School Report Card, 2016). Also, 54% of the student population's first language is Spanish and the majority of their parents are first generation immigrants (NJ School Report Card, 2016).

The bilingual program within the school is extensive as a large portion of the student population has recently immigrated to the United States and the English language is foreign to them. Bilingual programs are offered at the kindergarten and first grade level in an effort to introduce students to literacy in their native language. Key stakeholders closely monitor the programs and place students into English speaking classes when their language acquisition reaches a standard of proficiency. During this time students are also provided services through the school's English as a Second Language (ESL) program. When transitioning out of ESL, students are placed in sheltered English instruction until they are fully proficient English speakers. All notifications, announcements, and our report cards are translated in Spanish.. Translation is provided at all of the school events

in order to continue to provide information to parents and guardians while providing accessibility.

With the information presented above surrounding both social capital theory and theories of belongingness and attachment, there is a need to uncover family descriptions in order to gain information based on the high number of Latino immigrant families who live in the town of the context of this study.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, family involvement, belongingness, and attachment, as well as the literature surrounding hidden curriculum have been reviewed to explore how previous literature contributes to an explanation of Latino immigrant feelings of belongingness within the school community. Accordingly, there are gaps in research that are worthy of consideration including the lack of literature that describes those feelings in relationship to attachment and social capital theory also linked to student achievement. The above outlined theories related to social capital, attachment, and belongingness will be used to support this case study research study. The following chapter will review the methodology for the study including the context for the study, and the sampling for the study. The next chapter will also explain the plan for data collections, how the data will be collected and analyzed, and how validity and reliability will be established throughout the study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

This chapter will provide information on the overall design of the study beginning with the purpose of the study and overarching research questions. A review of the study's purpose statement and questions that guided this research study will also be included in this chapter. In addition, the rationale for choosing qualitative research, data quality and rigor, along with ethical considerations will be addressed in this chapter.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was drawn upon both social capital and attachment theories associated with Latino immigrant family descriptions of belongingness within the school community. This study explored the relationship between Latino immigrant family involvement and feelings of belongingness and attachment in relation to the school community. This study explored how Latino immigrant families describe their feelings of belongingness and attachment by investigating the linkages between Latino immigrant family members' beliefs and social capital relating to school involvement and parent descriptions of belongingness. This study sought to understand the relationship between Latino Immigrant family feelings of belongingness, attachment, and family involvement in the school community.

The setting for this study was a small, urban elementary school in New Jersey, with a substantial immigrant population and a high number of families who live in poverty.

## **Research Questions**

The following four research questions guided this study:

1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant families describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education?
2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?
3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families' sense of belongingness?
4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?

The research questions for the study were constructed to help to guide the qualitative research study. According to Maxwell (1996), research questions help to frame the study in essential ways and guide decisions about the methodological approach of the study. The research questions for this study guided the researcher during the research process.

## **Rationale for and Assumptions of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a research approach that focuses on exploring and finding meaning in group or individual descriptions related to a social problem within the naturalistic setting of the participants (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative researcher focuses on research surrounding emerging questions with data typically being collected in the participant's setting (Creswell, 2014). As a result, qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the research problem in an inductive way that supports the participant's views of the problem (Creswell, 2014). Defining characteristics of

qualitative case study research encompass seeking to understand through an empirical way involving naturalistic language (Stake, 1995, p.28).

There are both limitations and benefits to qualitative case study research, but for the purposes of this study the benefits of qualitative research outweighed any limitations. Various benefits of qualitative research include the ability to focus on a single concept and to provide meaning from the point of view of the participants, and this type of research also studies the setting of participants (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on creating an agenda for change within a setting or organization (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative research was also chosen for the purposes of this research study to give a voice to the participants and help to provide meaning within this social context of this issue (Creswell, 2014).

### **Strategy of Inquiry**

The research design of this study encompassed a qualitative case study. Qualitative case study research is an approach that explores a phenomenon within its context while using a variety of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Qualitative case study research also ensures that the issue is explored through a variety of lenses (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, case study methods are used to understand a real-life phenomenon in depth within a naturalistic setting (Yin, 2009). Stake (1995) proposed a guide to case study research and emphasized the importance of ensuring that a topic's essence is revealed. Stake (1995) also based the case study approach on a constructivist paradigm, meaning that the paradigm should recognize the importance of the truth in relation to one's perspective. Qualitative case study research questions should align to a phenomena and seek to understand "unanticipated" and relationships that have been

predicted (Stake, 1995). Important components of the case study research design include: the research questions, analysis, linking the data, and the conditions for understanding the findings (Yin, 2009, p. 27). Case study research questions should include probing participants to determine how and why (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) also identifies case study research as being intrinsic and collective in nature.

Yin (2004) suggests that a researcher who chooses a case study research design gain informed consent from all persons who will be volunteering to participate in the study. In addition, Yin (2004) states that protecting the privacy of the participants who choose to participate in the study is imperative. Case study inquiry will profit from previous research which can be used to guide data collection (Yin, 2009, p. 18). It is essential that the qualitative researcher continuously reflects during the research process while interpreting during the research study (Stake, 1995).

A qualitative intrinsic case study was embraced for the purposes of this case research study. Stake (1995) uses the term intrinsic and suggests that researchers who have a genuine interest in the case should use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case. Stake (1995) states that a qualitative case study relates to the exploration of the content of the case within a particular setting or context. In regards to this research study, the context involving Latino families and feelings of attachment and belongingness as well as perspectives of key stakeholders within the setting of the case contributed to this intrinsic case study.

## **Sampling and Participants**

Interview-based studies may use a sampling logic in order to select interviewees to obtain an appropriate sampling approach (Maxwell, 1996). Participants were purposefully selected to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was used to achieve representation of the Latino immigrant group of parents who have children attending the elementary school (Creswell, 2014, p. 189). Participants were also selected if they were born in another country and immigrated to the United States and if they attended school in another country prior to immigration. Purposive sampling to achieve representativeness was necessary for the purpose of this qualitative case study because the study related to a specific population (Creswell, 2014). Snowball sampling was used when participants who volunteered to participate in the process were also able to recommend other parents who could be interested in sharing their descriptions about Latino immigrant feelings of belongingness and attachment (Patton, 2002).

Latino immigrant family members who have children who attend the elementary school were also given an incentive to participate. Family members who agreed to participate in the interviews were provided with refreshments at the local community center. Creswell (2014) suggests that researchers should select participants who will help the researcher to answer the research questions of the study (p. 189). The Latino immigrant family members who participated had similar backgrounds in relation to residency and language barriers. Family members who were interviewed were bilingual. A former family involvement coordinator who is bilingual translated the interviews.

Focus group participants were selected based on the following criteria; participants had been an employee of Elk Lake Avenue School for more than five years

and those who had interacted with Latino immigrant families daily during that time.

Baxter & Jack (2008) recommend that the focus of the study center on answering how and why questions while focusing on covering contextual conditions that the researcher believes are relevant to the phenomenon of the study. Therefore, participants were sampled based on the above mentioned criteria in order to purposefully gain insight on the phenomena of this case study.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection for the purpose of this study included participant interviews and data collected from focus groups with school personnel. Prior to data collection, the researcher gained approval from the Elk Lake Board of Education to conduct the research at the institution and also received approval from the IRB to conduct research with Latino immigrant parents who resided within the school community and school personnel. Data was collected through interviews with Latino immigrant parents and focus groups comprised of key district stakeholders. Interviews were used to understand the norms, values, and rules that contribute to an individual's behavior, also related to individual and family norms and traditions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Focus group sessions were used to collect information while key stakeholders spiraled ideas (Creswell, 2014). Permission was obtained to record the interview and focus group sessions for the purpose of analyzing data. For this study, before the interviews the Latino immigrant family members were notified that all information collected would be used to help understand family involvement within the school community. Once again, participating family members were also notified that their identities would remain anonymous and their identities would be protected throughout the process.



## **Interviews**

Qualitative interviewing can provide researchers with new ways of understanding a problem (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Rubin and Rubin (2012) also describe qualitative interviewing as a way of focusing on the heart of the problem and on understanding specific situations, individuals, or groups. For the purpose of this research study, responsive interview was used to elicit information from participants with a focus on cultural interviewing in order to provide sensitivity to the interviewing process (Rubin and Rubin, 2012). Responsive interviewing allows the researcher to change probing questions in order to gain new information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The structure of the interview process, the tree and branch structure, where Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggest the trunk of the tree as the as the research problem and the branches of the tree as the main questions was used to obtain depth and detail in this research process.

Interviews were conducted at the local recreation center with the former district family involvement coordinator who is bilingual and had developed relationships within the school community among parents. The goal of interviewing participants in the setting was to create a comfortable arena for the purpose of the interview. The interviews were held at the local recreation center to create a comfortable atmosphere and were approximately forty-five minutes in length. Child care was also provided at the recreation center to encourage participation.

Qualitative case study researchers should remain interpretive throughout the process while working in a naturalistic setting (Stake, 1995). Creswell (2014) states that interviewing participants allows the researcher to control the types of questions (p. 191). However, the researcher's presence may skew the responses of the participants (Creswell,

2014, p. 191). I interviewed participants at the recreation center in order to create a more relaxed setting, as opposed to my office in the elementary school where I may be viewed more so as an authority type figure.

The proposed data collection included interviews of Latino immigrant family members who had children enrolled within the school in order to gather information surrounding the feelings of belongingness and attachment within the school community. Responsive interviewing was used, the tone of questioning was friendly and the pattern of questioning was be flexible (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The questions evolved based on what the participants stated throughout the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each interview was audio recorded using a digital recorder. Each interview was individually transcribed.

### **Focus Group**

A focus group comprised of school personnel met until data saturation occurred in order to obtain information about their descriptions and views surrounding Latino immigrant parent involvement and belongingness within the school community. The second focus of this study was to gain insight encompassing key stakeholders experiences within the setting of the case study in order to collect data about individual beliefs. Morgan (1995) suggests a researcher selects 6-10 participants composed of a protocol with semi-structured questions to guide the meeting. Morgan (1995) also suggests that a researcher remain a low-level moderator throughout each session.

A qualitative focus group interviewing method was used in order to gain an understanding about specific situations, individuals, and moments in time that were important to the focus of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A focus group was created to

collect information from school personnel about key stakeholders feelings of attachment and belongingness within the school community as related to the research questions that guided this study.

### **Instrumentation**

Two instruments were used for this study including an interview protocol and focus group guiding questions. Each protocol was designed to provide structure for the implementation, as well as to guide the researcher. Data saturation occurred when gathering new data no longer added insight to the themes that evolved throughout the data collection process (Creswell, 2014). Specific information about each protocol is described below.

### **Interview Protocol**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted based on the specific topic at hand with the researcher preparing limited questions to gain insight on the topic of discussion at the site of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interview questions supported the study's research questions. Informed consent was sought prior to the interviews and at the time of the actual interviews. All interviews were taped using an audio voice recorder. Responsive interviews emphasized building a relationship between the participants and the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). During the interviews, the questioning was friendly and welcoming (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Following the interviews, all recordings were transcribed.

A qualitative interviewing method was used in order to gain an understanding about specific situations, individuals, and moments in time that were important to the focus of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In order to gain descriptions from parents

about the focus of the study, a ten question interview sample was created. The interview protocol was designed to specifically gather descriptions from participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The table below demonstrates the relationship between the research questions that guided this study and the probing interview questions that guided the interview process. The complete interview protocol is included in Appendix A.

Table 1

*Interview Protocol*

Research Questions	Protocol: Interview Questions
RQ 1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant families describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child’s education?	M1.; M3.; M7. Belongingness
RQ 2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?	M3.; M5.; M6. School Community
RQ 3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families’ sense of belongingness?	M2. Parent Involvement
RQ 4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?	M3.; M4. School Connectedness

## Focus Groups

Participants were purposefully selected to minimize sample bias (Morgan, 1995). Participants were selected to participate based on having five years experience in the district and those who worked with Latino immigrant families during that time. Morgan (1995) recommended selecting acquaintances and those who work together and converse more readily. Also, selecting key stakeholders from the setting of this case study helped those individuals to discuss in a comfortable atmosphere (Morgan, 1995).

Table 2 below demonstrates the relationship between focus group guiding questions and research questions. The complete protocol can be found in Appendix B.

Table 2

### *Focus Group Protocol*

Research Questions	Protocol: Focus Group
RQ 4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?	M2.; M3. Belongingness in School

## Data Analysis

Data management was essential to the research process. The interview and focus group meetings were recorded and later transcribed. For the purposes of analyzing data, including coding data, MAXQDA was used to organize all information. As data in both the interview and focus group meetings data was collected and transcribed, this software program helped to identify themes within the research process.

Patterns and consistencies during data collection should be explored in all research, especially case study research (Stake, 1995). Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (Saldana, 2014). The purpose of analysis in case study research involves understanding the case (Stake, 1995). Therefore, as the researcher in this case study research, I searched for patterns in order to gain perspective or meaning surrounding the case (Stake, 1995). Throughout the interview process, I collected notes and document findings in order to identify patterns. I continually reflected on the research questions that guided this research study. This process continued during focus group meetings as well.

### **Coding**

According to Saldana (2014), the purpose of coding data is to determine a link between data collection in order to find an explanation of meaning from the data collection. Process coding was used during first cycle coding to analyze data in order to keep the participant's own language in context during the first cycle of coding for this research study (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2014), process coding honors a participant's voice and is appropriate for qualitative studies. Information collected from the participants involved in this research study contributed to an understanding about Latino immigrant family descriptions that related to the purpose of the study. The codes from the first cycle of data collection showed initial patterns between the participant's responses during interviews. After the first cycle of coding, the data was reduced from the data collected from the participant interviews.

In order to reorganize and reanalyze data, I applied the method of pattern coding to the second cycle of coding for this research study (Saldana, 2014). I used codes to

identify data that was similar and identify connections between the responses of the participant interviews and focus group transcripts (Saldana, 2014). I chose to use pattern coding to help me to identify themes between the data collected from interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and analytic memos (Saldana, 2009).

Themes were identified through data reduction (Saldana, 2009). According to Saldana (2014), themes occur when codes are revealed repeatedly throughout the coding process. In addition, analytical memos will be written and reflected upon during the research process to help the researcher with data analysis. According to Maxwell (2012), memo writing can be one of the most important techniques that a researcher can have to help in the development of themes and understanding the topic in the research process. Emerging themes will also be identified from the memo writing (Saldana, 2009). Case study research should use multiple sources of evidence while uniting data through the use of triangulation (Stake, 1995). Qualitative case study researchers should routinely use triangulation while being sensitive to the participants in the study (Stake, 1995). Data triangulation needs to relate to the research questions of the study (Stake, 1995). Data was triangulated by double-checking findings, and using multiple sources of evidence which included using literature, participant interviews, focus group dialogue, and analytical memos (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Reflectivity was an additional measure and process that helped to generate ideas throughout the research process; memo writing also helped to reflect upon the research (Maxwell, 2012).

## **Reliability and Validity Considerations**

Reliability and validity considerations were continually reflected on during the research process. In order to ensure trustworthiness, rigor in relation to credibility existed (Creswell, 2007). Credibility was established throughout this case study research from the incorporation of literature which supported the study and the methodology that was used (Creswell, 2007). When researchers collect data at their workplace, regardless if they are in a supervisory role, the information may not be accurate (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). Therefore, a researcher must show how the data will not be compromised within the research (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). Triangulation was also used to clarify meaning and ensure that accurate interpretations of data had been obtained (Stake, 2006). Data collection of interview and focus group data contributed to triangulation throughout the research process.

Another consideration included the style of responsive interviewing. In order to build a relationship of trust between the interviewer and interviewee, responsive interviewing requires reciprocity suggesting that the interviewer reveal something about themselves (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Due to the fact that the interviewer was working as the researcher, there were limitations when asking the interviewer to share personal information with parents of students who attend the elementary school. However, because the interviewer had already built relationships with participants, there was already a personal connection and the limitation did not affect the interview and focus group process. The researcher as an instrument may also have impacted the results of this study, primarily the fact that the researcher had a vested interest in the school, being the school principal, who interacted with students, parents, and families in general on a daily



basis. In order to ensure trustworthiness, credibility was established through the use of scholarly literature to support the study and through the use of this research approach which included the instrumentation of data collection and analysis. Once again, triangulation occurred during data collection and throughout the coding process.

Attrition through the research process was another possible barrier. Family members who agreed to participate in the research process may not have understood the importance of the study or could have lost interest in the process. Therefore, data collection could have been compromised. Another possible limitation was the language barrier that could have occurred throughout the data collection process. A bilingual school family involvement coordinator worked with the interviewer in order to translate during both the focus group sessions and individual parent interviews. Was the interviewer able to connect with the participants? Was the data collected in Spanish accurately translated into English? There may have been portions of the data collection process that were not accurately represented as the data was analyzed. In order to address any language translation and accountability concerns, the bilingual translator reviewed the data after translation occurred after both interviews and focus group data had been collected. Research suggests that a common pitfall associated with case study research is the tendency of the researcher to try to answer a question that is too broad (Baxter & Jack, 2008). For the purpose of this study, the research questions aligned with the literature and were reviewed to take this concern into consideration.

## **Role of the Researcher**

My role as the researcher connected to the context of the study where I was employed as the building principal. Upon the research phase of this study I had worked at the school for three years. I had interacted with the Latino immigrant families on a daily basis. The school was a walking district only, therefore family members were on school property at both arrival and dismissal. During most interactions with Latino immigrant family members, a translator was present to translate any concerns or comments that occurred within the realm of my position.

Although I realized there were dynamics of power associated with my role, I stressed the importance of confidentiality to family members who chose to participate in this research study. I also reiterated the importance of the study which was to ultimately understand how best to help and support the immigrant population, both in school and outside of the school, while also increasing feelings of belongingness. My hope was to better understand the immigrant families who were connected to the school and to create positive educational change within future years. This study acted as a tool to help me achieve my goals.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Due to the cultural and personal nature of the research study, confidentiality was extremely important throughout data collection. Prior to data collection, it was essential that the researcher sought approval of gatekeepers so that permission was given to complete the research study (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). According to Stake (1995), as qualitative case studies are personalistic in nature, privacy of the participants could be at risk making confidentiality and privacy a priority. It was also essential that sensitivity to

the participants was kept in mind during the research process (Stake, 1995). Potential problems during the data collection process included the participants' reluctance to share information that was personal in nature. Therefore, as the researcher I was upfront about the intent of the study and reassuring about the confidentiality of the research study.

Prior to data collection, I gained approval from the Institutional Review Board on Human Subjects (IRB) at Rowan University in order to conduct research. Permission to conduct the research was also obtained from the Elk Lake School District's Board of Education. In order to protect the identity of each participant, all parent and guardian names were omitted from all documentation and listed by number throughout the collection phase of the research.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, the purpose of the study, research questions, and the research design for this qualitative case study research were discussed. Data collection including participant interviews, focus group data, and analytic memos were also addressed, as well as data analysis, reliability considerations, and ethical considerations. Research findings will be presented in Chapter Four.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Findings**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore Latino immigrant family feelings of belongingness and attachment in an urban school community. Chapter four will provide an overview of the findings that were produced from data collection and analysis. First, this chapter will outline qualitative findings and developed themes stemming from semi-structured interviews with Latino immigrant family members. In addition to participant interviews with Latino immigrants, focus group meeting data was also analyzed and provided insight from educators who have interacted with Latino immigrant family members in this urban school community. Findings presented in this chapter will be outlined by developed themes that sought to answer the research questions that guided the study.

#### **Data Collection Overview**

Both interview transcripts and focus group data served as resources for this qualitative case study. Initially, there were 14 Latino immigrant family members who agreed to participate in this study; however, eleven participants actually completed the interview process. Interviews were scheduled within a four week period. Discussions with participants occurred in the form of semi-structured interviews using an interview protocol. Interviews were between 45 and 60 minutes in length. Interviews took place at a recreation center located in the community after school hours with myself, the interpreter, and the participants. Interviews were recorded and then transcribed from Spanish to English by an interpreter who is certified by the American Translator Association. The interpreter was selected to translate the interviews and then transcribe the interview

transcripts because she had worked in the community and had developed relationships with Latino immigrant families in both the community and within the school. Another certified interpreter, who is an educator within the school community, reviewed the final transcriptions for accuracy. Interview transcripts were analyzed. Data collection ended when patterns of data and reoccurring themes were present in the data and data saturation occurred.

Focus group discussions provided additional data for this research study. Focus group meetings took place at the elementary school and were held in the school library in order to create a more relaxed atmosphere for the participants involved in this study. The focus group meetings were 45 and 55 minutes in length and were completed in English, being that all of the participants' native language was English. The participants were educators within the school organization. Specific characteristics of the participants are outlined below. After the focus group meetings were recorded the recordings were then transcribed.

### **Participants**

Eleven Latino immigrant family members who reside in the Elk Lake Elementary school community participated in the data collection phase of this study. Elk Lake Elementary School is an urban community located in Lane, New Jersey. This seasonal shore town faces the Atlantic Ocean and has a year-round population of approximately 5,000 people but peaks to 250,000 during the summer months (New, 2011). The land area of the city is 1.3 square miles (Census, 2010). The median household income in the city is \$29,500.

Elk Lake Avenue Elementary School educates students in grades pre-kindergarten through five, located within two separate school buildings. Grades one through five are housed within the Elk Lake Avenue school building. The Early Childhood Center building is comprised of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. Elk Lake Elementary School has an enrollment of approximately 450 students, 90% qualify for free and/or reduced lunch, 68% of the students are Hispanic, and 47% of the students home language is Spanish (NJ School Report Card, 2016).

Participants were purposefully selected with the criteria being that they were born in another country and immigrated to the United States. Participants selected also attended school in another country prior to immigration. All participants had one or more children currently attending Elk Lake Elementary School. Of the eleven Latino immigrants who participated in this study, ten of the participants self-identified as being Mexican, the remaining participant self-identified as a Guatemalan immigrant. Participant ages ranged from 26 to 47 years old. Ten of the participants had two or more children enrolled at Elk Lake Elementary School where this qualitative case study took place.

Focus group participants were selected to participate if they met the criteria of being employed by the Elk Lake School District for more than five years and those who had interacted with Latino immigrant families on a daily basis during that time. Six of the seven focus group participants held an elementary education teaching certificate and an ESL certification. The participants were selected to participate because of their roles within the organization, having an ESL certification, and working with Latino immigrant families in both the school and community setting due to their positions.

Tables 3 and 4 provide an overview of important characteristics of the participants who participated in this study.

Table 3

*Latino Immigrant Family Interview Participants*

Participant	Gender	Birth country	Age	Years in the US	Yrs living in Elk Lake Township	No. children currently attending ELES
Juan	Male	Mexico	31	15	10	2
Josepha	Female	Guatemala	28	11	8	3
Maria	Female	Mexico	26	6	6	2
Martha	Female	Mexico	32	10	10	2
Rosa	Female	Mexico	32	14	11	2
Juanita	Female	Mexico	30	11	9	3
Marta	Female	Mexico	29	6	6	4
Leticia	Female	Mexico	41	13	13	2
Jose	Male	Mexico	47	18	14	1
Elena	Female	Mexico	26	8	5	2
Silvia	Female	Mexico	27	7	7	2

Table 4

*Staff Focus Group Participants*

Participant	Gender	Race	Age	Yrs teaching at ELES	Subject taught
Kate	Female	Caucasian	28	6	1st grade classroom teacher/ ESL certification
Cheryl	Female	Caucasian	30	7	2nd grade ESL
Irene	Female	African American	32	11	Parent involvement coordinator/ ESL teacher
Cecilia	Female	Caucasian	40	18	STEM teacher/ESL certification
Corrine	Female	Caucasian	41	19	Literacy Coach/2nd grade
Jared	Male	Mexican	35	5	ESL teacher
Michael	Male	Caucasian	53	5	ESL teacher

**Data Analysis**

Patterns and consistencies during data collection were explored as data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection (Saldana, 2014). Patterns were determined by reviewing notes and transcripts collected from the interviews and focus group meetings. Analytical memos provided another form of data to support the research. Analytical memos were reflected upon during the research process in order to make connections to the themes that developed through data analysis. The information collected was reduced



using two cycles of coding to find an explanation of meaning from the data collection (Saldana, 2013). Process coding was used during first cycle coding to analyze data in order to keep the participant's own language in context for this research study (Saldana, 2009). Process coding was used to capture action in the data during the initial stage of data analysis. I coded by searching for repetitive interactions and emotions surrounding different situations that arose from interview and focus group transcripts, as well as analytical memos (Saldana, 2013). I then applied the method of pattern coding to the second cycle of coding for this research study in order to reorganize and reanalyze data (Saldana, 2014). Pattern coding was used to determine major themes from the data by organizing the initial codes into themes or sets while searching for explanations from the data (Saldana, 2013). I used codes to identify data that was similar and identify connections between the responses of the participant interviews and focus group transcripts (Saldana, 2014). I used pattern coding to facilitate identification of themes between the data collected from interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and analytic memos (Saldana, 2009). Themes and an interpretation of the data developed into emergent concepts as identified by the code maps. The themes that show how data collected throughout the research process is related captured the participants' voices while answering the research questions of this study.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The following research questions guided theme generation through analysis of data:

1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant family members describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education?

2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?
3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families' sense of belongingness?
4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?

Findings that emerged from the data analysis demonstrated how Latino immigrant families described their feelings regarding the school community, such as how families related to the school community, their involvement and belongingness, and how belongingness was fostered.

The first theme depicts Latino immigrant participant voices as they relate to the community and feelings of belongingness within the school community. Central to this theme is community relationships and concerns relating to Latino immigrant family member feelings of belongingness. The second theme, family involvement and belongingness, includes descriptions of how Latino immigrants feel they belong within the school community and the challenges that the participants faced related to linguistic differences. For the first and second theme, I chose to honor the Latino immigrant family voices by focusing solely on their descriptions and the themes that developed. The third theme relates to stakeholders in the school community and how the school community fosters this sense of belongingness through the lens of school personnel; participants reflected on the practices and support offered to Latino immigrant families. The final theme that resulted from this study encompasses how belongingness is fostered. Central to this theme is how belongingness is fostered within the school community organization. Findings also supported how key stakeholders relate to and empower Latino immigrant families within the school community.

## **Relating to the School Community**

There are challenges that Latino immigrant family members face after immigrating to the United States. As stated in the literature review, linguistic challenges, adapting to cultural and community differences, and changes in the schooling process contribute to these challenges. Patterns arose as several participants stated that they find comfort in associating with other Latino immigrant families within the community. Participants stated that due to the high Spanish-speaking population in the community they feel more comfortable when in this town or at the school because they can often communicate without feeling awkward or embarrassed when speaking to other Latino community members. Participants also communicated their concerns about the different experiences they encountered after moving to the United States in relation to the community; these include the differences in culture, schooling, and their feelings of belongingness related to social capital within the community.

**Disconnected from the community.** Latino immigrant participants felt disconnected in the community when surrounded by others outside of their race. They did not feel attached to other people and many participants stressed how the difficulties associated with leaving their home country and moving to the urban school community affected them in relation to how they feel that they belong within the community. Juan described this thusly,

One thing that is different is the place in the community. There are a lot of changes right now. In the community I worry that my child will get attacked for his race. It hasn't happened here yet but it happens in other states. The major part

here (in this town) is Mexican. Some have hatred toward our customs. They always want to separate everything (customs, culture) in the town.

Juan's comments mirrored that of other participants as he communicated his perceptions about how other Latino immigrants are treated and how they belong in the community. Although Juan has not faced the challenges that he mentions above, he does have concerns about his place in the community and concerns about how his children will be treated. Juan's feelings in relation to the community demonstrate the lack of attachment that he has to the community.

Several participants shared their feelings about the community and the concerns they have for their children. One participant, Martha, shared:

Sometimes I think we are here in this city for our children and for better lives. This city has a lot of Mexicans. I feel uncomfortable sometimes around people who speak English. Some people look at us differently. For my children, it is all they know. Plus they are learning English better. They help me when I need to understand it.

Martha's statement indicates the discomfort she feels when surrounded by community members who speak English. Her discomfort, and that similarly described by other participants, relates to the lack of positive relationships that she has with others in the community. Although Martha and Juan described feelings that indicate that they do not feel accepted within the community, other participant descriptions focused on the comfort felt when surrounded by other Latino immigrants who shared similar customs, those who spoke the same language, and those who could relate to some of challenges they faced.

As Josepha shared:

Sometimes I just think it is better to stay with my own. We have a lot of Mexicans here in the town. Many of us came here for a better life. I am happy for my children that they have others like them here.

Josepha's statement mirrored that of other participants as they spoke about how they find comfort in the community where they live when surrounded by other Latino community members. With the high Latino immigrant population in the town, many immigrants have others who they can relate to and therefore find comfort when surrounded by those who share similar experiences. Participants felt a sense of comfort when surrounded by others who have shared similar experiences. Overall, the participants shared that living in a community where there is a large Mexican population has helped them to meet new people and friends and helped them to feel like they belong within the community. The attachment and social capital that they have to the community lies strongly with others who are Latino as well.

**Differences.** Latino immigrant family members do not feel connected to others when linguistic differences are present. Specifically, a pattern that arose surrounded how Latino immigrant families often become frustrated when trying to communicate with others of different races due to linguistic differences. They also spoke about the lack of communication they had with other English speaking community members. When participants were asked how they felt about their place in the community and why they felt others people treat immigrants differently, Maria shared:

I believe that for the same reason, that it is difficult to understand us, it is difficult for us to communicate with other people, to make friends with the American parents and it is difficult for us to begin conversation and share ideas. It is

awkward. It is very difficult. Learning about both cultures, such as, they about ours and we about theirs. So, I believe this is something very difficult.

Maria touched on her feelings of awkwardness in relation to her place in the community. For her, her difficulties with cultural and linguistic differences have added to how she feels accepted in the community.

Other participants, shared that they believe that community members do not want to know about their customs and sometimes they don't want to know the community customs either. Overall, participants spoke of the lack of connectedness within the community. They spoke about the comfort they find when with their own family and home setting. As Cecilia communicated:

I speak to the others who speak Spanish. I talk to those who I can communicate with because it is what I feel comfortable with but not many English speakers pay attention to us. We stay with our own. Some people are nice to us.

When Cecilia was asked why she felt that there was not much of a connection to people and why there was not much attention paid to her she stated:

I think that they don't think we understand them or that we can communicate.

When I go to a store people do not seem to see me or pay me attention. It is ok.

We get used to it here.

Patterns that developed demonstrated that the participants, although many did not feel accepted at times by people in the community, often communicated that part of their routine in the community has become second nature to them. They often speak to neighbors and community members who can speak Spanish and those who make the effort to attempt to make connections with them. However, they expressed that they do

not feel connected because many do not attempt to understand them. Participants described feelings of ‘awkwardness’ and a sense of familiarity among others. These patterns adhere to the idea that people associate with groups of people who they feel most comfortable around. Those feelings contribute to the connectedness related to relationships and social capital that the participants feel within the community.

### **Linguistic Disconnect**

Family involvement in schools is important to increasing student achievement. Despite feelings of uneasiness and awkwardness, described above, that arose in the community, Latino immigrants expressed different feelings associated with their child’s school and education. Many of the family members interviewed felt welcomed by teachers and staff at the school yet felt disconnected due to linguistic differences. They also cited language as being a tremendous barrier and how the school approaches that barrier can seemingly contribute to increased feelings of social capital and belongingness. Overall, participants expressed statements supporting positive experiences from their child’s school-based experience. The participants also described school-based experiences in their home country, especially noting their view on education in regards to family involvement in school. Family members also compared education systems and their experiences and perceived role as a parent and their involvement in school.

**Teachers should teach.** Latino immigrant family members believe that teachers should teach children and parents should parent. When asked to describe their view on involvement in the school, many participants claimed that a teacher should be the person to teach their child and that many parents don’t get involved in their child’s education. Patterns developed as several of the participants described their experiences in their home

country and experiences and views on how schools in the United States educate their children. Many participants stressed that it is the teachers' job to teach because the teachers are the experts. One participant described her education and her viewpoint on family involvement in the school community, as Rosa stated:

School was difficult for me. I did not study, I was poor. I did not study much more than the sixth grade of primary. I never studied more. I did not like school. It makes me a little upset that sometimes I cannot help my children with their work. For example, I understand it one way or I do not know how to explain it or how to do it or they explain to me and I do not understand nor what to do. But my feeling here is that teachers teach and parents don't bother.

This notion supports that some Latino immigrant parents cannot help their children due to differences in education or lack thereof. Some family members spoke of their viewpoints on family involvement in the school community and how they felt they belong within the school community. One participant, Juan, stated:

One is always interested in working and not interested in other things. When a meeting comes up one says, I am not going because it is not important. Some schools do not have parents come as much.

For Juan, he does not see the importance of being involved in school meetings or events. Parents often do not see the importance in parental involvement events although parental involvement is an important factor in promoting student achievement.



**Family involvement.** Although the school has invited family members to the family involvement events, several family members interviewed did not see the importance of being involved in their child's education. Juan expressed his views on family involvement by sharing:

One dedicates himself to work and they say no for my boss doesn't give me permission to leave. Eh, so this is what happens that one, as a parent, doesn't do his part to improve the education of his child. But sometimes one says, ah, they want us, the school, the school, I don't have to see anything. But, well, but sometimes it is wrong. Because, mainly, one did not have a good education, like when I studied, or to give a good example to your children.

Juan believes that it is not important to be involved in the school. He dedicates himself to his work. Juan's statement mirrored that of other family members as they shared that they do not understand why it is important to be involved in school. As Marta also expressed:

When one gets a paper from the school about meetings I sometimes go and then I think why should I go to the school. I don't know if I will go or not. My son tells me if it is important to go to the school. If the teacher calls me I will go to the school.

Likewise, Josepha echoed a similar viewpoint in discussing how she feels about the uncertainty of getting involved in school events. She explained:

My children enjoy school. I am happy with the teachers. Sometimes I go to the school, sometimes I do not go. I don't know why, I am with the children or there is work. I go if I need to, sometimes not because I think it is not important.

The Latino immigrant family members often do not see the importance of getting involved and barriers such as work often prevents families from attending those events.

**Uneasiness and apprehension.** Latino immigrant family members feel a lack of attachment to the school because of linguistic differences. Participants shared how linguistic differences hinder their involvement in their child's education. When asked about cultural differences and how that impacts family involvement in school many participants cited the fact that language is a tremendous barrier. Although several family members shared their feelings about the events and the invitations extended by the school, many family members expressed how awkward they often feel when attending an event at the school. Jose spoke about his experiences:

Especially when I go to school I do go to the meetings here in the school and one can feel uncomfortable because I don't know what people are thinking.

Many participants stated they were afraid to talk when surrounded by English-speaking parents where their child attended school. Participants spoke about belongingness, citing how uncomfortable and out of place they can feel when attending school events. Another participant, Marta, stated:

The challenges here is the language first, then the customs, as much as one faces discrimination, especially when one does not speak English, they discriminate against you. I don't talk at group meetings. I know English but when one is told to come to school one says 'I am not going because it is not important' but sometimes it is important. But here they do it good, it is good.

Although some participants felt uncomfortable and out of place when attending family events and meetings, they also spoke about how they felt when attending school events and how they often felt like they are a part of the school community. One participant,

Leticia, spoke about language and how she feels when attending meetings at the school, she shared:

I understand a little and I read a little English but it is not enough so that I can help my children correctly. So it is important to send information from school in Spanish. That helps us so we can understand and help our children and explain it in our language. They do it here more than when I had years living in California. I go to school if my child had a problem or if I don't understand they try to find someone, an interpreter so that I can understand the problem and my child can resolve his problem so it is a good thing. They treat me kindly, they give me information and ask if they can help. Everything is good here. Everything has its reasons in everything so I dedicate myself to work and do what little I can do for my children.

Although family members expressed feelings of discomfort when attending events due to linguistic differences, several parents expressed feeling welcomed in the school due to the events being translated for them. They also expressed appreciation for the teachers and staff within the school, especially the teachers who take time to have newsletters and notices sent home translated in Spanish. Furthermore, participants expressed appreciation for how the school invites parent into the school. They spoke highly of the education offered to their child in this school community. One participant, Juanita, expressed:

My child brings home flyers in English and Spanish. The school invites parents. They invite kids. I sometimes go to the school when I can bring my kids. Sometimes I am babysitting the other kids. The school does invite us. There is

always someone who can help us because they speak Spanish. The teachers care, too.

Although family members are invited to events, family members often feel as if they don't have a voice because they are afraid to speak what little they can in English or because they feel that the teachers and school in general are the experts when it comes to education. Family members feel that the school provides them with opportunities to be involved. Parents also cited that they feel welcome in this school compared to other school communities in the United States where they have lived.

### **Building Relationships**

Though educators have different viewpoints on family involvement and what constitutes involvement, focus group participants shared that they have embraced the opportunity to learn about Latino immigrant families and the students who have attended the school where they work. Educators explained their views on Latino family involvement in relation to the organization.

**Developing an understanding.** The school is an important place for Latino immigrant families in the community. Latino immigrant family members want to help. Teachers want to understand how to help Latino immigrant families. One participant, Kate, who teaches first grade students in a bilingual immersion program, explained:

I think school is extremely important for parents here. They want their kids to get the best possible education so I have noticed in my encounters at parent teacher conferences, phone calls home, and notes home that they are very responsive and respectful. They will say, yes, yes teacher, absolutely teacher. The families are very much willing to provide their child with everything they can, even if they

can't at home and can't necessarily help them they are very much willing to make an effort or hear suggestions about how they can better help their child with their education.

Patterns arose as focus group participants spoke about how Latino immigrant family members are willing to help but limited to what they are able to help with in their child's education. This leads to a disconnect between school and home because family members do not necessarily understand how to help their child.

Participants also feel that differences in education contributed to family involvement and how the families feel that they belong. One participant, Irene, shared:

One of my parents said, teachers educate, parents teach. She said my role as a parent is to teach my child right from wrong, academics even. The teacher teaches them math, writing, and whatever but it is the parents' job and responsibility to teach that child first.

As Irene shared, the Latino immigrant parents are willing to help but often do not know their role or believe that it is their job to help with their child's education.

Many focus group participants spoke about the positive interactions they have had with Latino immigrant families at the school. Participants believe that even though the Latino immigrant family members may not have completed much of their education they still value education here in the United States. Another educator, Corrine, who has been teaching in the school for nineteen years shared:

After years of speaking with the parents that for a lot of our families their child is first generation here in the United States and a lot of their parents did not go very far with their own schooling. Most who I have talked to only finished upper

elementary or junior high school levels at most and I think one of the reasons why they have come here is to provide their children with a better education in hopes for a better way of life for them. Now that they are here, school is much more important to them than it was when they were in their home country. They put much more value on it. Much more of an emphasis on school.

As Corrine shared, Latino immigrant family members want to be involved. Many do not have the education to help their child with schoolwork while others struggle with the language. Latino immigrant families value education but there is a disconnect being that a family's role differs as far as expectations for involvement.

**Intimidation.** Many Latino immigrant parents are unable to help their child with their school work. Teachers believe that parents are intimidated with the English language because they are unable to help their child when they struggle. One of the bilingual participants added:

Parents have told me that they feel uncomfortable when they go to school and staff can't help them with their speaking due to language. They do feel uncomfortable with the language. Children often do the translating. Sometimes the families are intimidated because they don't want to speak and make a mistake. They get nervous that people won't understand them. And maybe the fact of not being educated sometimes I feel that they are nervous to bring any attention to themselves. They want to fly under the radar and not ruffle any feathers. Because parent events are never only one person and there are groups and they might not want to be singled out. I do feel like the language is the main reason with there is a disconnect with their involvement. Also, culturally there are differences. Many

parents here do not interact with the Latino population even though our numbers are high compared to other schools.

According to the educators, parents have expressed they are unable to help their child. There is a disconnect between school and home due to language, work schedules, and cultural differences. Families do not help their children at times due to the disconnect between school and home.

### **Fostering Belongingness**

Focus group educators described their views on Latino family immigrant involvement and how the organization fosters feelings of belongingness within the school community. The participants explained how their role as individuals and as an organization contributes to these feelings.

**Adapting for success.** Educators should find ways to support Latino immigrant families. Translation needs to be provided and accessible at all times. By engaging in reflective practices, participants gained perspective on the ways in which the school community assisted parents and how they worked to help the immigrant families feel welcomed. Cheryl, an ESL teacher, added:

Our school is way ahead of the curve because we have been forced to do so due to our high immigrant population and Spanish speakers. We send notices home being translated, our global calls are all translated, the welcome sign being translated and as far as that goes we do try to provide translation and to bridge the gap in order to help the families to feel welcome and comfortable.

As the participants shared, translation should occur on many levels, in written communication, on global calls, and at the school during meetings in order to help family

members feel connected and welcomed by the school. By doing this, belongingness is fostered within the organization leading to stronger communication lines and a sense of welcome among the families at the school.

Another participant, Cecilia, reflected on the supports offered by the school for the Latino immigrant families. She shared:

Our staff in general and most of us who have been here for a good while, I think we really do a great job developing more intimate relationships, building relationships and as their children get older and the younger ones come to us the parents become more open. You know, if there are problems or they need something, um, you know, they speak up a little bit more. It is kind of an interesting dynamic. The Latino culture in particular is very warm and welcoming in the sense that like, I don't know how to explain it but they are very much open to having a conversation with you if they feel comfortable.

Cecilia's statements mirrored that of other participants as relationship building being an essential component to helping families to feel welcomed and connected to the school. She also expressed:

It's not like don't speak to me because we are Latino. They are willing to partake in a conversation. Even if you see at dismissal Latino parents are speaking amongst each other, the parents are getting to know each other especially if there is a new student. They communicate amongst themselves. They introduce the other Latino parents to other teachers who are outside dismissing students.



Through networking among parents and teachers, positive relationships have developed and in turn helped Latino immigrant families to feel connected to the school.

Furthermore, participants shared their satisfaction as to how the school has tried to bridge the gap between school and community. As Irene explained:

Our school also does a nice job reaching out for community events. So like when the kids are participating in a sport you can always see a staff member at one of those games, at an event, supporting the kids Girl Scout cookies, etc. Or helping out with a fundraiser or what the kids are involved in. Our staff does a good job participating in that and that helps the parents to see we are involved and lets them know that we do care about what's going on. We are vested in them.

Participants stressed the importance of reaching out and becoming involved not only within the school but also within the community. In addition, Corrine added:

It helps when we help the parents to feel welcome and to know that this is a safe area for their child and helps open up the door. To feel welcome. This school is like a home for the kids. Also, it's the communication piece. They won't come if it's not communicated. We translate everything in Spanish. It's also good because the kids go home excited.

By continually communicating on multiple levels, parents feel welcome and find comfort associated with the school and in turn belongingness is fostered. Corrine then compared her own experiences as a mother to other school programs that she has encountered as a parent and shared:

Just thinking from my own personal experience with my own children, and the immigrant children at their school. Every year they are getting more and more

immigrant families, especially from Mexico. I find that the parents often are just off to the side. If they are lucky there may be a translator there. But most of the times they don't. Their parents are not as inclusive to them. When we go to back to school night the parents sit at their child's desk. You can tell they have no idea what is going on. It definitely does not have the warm and welcoming atmosphere that our school has.

Other participants agreed that families need to feel comfortable and informed when at school events. They also felt strongly that this school has made great strides to help Latino immigrant families to feel accepted.

Patterns arose as participants spoke about how past practices have helped them to improve communication and the atmosphere within the school. The school's parent involvement coordinator, Irene, reflected on the school's past practices, she shared:

Also, one of the big things with parent involvement we were talking about how the parents said they felt segregated because we separated the CAP classes a couple of years ago. We separated the Spanish speaking immigrants, Spanish speakers and they said they felt segregated. That's when we really started using translators during meetings because we thought if we are really trying to include them why are we separating them. And in the same sense we are trying to make everyone feel welcome.

Reflecting on past practices regarding family involvement events has made a difference in the atmosphere and has helped immigrant families feel that they belong and are welcomed within the school.

The participants in this study take pride in helping the Latino immigrant families to feel welcomed within the school community. The measures they have taken in order to foster that sense of belongingness, whether it be providing translation for all communication either within or outside of the school, the participants felt that they are doing great things to involve the families. Through the use of continual reflection and purposeful change the program has evolved according to the focus group participants. Due to the high number of Latino immigrant families within the school, the participants feel that this has helped prepare them to help the families to feel welcome by forcing them to evolve in a way to help their students.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study give an overview of Latino immigrant family descriptions of feelings of belongingness within the school community. Findings also provide insight from teachers who work with Latino immigrant families in an urban school community. The findings suggest that although Latino immigrant families may feel a lack of feelings of belongingness, there are also positive things being done within the organization to help those parents feel welcome. Themes involving linguistic challenges and feelings of awkwardness, social capital and belongingness within the school and community, and fostering belongingness by involving Latino immigrant families in the school community were discussed in this chapter.

The last chapter of this dissertation will contain an abstract of the study and will discuss further implications and outcomes of this study while addressing current literature. Additional discussion will include implications for Latino immigrant families

and key stakeholders within school settings who educate Latino immigrant children and their families.

## Chapter 5

### Discussion and Implications

As outlined in the literature review, family involvement plays a key role in academic success and student achievement, yet limited research has explained how Latino immigrant families feel they belong in the school community (Gaitan, 2012). Without further research and explanation of Latino immigrant feelings of belongingness within the school community and how social capital contributes to this sense of belongingness, it is less likely that Latino immigrant students and their families will feel connected to schools in their communities.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the relationship between Latino immigrant family involvement and feelings of belongingness and attachment in relation to the school community. This study explored how Latino immigrant family voices describe their feelings of belongingness and attachment by investigating the linkages between Latino immigrant family beliefs and social capital relating to school involvement and parent perceptions of belongingness. This study sought to understand the relationship between family feelings of belongingness, attachment, social capital, and family involvement in the school community. The four research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant family members describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education?
2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?
3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families' sense of belongingness?

4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?

The theoretical lenses for this research included an emphasis on social capital theory and theories of belongingness and place attachment, particularly involving improving family participation in the school community and providing an opportunity for family members to express their feelings of belonging in the school community. Social capital theory and social structures of relationships were used to help describe how individuals benefit from the understanding of social capital on both individuals and community networks. The theories of belongingness and attachment were used to explore Latino immigrant descriptions. Eleven Latino immigrant family members participated in the interview portion of this study. Seven educators also participated in focus group meetings in this qualitative case study. Interview and focus group data was collected and then analyzed.

**Description of the Case**

This study took place in the urban community of Lane, New Jersey. The elementary school where this case study took place educates students in grades pre-kindergarten through five, located within two buildings. Grades one through five are housed within the building at Elk Lake Avenue Elementary School. The Early Childhood Center building was comprised of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students. In addition, 47% of the student's home language was Spanish, with the remaining students being primary English speaking (NJ School Report Card, 2016). Many of the Latino students who attended the school have parents who are first generation immigrants. Approximately 85% of the students who attended the elementary school received free or

reduced lunch due to the extreme poverty within the school community (NJ School Report Card, 2016).

The goal of this research study was to allow Latino immigrant families to express their feelings of belongingness and attachment in relation to the school community. This study also gave school personnel the opportunity to voice how belongingness is fostered within the school organization. This study sought to understand the relationship between family feelings of belongingness, attachment, and family involvement in the school community. After data collection, data was transcribed and analyzed. Four themes developed from data analysis: (1) relating to the community, (2) linguistic disconnect, (3) building relationships, and (4) fostering belongingness. Research by Irvin (2010) found that relationships between school personnel, parents, and students are important to promoting educational attainment of students. By building relationships within the school community, educators can create an environment that supports Latino immigrant families (Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang, & Supple, 2015). Research has revealed that a sense of school belonging can be increased through instructional practices as well as connecting the relationships between key stakeholders and parents (Irvin, 2010).

Research has also suggested that social capital has contributed to the perception of how families involve themselves in school (Tang, 2015). In order to strengthen feelings of belongingness and cohesion within the school setting, key stakeholders should be aware of the dynamics that Latino immigrant families encounter when experiencing a new school system and culture (Diaz, 2005). Due to the fact that many of the Latino students who attended the school have parents who are first generation immigrants, it was imperative that belongingness is fostered within this school community.

This chapter will present a discussion of findings related to the study's research questions. Finally, implications for practice, policy, leadership and additional research will be addressed.

### **Relating to the School Community**

The first research question answered how the voices of Latino immigrant family members described their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education. This study revealed that the Latino immigrant family members found comfort in associating with other Latino immigrant families within the community.

### **Differences**

This study uncovered that Latino immigrant family members did not feel as connected to others when linguistic differences were present. Many families often became frustrated when they communicated with others of different ethnicities due to linguistic differences. For the participants, their difficulties with cultural and linguistic differences added to how they feel accepted in the community. The participants indicated that due to the high Spanish-speaking population in the community they also found comfort in this particular town or when they were at Lane Elementary School because they could communicate without feeling awkward or embarrassed when speaking to other Latino community members. These findings are consistent with research that stated that immigrant community members cite language barriers and unfamiliarity with the U.S. educational system and culture as deterrents to community school involvement (Garcia, Akiba, Palacios, Bailey, Silver, DiMartino, & Chin, 2002).

Furthermore, Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin (2009) found that practices that encourage supportive relationships serve to enhance the engagement of immigrant



children and their families and in turn those practices foster belongingness. Affirming this notion, these findings also coincided with Ramirez's (2003) study that stated parents often become frustrated with lack of communication, however found comfort with those who were able to communicate with them, especially those who shared similar cultures and language. Tang (2015) found that families may feel uncomfortable due to the style of communication which relates to social capital and how relationships are formed. This contributed to how and why the Latino immigrant families connected to others in the school community. In Jung and Zhang's (2016) study of family involvement, they recommended that family involvement for immigrant families move beyond traditional parental involvement for immigrant families to include consideration for English language attainment for involvement in school education. Community and school entities should be conscientious of language differences when inviting and involving Latino immigrant families in order to ensure understanding and promote connectedness.

Participants in this study revealed that they believe that community members do not want to know about their customs. Overall, participants spoke of the lack of connectedness within the community. These findings emulated work done by Wright and Levitt (2014) in which they discovered the importance of strong connections with family and community for Latino immigrant families. Garcia-Reid, Peterson, & Reid (2015) also uncovered when schools and the community provide an emotionally supportive environment for families and their children those individuals are more likely to be positively connected to their school environment. In order to build upon belongingness and connectedness within the school community efforts should be made to support Latino immigrant families.

The participants in this study also described feelings of ‘awkwardness’ when surrounded by others outside their ethnicity and a sense of familiarity when associating with those who shared the same ethnicity and connections to culture and customs. Affirming research completed by Garcia et. al. (2002), the reasons why Latino immigrant parents are involved in the school community is determined by the connections they have to the neighborhoods where the families live and the support networks available to them within the community.

### **Disconnected from the Community**

The participants in this study stated that they felt disconnected in the community when surrounded by others outside of their ethnicity. Specifically, they did not feel attached to other people within the community. They spoke about how they found comfort in the community where they live when surrounded by other Latino community members. With the high Latino immigrant population in the town, many immigrants had others with whom they could relate to and therefore found comfort when surrounded by those who share similar experiences. The participants shared that living in a community where there is a large Mexican population has helped them to meet new people and friends and helped them to feel like they belong within the community.

In Ramirez’s (2003) study of Latino immigrant parental involvement and the school community it was found that relationships should be developed between the adults in the community to foster feelings of belongingness. For the participants in this study, the attachment that they had to the community connected with others who were Latino. The participants in this study recognized that beliefs and differences occurred throughout

the school community which caused them to gravitate towards others who shared similar customs and experiences.

### **Linguistic Disconnect**

The second research question asked how Latino immigrant families related to the school community. Results of this study showed that Latino immigrant family experiences were positive in relation to their child's school-based experience. This is despite feelings of uneasiness and awkwardness at times due to linguistic differences, as described above, that arose in the community when Latino immigrants expressed different feelings associated with their child's school and education. Many of the family members interviewed felt welcomed by teachers and staff at the school. Several participants felt welcomed in the school due to the various family involvement events being translated for them. Family members also expressed that they appreciated the teachers and staff in the school for always welcoming them at conferences and other activities in the school where they were invited. The Latino immigrant family members also spoke highly of the education offered to their child in the school community. According to Stevens and Patel (2015), the way that information is communicated between school and home to family members can positively strengthen relationships between school and home. Also in agreement, Marschall, Shah, and Donato (2012) and Powell, Son, File, and San Juan (2010) supported the notion that family-school relationships, especially in elementary school, are essential for promoting both academic and social skills and may predict later success in school, by strengthening feelings of belongingness and attachment. The findings of this study demonstrated that by building upon and strengthening relationships, Latino immigrant families will feel welcomed

within the school community and in turn they will be more willing to participate. Galindo and Sheldon (2012) also agreed that family involvement and connections at school could positively impact a child's achievement and development.

Overall, the participants in this study also described school-based experiences in their home country, especially noting their view on education in regards to family involvement in school. Family members in this study compared education systems and their experiences and perceived role as a parent and their involvement in school. They also cited unfamiliarity with school expectations and communication as being a tremendous barrier and revealed how the school approaches that barrier can seemingly contribute to increased feelings of belongingness. Tang (2015) supported the notion that Latino immigrant families may lack confidence in forming relationships with school personnel when helping their child with their education, which may also be impacted due to lack of English proficiency or unfamiliarity with schools in the United States.

### **Teachers Teach**

This study uncovered that Latino immigrant family members believed that teachers should teach children and parents should parent. Participants claimed that a teacher should be the person to teach their child and that many parents do not get involved in their child's education. Participants also stressed that it is the teachers' job to teach because the teachers are the experts. The Latino immigrant participants also revealed that they did not see the importance of getting involved. In agreement, Brabeck and Sibley (2017) contended that immigrant parents tend to be more involved outside of school and care about their child's achievement but likely face challenges in regards to school involvement, such as language or transportation. Poza, Brooks, and Valdes'

(2014) study also showed that Latino immigrant family members do highly value their children's education and are willing to help when teachers and schools make an effort to involve the families. Furthermore, Wassell, Hawrylak, and Scantlebury (2017) study of teacher's perceptions also indicated that some of the perceived barriers to Latino immigrant family involvement included intimidation of or a lack of trust in the school and differences between the Latino immigrant's home language and the presiding language of the school. This supports the participant's statements that indicated that some Latino immigrant family members cannot help their children due to differences in education or that they simply do not understand the importance of getting involved.

### **Family Involvement**

In general, family involvement has a positive impact on student achievement (Brabeck & Sibley, 2017). Although the school invited family members to the multiple family involvement events, several family members interviewed did not see the importance of being involved in their child's education. Latino immigrant family members also shared that they did not understand why it is important to be involved in school. Other participants spoke of feelings of uncertainty when they spoke about getting involved in school events. As one participant in this study, Marta, revealed, "When one gets a paper from the school about meetings I sometimes go and then I think why should I go to the school. I don't know if I will go or not." The participants in this study shared that they either did not see the importance in getting involved or did not understand how to help their child. Marta's statement coincides with research completed by Chrispeels and Rivero (2001) who suggested that the families often lack what is required to help their children succeed in school and understand how to get involved. Chrispeels and

Rivero's (2001) study also revealed that family involvement will shift, specifically their level of engagement, with the school when families are informed and an opportunity to explore practices that affect their children presents itself. The results of this study indicated that Latino immigrant family members wanted to be involved but did not have the knowledge or tools to do so, which related to the level of engagement that they had in their child's education.

### **Uneasiness and Apprehension**

This study uncovered that participants felt a lack of attachment to the school because of linguistic differences. When asked about cultural differences and how that impacts family involvement in school many participants cited the fact that language is a tremendous barrier. Poza, Brooks, and Valdes' (2014) study also revealed that challenges such as language barriers and immigration status could hinder parental participation in school. Many Latino immigrant family members, although they felt welcomed by the school as a whole, expressed how awkward they have felt when attending an event at the school. Many participants stated they were afraid to talk when surrounded by English-speaking teachers and parents. Dika and Singh's (2002) study found the lack of English proficiency contributed to decreased social capital among immigrant family members. On the other hand, although family members expressed feelings of discomfort when attending events due to linguistic differences, several parents indicated that they felt welcome in the school due to the events being translated for them. This finding corresponded to Calzada's et al. (2015) study that found that Latino immigrant family involvement at school was higher when teachers and school staff had translators available

and that families found comfort if they had communication with teachers who were Latino.

Related to the above mentioned feelings of awkwardness and apprehension shared by the participants, although family members were invited to events, the participants often felt as if they did not have a voice because of the fear of having limited English-speaking skills or because they felt that the teachers and school in general are the experts when it comes to education and it wasn't their place to say anything at meetings. The family members who participated in this study also revealed that they felt welcome in this school compared to other school communities in the United States where they have lived. The feelings described by the participants coincided with feelings of belongingness and attachment to this school community.

### **Building Relationships**

The third research question asked how social capital contributed to a sense of belongingness within the school community. This finding revealed that participants who are employed in the school have embraced the opportunity to learn about Latino immigrant families and the students who have attended the school where they work.

### **Developing an Understanding**

Collectively, the participants in this study revealed that school is an important place for Latino immigrant families in the school community. They shared that teachers want to understand how to help Latino immigrant families. In Patel and Stevens' (2010) study it was found that strong relationships between educators and families are essential to the development of social connections. Results of this study indicated that Latino immigrant family members are willing to help but limited to what they are able to help

with in their child's education. Focus group participants also shared that the differences in education contributed to family involvement and how the families felt that they belong. As one participant shared, "Latino immigrant parents are willing to help but often do not know their role or believe that it is not their job to help with their child's education." This coincides with research by Leidy, Guerra, and, Toro (2010) that found that parents' lack of fluency in English combined with the lack of understanding the school system effectively excludes family engagement in their child's schooling. Furthermore, Tang's (2015) study on social capital found immigrant families may not have the confidence to help their child in school-based activities due to low English proficiency.

This study also found that the educators who participated in this study had positive interactions with Latino immigrant families at the school. The participants shared that although Latino immigrant family members may not have completed much of their education they still valued education in the United States. This study indicated that Latino immigrant family members wanted to be involved. Leidy, Guerra, and Toro's (2010) study contended that the importance of the family within Latino culture often focuses on enhancing their children's well-being. Furthermore, Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010) revealed that immigrant parents often strive to give their children a better life. Sibley and Dearing's (2014) study on family involvement also stated that Latino immigrant families expect high achievement from their children. However, participants in this study claimed that many family members did not have the educational background to help their child with schoolwork, while other immigrants struggled with the language. Without connections between Latino immigrant families and the school personnel within the



school organization, Latino immigrant families will continue to be disconnected from the school community.

### **Intimidation**

Many of the participants in this study shared that, based on their experiences, many Latino immigrant parents were unable to help their child with their school work due to educational attainment. Teachers also believed that parents are intimidated with the English language because they are unable to help their child when they struggle. According to the educators who participated in this study, often times, parents had expressed they were unable to help their child. Educators agreed that there was a disconnect between school and home due to language, work schedules, and cultural differences. Research showed that schools should be proactive by reaching out to immigrant families due to the fact that both communities and schools are an essential component in determining how Latino immigrant families are involved in their child's education (Sibley & Brabeck, 2017). Furthermore, Tang (2015) also found that the lack of family involvement and immigrant families' participation in schools may stem from school climate and how relationships have been built through the school organization. Collectively, Latino immigrant family members often did not help their children at home with schoolwork due to their inability to assist in completing assignments or projects.

### **Fostering Belongingness**

The fourth and final research question asked how the school, as a place, fosters belongingness. Collectively, focus group educators shared their views on Latino family immigrant involvement and how the organization fosters feelings of belongingness within

the school community. The participants in this study revealed how their role as individuals and as an organization contributed to these feelings.

### **Adapting for Success**

This study uncovered that the focus group participants believed that organizations should find ways to support Latino immigrant families. As a top priority, translation needs to be provided and accessible at all times. As Hill and Torres (2010) state, the lack of translators or bilingual staff is often an inconvenience for Latino parents. As the participants shared, translation should occur on many levels, in written communication, on global calls, and at the school during meetings in order to help family members feel connected and welcomed by the school. By doing this, belongingness has been fostered within the organization, leading to stronger communication lines and a sense that parents are welcomed into the school.

This study also found that relationship building is an essential component to helping families to feel welcomed and connected to the school. Through networking among parents and teachers, positive relationships were developed and in turn this helped Latino immigrant families to feel connected to the school by bridging the gap between school and community. In Poza, Brooks, and Valdes' (2014) study they contended that school community relationships with Latino families need to be bridged by enhancing the educator's understanding of Latino immigrant parenting styles and cultural practices and helping those parent's beliefs to mirror that of the school's expectations for parental involvement. Participants in this study stressed the importance of reaching out and becoming involved not only within the school but also within the community. By continually communicating on multiple levels, educators have helped parents feel

welcome and in turn helped the families to find comfort associated with the school and in turn belongingness has been fostered within the organization.

This study also revealed that Latino immigrant families need to feel comfortable and informed when attending school events. Participants in this study shared that their school has made great strides to help Latino immigrant families to feel accepted. Furthermore, reflecting on past practices has helped them to improve communication and the atmosphere within the school in regards to welcoming the families. Reflecting on past practices in association with family involvement events has made a difference in the atmosphere and has helped immigrant families feel that they belong and have been welcomed within the school.

The participants in this study took pride in helping the Latino immigrant families to feel welcomed within the school community. In fact, coinciding with these findings, as noted in Ramirez's (2003) study, educators should take the initiative to foster a positive working environment with parents in order to improve participation and improve student success. Leidy, Guerra, and Toro (2010) also contended that schools with high numbers of immigrant Latino youth need to find out how to accommodate Latino cultural values within their organization and schools must be sensitive to the needs of their students' families. The measures adopted in order to foster that sense of belongingness by the participants in this study, whether it be providing translation for all communication either within or outside of the school, have helped to involve the families and make them feel welcome.

Through the use of continual reflection and purposeful change the program has evolved according to the focus group participants in this study. Leidy, Guerra, and Toro

(2010) also found that understanding the unique barriers and challenges faced by these families is necessary to developing culturally sensitive family involvement programs targeted specifically to meet the needs of immigrant Latino families and their children. Due to the high number of Latino immigrant families within the school, the participants in this study revealed that this has helped prepare them to help the families to feel welcome by forcing them to evolve in a way to help their students.

### **Belongingness and Family Involvement**

This study found that belongingness and school connectedness is an important part of family involvement. In this study, family involvement practices within the school led to the formation of relationships and positive social capital between Latino immigrant families and teachers due to the efforts that were made to bridge language barriers. This study showed the importance of communication in helping the families to feel welcome in the school at family involvement events. Tang's (2015) study also found that it is necessary to consider the social support that families receive in an effort to promote social capital. The teachers in this study extended themselves through the use of communication in order to make the family members feel comfortable. This study found that the teachers in the school embraced Latino immigrant families and students through the use of family involvement practices and adapted their practices in order to foster belongingness.

This study also revealed that Latino immigrant family members felt welcomed because communication was translated for them by school personnel. In addition, family members spoke of appreciation for the teachers who provided information through the use of translated communication at family involvement events, meetings, conferences,

and during daily interactions with the school. By doing so, the Latino immigrant families felt welcomed in the school community and belongingness was fostered.

### **Conceptual Framework Revisited**

This study found that there were connections between social capital theory, theories of belongingness and family involvement. In this study, social capital theory related to the Latino immigrant families and how they voiced the barriers they faced in regards to language differences when attending family involvement events or during their interactions with the school. In relation to social capital and family involvement, the theories of belongingness and attachment were used to explore Latino immigrant family and teacher descriptions of belongingness and provided insight into how social capital contributed to challenges due to linguistic differences. As Ee's (2017) study indicated, social capital theory and family participation are associated with each other, while a positive school environment also contributes to involvement. In this study, the school network provided opportunities that led to the development of relationships between families and teachers. This also helped create positive social capital for the immigrant family members by alleviating language barriers. Furthermore, feelings of belongingness were fostered through the relationships that were built upon by increasing positive social capital among school personnel and the immigrant families. Tang's (2015) study found that the benefits of social capital for immigrant families could be measured through the support that the family members received through their interactions with an organization. The results of this study indicated that the connections between social capital, belongingness, and family involvement were present due to the relationships that were formed through the family involvement opportunities initiated by school personnel.

## **Implications**

Findings from this study added to research surrounding Latino immigrant family members' feelings of belongingness and attachment within school communities. This study provided an understanding and insights for policy makers, educational leaders, and key stakeholders working in the field of education.

## **Policy**

The number of Latino immigrants residing in New Jersey has grown and is predicted to continue to grow as the Latino immigrant population is the fastest growing population in the United States (Wright & Levitt, 2014). This study uncovered that there is a need to help Latino immigrant families to feel welcome and improve feelings of belongingness and attachment in regards to the school community. Hill and Torres (2010) stated that there is limited knowledge about Latino engagement and families in schools and that more needs to be done to support those families. In agreement, Garcia-Reid, Peterson, and Reid (2015) declared that as immigrant children and their families continue to adjust to changes, it is imperative to find ways in which families and schools can offer the support needed to those children.

Based on the results of this study and the increasing number of Latino students who attend school in New Jersey, it is recommended that the New Jersey Department of Education work to provide additional support to those students with a focus on Latino immigrant family involvement within schools and communities. Although there are programs in place to support students academically, the social and belonging aspect in the area of family involvement needs additional attention. New Jersey teacher education programs and individual school districts should provide opportunities for professional

development in the area of belongingness and attachment in relation to family involvement practices and diversity training among immigrant families. Cultural differences should continue to be addressed when researching ways to enhance school practices involving immigrant families in education (Ramirez, 2003). Furthermore, based on this research and the fact that family involvement plays a key role in academic achievement as well as social development, schools should be equipped with resources to assist those in need whether it be through the use of translators and bilingual staff, parent workshops, or staff training.

Due to the results of this study and the recommendations stated above, state policy-makers should immediately take measures to address the importance of the role of family involvement and help support the Latino immigrant population to feel connected to their school community. Local school boards of education should focus on advocating for those families and the students residing within their district by providing opportunities for staff development to ensure growth and attainment within the organization. By doing so, policy makers will provide opportunities to help foster belongingness within school communities.

### **Research**

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that additional research take place to explore Latino immigrant family involvement and feelings of belongingness within school communities. Latinos have experienced, as a group, a lower educational experience in school compared to other groups of students (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Furthermore, limited research has been completed to explain how families of immigrant

youth and their families feel they belong in the school community (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013).

A limitation of this study was the representation/diversity of the Latino immigrant family members who participated in this study. The majority of the participants were Mexican. Gender was another limitation of the study as most of the focus group participants and the Latino immigrant family participants were female. In order to provide opportunities to include more diverse voices, it is recommended that future research include Latino immigrants from other countries. Furthermore, additional research should include family members who live with Latino immigrant students, such as grandparents or aunts and uncles, in order to allow for more diversity and different voices in the research.

It is essential that the social and academic needs of this quickly growing group of immigrant students are met (Greenberg, 2013). Future research should be completed to guide key stakeholders in developing ways to guide family involvement and outreach measures for immigrant families in the US. Through continual exploration of parental involvement practices and Latino immigrant voices surrounding parental involvement and belongingness, additional research could serve as a resource for educational organizations.

### **Practice**

This study provided a new perspective on feelings of belongingness and attachment in the school community from the voices of Latino immigrant family members. This study added to perceptions surrounding cultural assumptions and current family involvement practices involving Latino immigrant families. It is suggested that



strategies for improvement of family involvement in school organizations be explored specifically by supporting teachers and staff in finding effective ways of communicating with and partnering with Latino immigrant families in search of policies and practices used to improve family involvement (Calzada et al., 2015). In doing so, all staff may benefit from the knowledge gained and be more effective in engaging Latino immigrant families and their students by helping them to feel more connected to the school community.

For staff members who work with Latino immigrant students and families, this study may help their understanding of the families and how they feel about family involvement and why families may or may not get involved. This information may help educational leaders who are working with staff to develop their family involvement program by using this information to better understand the challenges that Latino immigrant families and their children face. In addition, this information may also offer support by contributing to the development of an understanding of the importance of community partnerships within the school community.

This information may change how people who interact with Latino immigrant families view the challenges the families have when moving to the United States and establishing themselves in a new community. Most importantly, this information may contribute to awareness and lead to support for Latino immigrant families by helping school personnel and community members to understand the family member's perspective and views on education and involvement. By developing family involvement practices and programs, educational leaders and staff can better understand Latino

immigrant students and their families and work to provide opportunities for those to feel connected to the school community.

### **Leadership**

The findings of this study identified that as the Latino immigrant population continues to increase in New Jersey schools, educational administrators should be conscious of the supports needed to help Latino immigrant families and students who enter their districts. Administrators and school leaders should create a community of practice with the expectation that leadership will create a community of caring. Specifically, leaders should create staff buy-in by exposing staff members directly to scenarios where the need to help Latino immigrant families is evident. Opportunities should be available for staff members within each organization to familiarize themselves with the supports recommended to help immigrant families. There is a clear indication that Spanish-speaking families need to feel connected to their school and in order to do so there needs to be translation available for all written and oral communication sent to Latino immigrant families. Furthermore, teachers should be making an effort to reach out directly to those families in the event that there are family involvement events or parent-teacher conferences.

Educational administrators should educate staff on how to use communication lines that are available in order to work with Latino immigrant families to increase the effectiveness and use of family involvement practices. Furthermore, administrators should work with staff to embrace cultural differences among those Latino immigrant families. Specifically, administrators should ensure that staff members understand the importance of learning about cultural differences in order to support their students and

their families. Whether it be through the use of professional learning communities or staff professional development, it is essential that administrators work with teachers and, if available, a family involvement coordinator to find ways to welcome cultural differences. School administrators should also provide opportunities for family involvement events that embrace culture and allow all families and their children to showcase aspects of their culture.

Currently, I am serving as a school administrator at an elementary school. I plan on sharing these findings with other key stakeholders within the organization. The findings will be shared through team meetings and workshops in order to help staff better understand the supports that are necessary for Latino immigrant families. Specifically, I will emphasize the importance of translating all communications for immigrant families. I have worked with teachers who have had every parent or family member attend a school event except for the immigrant student's family. I plan on working with staff in my school building to help them understand the importance of communication when working with immigrant families. There is a need to educate staff on family involvement practices in order to help immigrant families to feel connected to the school community. There is also a need to include community organizations at family involvement events. These services can provide information and support to immigrant families and help create feelings of belongingness to the community.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored how Latino immigrant family voices described their feelings of belongingness and attachment by investigating the linkages between Latino immigrant family beliefs and social capital relating to family involvement and parent perceptions of

belongingness. The participants involved in this research study shared their voices and insight regarding Latino immigrant family involvement from their experiences. This study determined that although Latino immigrant family members may often not see the importance of becoming involved in their child's education within the school community, they do value their child's education and will help as they see is needed. Furthermore, although there are cultural differences, Latino immigrant family members and the educators in this study have embraced opportunities to be involved and to involve families within the school. In addition, Latino immigrant family members benefit from translational tools, via written or oral communication, in order to bridge the gap between school home connections. Also, this alleviates feels of awkwardness by the Latino immigrant family members when they interact with English-speaking community members. Finally, it was discovered that the educators in this study took pride in making connections and fostering belongingness within the school community. With the high Latino immigrant population enrolled in their district, the educators who participated in this study sought out necessary measures to improve how they involved families within the school and by doing so they helped the organization evolve.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Introductory Interview Protocol**

Thank you for meeting with me today and for agreeing to participate. Each interview will be recorded and transcribed. The interview will last no longer than one hour.

#### **Introduction**

As I mentioned earlier, this study will collect information about how feelings of belongingness relate to the school community. This information will be used to gain insight about parent involvement in our school.

You have been selected to participate in this interview as you have met the following criteria: (1) You currently have a child or immediate relative enrolled in our school; and (2) You were born in another country and immigrated to the United States with your family; and (3) You attended school in another country.

### **Interview Protocol**

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do the voices of Latino immigrant families describe their feelings of belongingness related to their child's education?
2. In what ways do Latino immigrant families relate to the school community?
3. How does social capital contribute to or challenge Latino immigrant families' sense of belongingness?

#### **Background Information**

1. Tell me about yourself. Where were you born? When did you immigrate to the United States? How long have you lived in Lane, New Jersey?

## **Main Interview Questions**

1. Tell me about some similarities and differences that you have encountered between schools in the country where you were born and the school system here at Elk Lake Avenue School. How do these similarities or differences make you feel about school in the United States?
2. What do you think the school (EL) does to involve parents in the school?
3. How do you feel you belong within the school community? (\*Can you give an example of a time school personnel helped you to feel comfortable or uncomfortable?\*What does the school (staff) do to make you feel welcome?\*What makes you not feel welcome?)
3. How do you think differences in home/school contribute to these feelings? Why?
4. What could we do to help you to become more involved within the school?
5. What do you think are some of the reasons why parents choose to get involved in school events?
6. Why do you think parents may not get involved in school events?
7. In what ways has school been a role in your family's life?
8. What do you think are some challenges that Immigrant families face when they move to another country?
9. Tell me about some things that the school should be doing to increase parent involvement.
10. In what ways do you believe cultural differences may impact parent involvement in school?

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.

## **Appendix B**

### **Focus Group Protocol**

Hello. Thank you for meeting today to have a discussion about your experiences related to education within the school community. The purpose of this discussion is to learn more about how you feel about the school, particularly about your role within the school, and what the school is or isn't doing to promote feelings of belongingness and parental involvement within the school environment. This study benefits you because we will use the information to inform decisions about our practices within this organization.

First, before we begin the discussion, let's establish some rules. There are no right or wrong answers and your opinion matters. So, feel free to disagree. I will be recording the session because I do not want to miss any information from our discussion. No names will be recorded or included in any documentation.

#### **Introduction**

As I mentioned earlier, this study will collect information about how Latino immigrant families feelings of belongingness relate to the school community. This information will be used to gain insight about parent involvement at our school.

You have been selected to participate in this interview as you have met the following criteria: (1) You have been an employee of Elk Lake Avenue for more than five years; and (2) You have interacted with Latino immigrant families daily during that time.

#### **Background Information**

Tell me about yourself. How long have you worked at Elk Lake Avenue School? What is your role within the school?

#### **Research Questions**

4. How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?

#### **Main Focus Group Questions**

1. What do you think are some of the cultural differences that Latino immigrant families encounter here at Elk Lake Avenue School in relation to the schooling in another country



2. What do you think the school (EL) does to involve parents in the school? (\*How does the school community, as a place, foster this sense of belongingness?)
3. What does the school (staff) do to make parents feel welcome?  
\*What do you think hinders family involvement? \*Do you think differences in home/school contribute to these feelings? Why?
4. What could we do to help families to become more involved within the school?
5. What do you think are some of the reasons why parents choose to get involved in school events? If not, why didn't you choose to become involved?
6. Why do you think immigrant parents don't get involved in school events?
7. What do you think are some challenges that immigrant families face when they immigrate to the United States from another country?
8. Tell me about some things that the school should be doing to increase parent involvement.
9. In what ways do you believe culture may impact parent involvement in school?
10. Tell me about how you have helped immigrant families to transition at our school.

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today.